
Battle shaping up for Nigerian election contest

Nigeria is the nation central to the development of sub-Saharan Africa. Its population of approximately 70 million is one sixth of all of Africa. Its industrial production is the greatest in black Africa. Increasingly, since independence, Nigeria has played a leading role in the organization of Africa as a unified political and economic region. Nigeria's decision to participate in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on an equal footing with poorer and less populous states was important for that nation's development, as was their role in the formation and operation of the Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS).

More recently, it was the Nigerian government of Murtala Muhammed which led the OAU to support Agostinho Neto's Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola in 1975. The British were so alarmed at Muhammed's political role that the British High Commissioner to Lagos saw fit to harbor the perpetrators of his assassination until it was clear that their attempted coup had failed on Feb. 13, 1976.

For these reasons, Nigeria is a hotly contested front in the battle to establish a new world economic order. Last year, German banks pledged well over \$1 billion in credit for Nigeria's development plans. West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt met with Nigerian Chief of State, Olusegun Obasanjo, twice during his August African tour and again at the North-South talks in Jamaica.

At the same time, the French government of President Giscard d'Estaing has been working closely with Nigeria's ECOWAS and OAU allies. ECOWAS was originally founded to supersede separate French-speaking and English-speaking alliances in West Africa. During his fall tour of Africa, Giscard's foreign affairs official, Olivier Stirn, noted the possibilities ECOWAS has created. He said that it was French policy to establish economic and other relations in order to participate in the development of all African states — not just on its former colonies.

To understand the dangers faced by an otherwise confident Nigeria this year, it is important to remember the

British role in the Murtala assassination and their opposition to the industrialization of underdeveloped regions.

The election campaign

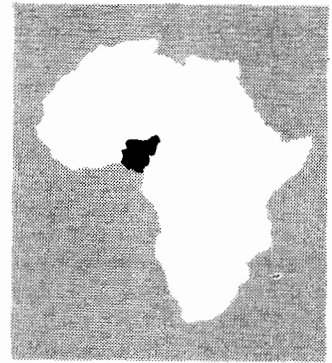
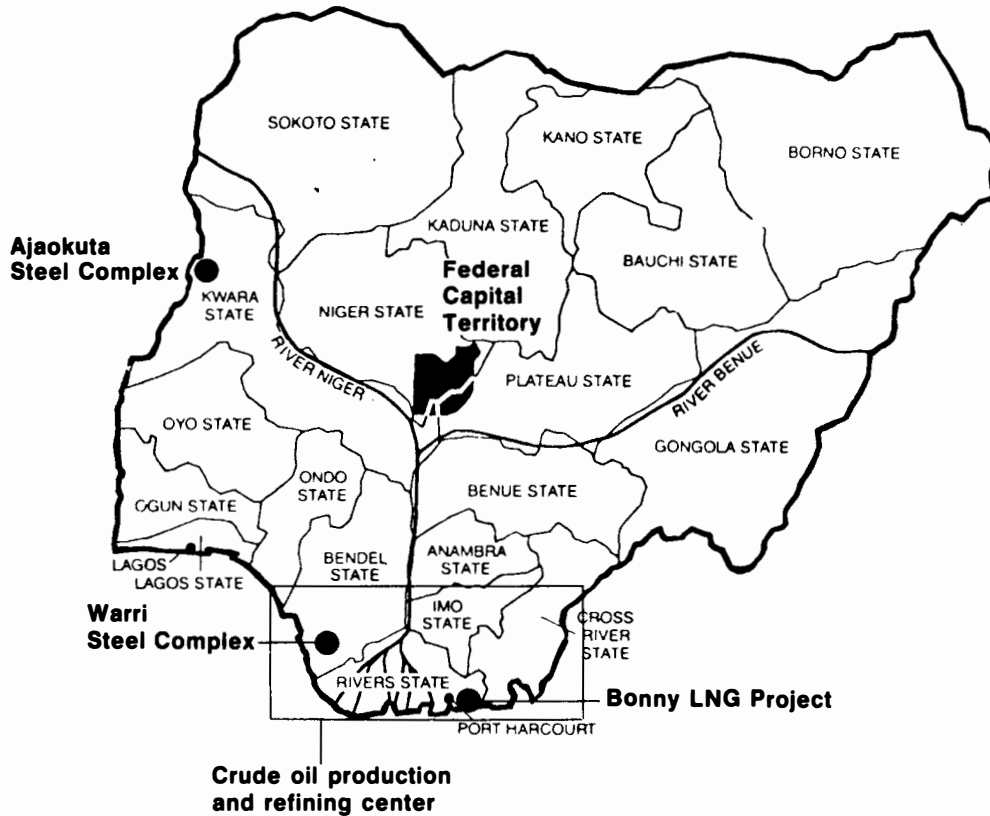
This year, the Nigerian Federal Military Government of General Olusegun Obasanjo plans a return to civilian rule. During the first week of January, the Nigerian Federal Elections Commission (FEDECO) completed the second phase of this procedure by certifying five national political parties to take part in legislative and presidential elections. The first phase was completed last summer with the adoption of a constitution, mandating a president to head the nation. The FEDECO plans to adhere to the schedule established in 1975 by then head of state Murtala Muhammed. Obasanjo's Chief of Staff, Brigadier Shehu Yar'adua has described the plans for "civilianization" as proceeding "with military precision."

Although the military government has pursued aggressive plans for national development during this process, it is clear that London-centered forces opposing collaboration between the new European Monetary System and underdeveloped nations plan to use the election campaign as a weapon against Nigerian nationalism. Brian May of the London Guardian has predicted that the elections this fall will result in a north against south civil war in Nigeria.

The legacy of Biafra

The potential for destabilization of Nigeria exists in the same broad forces who were involved in the Biafran secession of 1967 and the subsequent Nigerian Civil War. Prior to independence, the British had administered Nigeria as three separate protectorates and, until 1970, Nigerian politics was dominated by the three-cornered battle between north, east, and west.

The majority party, the Northern Peoples Congress, was an Islamic-oriented party dominated by the Hausa-Fulani



tribal group. It was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, who, in addition to the title conferred on him by the British Crown, held the position of "Sardauna of Sokoto," the leader of Islam in Nigeria. He is reported to have been a member of the "Moslem Brotherhood," the fanatic Islamic cult.

The Biafran secession was the result of a British deployment against the Ibo tribal group. Many nationalist leaders, including Nigeria's most famous personality Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, were Ibos. Major General John Aguiyi Ironsi, the first military head of state, was murdered after issuing Decree 34 in May 1966, which made Nigeria a unified republic instead of a federation. In order to neutralize the unifying influence of Ibo nationalist leaders, a cult of persecution — much like the Zionist Masada cult — was developed.

Colonel Odemugwu Ojukwu, the leader of secessionist Biafra, declared that the Ibos, who held important positions throughout West Africa, could only be safe if they left their homes and birthplaces to live in a separate enclave in eastern Nigeria. Ojukwu was the millionaire son of a father knighted by the British Crown and the only Nigerian officer who trained at the elite Oxford and Seton Hall instead of Sandhurst.

The credibility for his myth of Ibo persecution was provided by mobs of Moslem-Brotherhood influenced fanatics who murdered tens of thousands of Ibos in northern Nigeria in September 1966. Even after the Sep-

tember massacres, Ojukwu complained, after the Civil War, most Ibos did not want to go east to their "homeland."

Ojukwu had to convince Nigerian head of state Yakubu (Jack) Gowon to order all Ibo troops to eastern Nigeria and all non-Ibo troops out of the region in order to prepare for a Biafran secession.

The Civil War was fought from May 1967 through January 1970 and reportedly killed several million Nigerians. The exploitation of Nigerian oil potential, which was ready to take off in 1967, was delayed for three years. Today, the Civil War is the same sort of moral reference point for most Nigerians as World War II is for adult Americans.

For this reason, tribal secessionism or separatism is no longer a legitimate issue in Nigerian politics. The FEDECO regulations prohibit parties based on tribalism, regionalism, or religious sectarianism. General Obasanjo has made a number of public statements during the campaign that he was watching for any breach of public order.

The messiah

In spite of the lessons of Biafra, the British have fielded a major capability for destabilization in the current election campaigns. They are hoping that the military government's Sandhurst-learned sense of "fair play" combined with large doses of fiscal conservative budget slashing will allow this destabilization capability to flourish.

The most obvious antinationalist deployed in the election is Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a candidate of the misnamed Unity Party of Nigeria.

In the introduction to Awolowo's 1947 pamphlet, "The Path to Nigerian Freedom," Margery Perham of Oxford writes "... his frank analysis ... is in effect a justification of much, if not of the whole, of British policy."

Awolowo's campaign has combined populism with messianic cultism, as Awolowo is pledging to register chieftains and other traditional tribal leaders as public officials and to grant autonomy to local councils thus formed. He is also promising social welfare benefits which only a generation or more of effective national leadership would make available: universal free education, health care, increased aid to agriculture and construction.

During an October national tour, Awolowo supporters greeted him with the Winston Churchill "V" sign and cries of "Hallelujah, the Messiah has come." The Nigerian Tribune, a newspaper he controls, claimed that Awolowo will deliver Nigeria to the "promised land" of "world power" in "Noah's Ark."

Perhaps the Nigerian leadership, in accrediting the Unity Party, assumes that Awolowo could never win a majority of the votes. His history, however, makes the danger clear.

Awolowo's pre-military-rule party, the Action Group, was actually founded in London as a Yoruba tribal association while Awolowo was studying law at the Inner Temple. During this period, Awolowo claims he was influenced by the "liberal" British racist Thomas Henry Huxley — the grandfather of today's antitechnology movement. He attended London meetings of the Ethical Society, part of the same cult-spawning networks founded by Huxley which control the Islamic Brotherhood movement of northern Nigeria.

Throughout its history, the western-Nigeria-based Action Group functioned by establishing violently shifting coalitions with other minority tribes using persecution by right-wing Islamics as an argument against national unity.

After Awolowo's imprisonment for treason in 1962, the Action Group began a four-year rampage which resulted in the military takeover of the government in January 1966, and the Civil War which followed.

It was widely believed that Awolowo would lead a secession of western Nigeria. He encouraged Ibo separatism and after Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu declared the eastern region to be the Republic of Biafra it was believed Awolowo would deliver the coup de grace to the Republic of Nigeria by leading the west out, but he did not. General Yakubu Gowon, head of the military government appointed Awolowo Commissioner of Finance.

The father

The probable front-runner for the presidency is Nnamdi Azikiwe, candidate of the Nigerian People's Party. Azikiwe has been an internationally known leader of the African independence movement since 1934 and is considered the "father" of Nigeria.

Although he has been a voice for unity and progress throughout most of his long career, many Nigerians believe he surrendered his position in Nigerian politics when his cabinet voluntarily ceded power to Major-General John Aguiyi-Ironsi in January 1966. Azikiwe is also tainted by a year of opportunistic support for secessionist Biafra and welcomed the collaboration of Michael Okpara, former Premier of eastern Nigeria who was an advisor to the Biafran government throughout its existence. He appears to be out to build an alliance between the north and the eastern Ibo regions against the western-based Yoruba tribesman, Awolowo.

The entrepreneur

Alhaji Waziri Ibrahim, candidate of the Greater Nigerian People's Party — which split from the Nigerian People's Party over the nomination of Azikiwe — is one of the "new" men in the presidential campaign. He was a civilian Minister of Economic Development and is reported to be close to the number-two man of the current military government, Brigadier Shehu Yar-ardua. He is, therefore, an important moderate northern Islamic figure. He runs a group of mining, manufacturing, and commercial enterprises with stress on agricultural development.

Ecumenism or chaos

On Jan. 4, two predominantly northern parties had a violent confrontation which resulted in 30 arrests: the National Party of Nigeria and the People's Redemption Party. Shehu Shagari is the candidate of the National Party — and reportedly of the Moslem Brotherhood. He was the senior minister with several portfolios in the cabinet of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa.

Alhaji Aminu Kanu heads the People's Redemption Party and led the pre-military-rule Northern Elements People's Union in an alliance with Azikiwe's National Congress of Nigerian Citizens against the old right-wing Northern People's Congress. Kanu has been described as representing an ecumenical, anti-Brotherhood current of Islam.

Thus, the elections period represents a possible threat against Nigerian unity. The Awolowo and Moslem Brotherhood involvement in the campaign is ominous — particularly if the military government slackens its aggressive economic growth policies to comply with World Bank recommendations. On the other side are the traditions of Nigerian nationalism and ecumenical Islam which are still active.

Approximately half of the Nigerian population, including most of the present government and many in the politically decisive north are Moslems, a source of moral intellect that could be mobilized to unify the country. But to date, it has been the fanatic, separatist rather than the ecumenical currents of Islam which have been more prominent.

— Stanley Ezrol