

**NIGERIA FLASH NOTE****The Absentee President**

1) After missing yet another Cabinet meeting, PMB was **conspicuous by his absence from three events over the week-end:**

- Friday's Juma'at prayer session at the Aso Villa mosque;
- the following day's ceremony in Kaduna, celebrating the [wedding of the President's personal assistant, Babatunde "Idiagbon" Sabiu](#), which was graced by a number of Cabinet members and Northern Governors; and,
- Monday's Labour day parade.

The word in Abuja is that Buhari's **condition has deteriorated significantly over the last fortnight**, during which he has not been seen in public. It is whispered that, unable to hold down even liquids, he is now being fed intravenously.

2) Then yesterday, as if we needed a reminder that the President's **medical crisis could easily morph into a political drama**, the founding chairman of the ruling APC issued the following - admittedly hyperbolic - warning:

*"The greatest danger, however, is for political interests at the corridor of power attempting feast on the health of Mr. President [...] In the end it could drag the entire country into avoidable doom."*

Under these fraught circumstances, the **far-reaching reforms** required to revive Naija's ailing economy **appear doomed to take a back seat**.

3) As will be recalled, Osinbajo's 59-day stint as Acting President offered **a dramatic counterpoint to the pervasive sense of drift** that has been the hallmark of his boss' leadership. But the public *kudos*<sup>1</sup> that he received from the convalescent Buhari upon the latter's Mar. 10<sup>th</sup> return from London was greeted as pure anathema by his handlers in the Villa - i.e. Abba Kyari, Mamman Daura and Tunde 'Idiagbon' Sabiu<sup>2</sup>.

4) The phrase *"Continue to do the work"* indicated that the convalescent Buhari was not ready to resume his presidential duties immediately, and implied that **he wished his No. 2 to remain Acting President**. Moreover, he had announced<sup>3</sup> that he would be **returning to London for further treatment "in a few weeks' time"**, which would extend Osinbajo's incumbency *sine die*.

5) From the cabal's stand-point, this was clearly intolerable. How they pulled it off has not yet come to light, but the very next day, a tweet from presidential spokesman Femi Adesina announced that on Mar. 13<sup>th</sup> Buhari would be advising the National Assembly that he was **resuming his role as head of state<sup>4</sup> with immediate effect**. This is exactly what happened. And it is noteworthy that there has since been no further mention of the President proceeding on another "medical vacation".

<sup>1</sup> *"Youth and intellect is squarely behind him [...] Continue to do the work, Nigeria will continue whether we are here or not."*

<sup>2</sup> Respectively, the President's chief of staff first cousin and personal assistant.

<sup>3</sup> I.e. in the same Mar. 10<sup>th</sup> address.

<sup>4</sup> As required under Article 145(1) of the Constitution.

6) Under these circumstances, the best-case scenario would seem to be for the President to remain sufficiently indisposed as to oblige his deputy to continue **assuming additional responsibilities as Vice President**. A far more bearish scenario would arise were Buhari to become so incapacitated as to warrant his med-evacuation or worse, since this **would entail a formal transfer of authority to Osinbajo - an Evangelical pastor from Lagos state**.

7) In the context of the obvious uncertainty as to whether Buhari would stand for re-election in 2019, this would trigger a battle royal for the APC nomination among **aspirants determined to keep the presidency in Northern, Moslem hands**<sup>5</sup>. Since the first order of business for any such aspirant would be to undermine Osinbajo, the heir-apparent, this **would significantly exacerbate Nigeria's economic uncertainty**.

In short, the punters should be careful what they wish for. The ingredients are already in place for **a reprise of the political and economic turmoil that marked the final months of Yar'Adua's incumbency** and persisted through GEJ's nomination as the PDP's nominee for the 2011 race<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Among the most obvious aspirants is the APC's national leader Asiwaju Bola Tinubu; Senate president Bukola Saraki and former Vice President Abubakar Atiku.

<sup>6</sup> The prospect of the Presidency reverting to another Southerner, only two years after the election of the Third Republic's first president from northern Nigeria triggered enormous resistance from that region. This included a campaign to render the country ungovernable, that found expression in the dramatic surge in the frequency and intensity of bombing attacks by Boko Haram.

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