



Executive Summary



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NIGERIAN UNITY: IN THE BALANCE

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The United States has growing economic and security interests in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Nigeria in particular. Nigeria is clearly the most important economic and security partner in the region. As such, it plays an essential part in achieving U.S. objectives. It can only do so as a unified state. It is highly unlikely that any conceivable collection of successor states could have the ability to play such a role, even if they succeeded in becoming economically and politically viable. It is very possible, and perhaps probable, that successor states would become sources of spreading instability or threats to U.S. interests.

Protection of U.S. interests is thus bound up with the continued existence of Nigeria as a unified state. Unfortunately, Nigeria is under grave danger of devolution from internally generated threats. To protect U.S. interests, policymakers will find it essential to have an understanding of the forces that both unite and divide Nigeria. These centripetal and centrifugal forces are internally generated by historical, religious, cultural, political, physical, demographic, and economic factors. They create identifiable fault lines along religious, ethnic, and regional divisions that often reinforce each other. The history of Nigeria's formation as a unified state and its subsequent political evolution has both reflected as well as reinforced these fault lines.

Nigerian fault lines are most noticeable in the case of the religious divide between Muslims and

Christians, which has become linked to ethnic and regional divisions. Violence has dramatically increased over the past decades as these divisions have grown sharper. Much of this is due to the failure of Nigeria's political leadership to represent a national constituency. Most political leaders have focused solely on obtaining power or benefits for their own ethnic or regional groups. Minorities have responded by forming their own pressure groups. The government has often responded by dividing a weaker and weaker state among an ever increasing number of claimants pitted against each other. This process of division has hollowed out the national institutions that help bind Nigeria together.

Overlaying specific and identifiable fault lines are broader economic and political developments that have put enormous stresses on all levels of Nigerian society. The most important of these developments is clearly the impact of the oil industry. It has had profoundly destabilizing effects throughout Nigerian society. The oil industry is greatly responsible for the vast explosion of corruption which has undercut the legitimacy of the Nigerian government and local elites alike. The Niger Delta, source of much of the oil in question, has been transformed into a major source of instability and into a new fault line along which Nigeria may split.

However, despite enormous stresses, Nigeria has remained intact. Long-standing cultural, historical, and economic ties operate to tie the country together. Although not yet truly

robust, there has been an evolution of a national consciousness within a common historical experience and a shared English-speaking culture. Nigerians have also used national institutions and symbols to generate a sense of national identity. The most important of these institutions had been the educational system, now neglected by the state and a primary target for Nigeria's leading terrorist group. The success of these efforts, although limited, demonstrates that division is not inevitable.

On a less positive note, the Biafran War and violent clashes along specific fault lines have made clear the potential cost of separation. Regional and ethnic groups fear domination by other neighboring groups without the protection of a unified state. For most groups, it is still more economically advantageous to share in the larger national economy than to attempt separation.

The centrifugal and centripetal forces that will decide its future are deeply rooted in Nigerian society and history. U.S. policies, therefore, will not be decisive in and of themselves. However, given the importance of Nigeria's continued existence as a unified, functioning state, the United States should take relatively low-cost measures to strengthen the centripetal forces in Nigeria, while ameliorating the negative effects on U.S. interests of a breakup should Nigeria fail.

This can best be done through a "whole of government" approach led by an interagency coordinating group focused on strengthening centripetal forces in an integrated way. As part of this coordinated and more focused approach, the United States should establish new diplomatic representation in key regions. This would make it possible to implement new measures and improve the execution of existing programs.

New and nonintrusive measures should include support for Nigerian anticorruption initiatives. As both a security assistance and anticorruption measure, the United States should serve as an "honest broker," helping to establish a regional maritime cooperation strategy to reduce oil and arms smuggling. In conjunction with a modest expansion of security assistance, technical assistance to infrastructure projects that create

mass employment in key regions should be part of a counterinsurgency strategy.

This integrated approach should place emphasis on strengthening national institutions in both the governmental sector and civil society. This approach should not require extensive new funding, but should be concentrated on areas where the United States has particular strengths and Nigeria has particular weaknesses. This is especially applicable to the training and technical resourcing of key civil service institutions that support truly national institutions, such as the judicial system and Parliament. For example, targeted assistance to the educational sector through a cooperative project for national curriculum reform could have powerful short-term and long-term effects, just as it did in the past. Similarly, support for Nigerian-led interfaith dialogue and mediation should have short- and long-term benefits.

Although Nigeria's fate rests in Nigerian hands, the United States can help tip the balance in a positive direction. By doing so, it will help Nigeria as a nation and thereby protect its own interests.

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