

NIGERIA UPDATE

Uninspiring start to the Buhari presidency

A fortnight into the Buhari presidency and a full 10 weeks since he was declared winner of the March 28th election, not a single cabinet member has been nominated. Nor has a single policy initiative been unveiled on the array of issues awaiting urgent attention¹ - including the fiscally onerous fuel subsidies, the arrears in payments due to civil servants and government contractors and redefining the role of NNPC, the national oil company. Of the “new broom” that forms the centre-piece of the APC’s logo, there is as yet no sign.

1) Although the new team is trying to spin the delay as an exercise in deliberate haste, it is now painfully clear that the real bottleneck is *the challenge of dividing the spoils of office among the host of semi-autonomous interest groups amalgamated under the APC’s banner*².

2) An early indicator of the feverish horse-trading underway came with the announcement on June 1st – i.e. three days after the inauguration – to the effect that not one, but two presidential spokesmen had been appointed³.

3) The denouement of yesterday’s elections for leadership of the National’s Assembly provided even more dramatic evidence of the fierce competition for influence within the APC’s ranks. *Both of the party’s official candidates for the Senate presidency and the Speakership were defeated* - in each case by a rival from within his own party who had managed to support muster the support of fellow dissidents as well as a significant number of votes from the PDP⁴.

4) Even more ominously, it has now emerged that *this coup was orchestrated by a number of the party’s barons*⁵ including: Abubakar Atiku (Vice President under OBJ), Rabi’u Kwankwaso (outgoing Gov. of Kano state, and a defector from the PDP), Aliyu Wammako (Gov. Sokoto state) and Ahmed Abdulfata (outgoing Gov. of Kwara state and a protege of Bukola Saraki).

5) Having declined to intervene during the feverish leadership campaign, President Buhari himself greeted the results with apparent equanimity⁶. However, the APC’s *national publicity secretary Alhaji Lai Mohammed left no doubt as to the scale of the party’s disarray* when he pledged, in an impassioned outburst,

¹ However, this did not prevent the new president from attending the G-7 Summit in Bavaria, to which he had been invited to submit a laundry-list of items on which the Federal Republic would welcome assistance. In a briefing to the Nigerian media following the President’s return, his spokesman reported with surprising candour that “*The G-7 leaders] left it to President Buhari to come up with the specifics on his requirements.*”

² i.e. Action Congress of Nigeria; Congress for Progressive Change; All Nigeria People’s Party; a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance; as well as the five Governors who defected from the PDP in Nov. 2013.

³ i.e. Femi Adesina (until last week, Editor-in-chief of *The Sun* and president of the Nigerian Guild of Editors); and Garba Shehu who had served as media chief of the APC’s Presidential Campaign Council.

⁴ Thus, the Senate presidency for which Gbajabiamila (Lagos state) had been proposed, went instead to Bukola Saraki (Kwara), while the Speaker’s slot earmarked for Lawan (Yobe) was instead ‘snatched’ by Dogara (Bauchi).

⁵ Their intervention was reportedly a deliberate move to clip the wings of the party’s ‘godfather’ Bola Ahmed Tinubu (a former Governor of Lagos state) who had almost single-handedly imposed Chief John Odigie-Oyegun and Prof. Yemi Osinbajo as APC national chairman and vice-presidential nominee, respectively. As if to drive the point home, Atiku publicly congratulated the newly elected leaders.

*”to reestablish discipline in the party and to mete out the necessary sanctions to all those involved in what is nothing but a monumental act of indiscipline and betrayal to subject the party to ridicule and create obstacles for the new administration”*⁷

6) The parliamentary contretemps – and the imperative of accommodating the interest groups perceived to have ‘lost out’ - is *almost certain to push even farther into the future the date when a Buhari administration is finally announced and a policy agenda unveiled*. In the interim, a sense of drift prevails, captured most vividly by the fact that the campaign against Boko Haram is still being led by the commanders who have presided over the military debacle of the last several years.

7) Last week JPMorgan, citing the arrival of a new administration, extended until December the time-frame for a decision on whether to remove Nigeria from its GBI-EM emerging market local-currency index⁸. With the emerging-market asset class already battling significant headwinds, *financial markets are unlikely to show the Federal Republic such patience*. Caveat emptor.

⁶ Viz.: “President Buhari had said in an earlier statement that he did not have any preferred candidate for the Senate and the House of Representatives, and that he was willing to work with whoever the lawmakers elected. That sentiment still stands.” – Statement by Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity, Femi Adeshina, as quoted by *The Vanguard* on June 9, 2015.

⁷ As reported by Onyebuchi Ezigbo in “APC Rejects Saraki, Dogara as Senate President, House Speaker”; *ThisDay*, 9 June, 2015. Nevertheless, it is far from clear precisely what sanctions are envisaged against such heavy-weights, or by whom they might be administered.

⁸ The bank had downgraded Nigeria to index-watch negative in January in reaction to the sharp drop in Naira liquidity resulting from a series of restrictive measures the CBN had implemented in an attempt to defend the currency.

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