

# 31

## The presidency and Nigeria's power blocs

(The Guardian, June 7, 2012)

Towards the end of the first segment of the series **As the succession battle begins** (April 26, 2012), I offered the following proposition: "The bitterest enemies of President Goodluck Jonathan are to be found in the two power blocs. The language the blocs' spokespersons deploy not only against the president's regime but also against the person of the president is the most "irreverent". But, ironically, the Jonathan presidency stands on the balance of the two power blocs. On the other hand, the most militant supporters of the president are to be found in the Southsouth geopolitical zone in which there is no power blocs.... Ironically, this absence of power blocs in some parts of the country may (some would say "again") save the country's unity - in the short run. But, ultimately, it is the emergence of a revolutionary movement that can save the country - if it is not too late."

Inspired by some recent political developments and media commentaries, I wish to clarify and advance this twin – proposition with a sequence of statements articulated from political history and current tendencies. First of all, Nigeria's power blocs do not exhaust the political forces active on Nigeria's political scene, and the political forces do not exhaust all the

political actors. We must, thus, differentiate between political actors, political forces and **power blocs**. This statement can be put differently: Whereas power blocs are political forces, not all political forces are power blocs; and whereas political actors enter the description of power blocs and political forces, not all political actors are in power blocs or political forces.

There are only two power blocs in Nigeria. These are the **Northern power** bloc and the **Southwest** power bloc. The difference between these power blocs, on the one hand, and the other non-power bloc political forces, on the other, can be found in the lengths of the power blocs' histories, in their resilience (that is, power of reproduction and renewal), in their positions in the national economy - and hence, in their strengths and in their abilities to attract "satellites" from non-power bloc political forces and unaffiliated political actors or political "actors - at - large".

As for the similarity and difference between the two power blocs, this was what I said in this column about a year ago: "It needs to be emphasized that the two power blocs are not outside the class structure or social formation of the country. The power blocs grew and took shape within the class structure and social formation. They are capitalist blocs and they are not hostile to the International Community. Beyond these shared attributes, however, the two power blocs are separated by every other thing: history, culture, political ideology, political strategy and tactics, relationship with the masses and vision of a united Nigeria". (**Provisional Report on Election 2011**, May 12,19, 26 and June 2 and 9, 2011).

Nigeria's power blocs are not reducible to political parties, and have never in their histories been reducible to political parties. It is, however, true to say that a power bloc sometimes acts through the country's political parties - one or more of which it may dominate -and sometimes through forces outside the political parties. Nigeria's power blocs are also not reducible to ethnic groups, although each of them has an **ethnic core**. Furthermore, the power blocs are not **monolithic**. In particular, several antagonistic political parties or antagonistic tendencies within the same political parties, may be present and active in a power bloc. But this complexity which confuses analysis, or even observation, "straightens out" or becomes simplified as a national crisis deepens. The shapes and contents of the power blocs then become clearer as they shed, or are shed of, some of their "satellites" and achieve greater strategic unity.

Nigeria's two power blocs need not always be in open struggle or confrontation or on opposite sides in every national crisis. We may observe that the two power blocs are not in combat at the moment. Rather, they - temporarily - have a common opponent or enemy. And that common opponent or enemy is not the current armed insurgencies, but the Goodluck Jonathan Presidency. Historically, in modern times, where power blocs have a common opponent or enemy, it is usually a force that threatens the political economy and or the state - in the long run or short run. These usually include the revolutionary left movement. But in Nigeria of today this common enemy does not threaten the Nigerian state and is clearly much more reactioning and anti-people than the two power blocs.

The power blocs' common opponent or enemy – the Jonathan Presidency – does not indicate any road to any future, not to talk of a viable one. And yet the present is clearly undesirable and untenable. The two power blocs, through several political and “sociocultural” formations and publicists, have presented the nation with their visions of the future. Nigerians understand what they are saying. The Nigerian Left has also been presenting and renewing its vision. On the contrary, the present regime has no vision. It is simply resting on the balance of the two power blocs. Perhaps this is what some of its enemies call “cluelessness” the current situation in Nigeria reminds me of the situation in Ghana in the early 1980s: overwhelmed and “clueless”, the Liman regime simply sat back and waited for something to happen. And something did happen.

**Politics of hate**, in which the power blocs and the Jonathan presidency are currently engaged does not require an abstract definition. Rather, it can be articulated concretely from the language of the current national debates over the following developments: revenue allocation federalism and geopolitical structure, corruption and state robbery, the Justice Salami case and General Buhari and the 2015 electoral contest. A study of these debates reveals a bitter fight between the two power blocs, on the one hand, and the Jonathan's presidency, on the other - with each side being supported by various political forces and political actors. Of course, there are **independent** political forces and political actors in the roll call of the debates. These latter groups are to be found in the community of leftists, popular-democratic organizations and intellectuals of various persuasions. But their voices are marginal just as their current political weights.

The situation described in the preceding paragraph creates three particular **fears** in me. The first is the fear of "merger" or "convergence" of **power bloc politics** and **armed politics** or, to put the matter more explicitly, the merger or convergence of one or the other of the two power blocs, or even both of them, with armed insurgencies; as well as emergence of pro-regime armed militias.

The second fear arises from the real possibility not just of power-bloc-induced crisis in the **Left** but of massive co-optation of segments of the country's popular-democratic movement by the power blocs as happened during the First Republic or more specifically during the Crisis and Civil War (1966 -1970). The third fear is that of more brazen external intervention (armed and unarmed).

It is for these reasons that I believe, and urge, that Nigeria's radical patriots, democrats and leftists as well as popular mass organizations must, at this time and as the current national crisis and politics of hate develop, subject every public question and every offered proposition to **radical interrogation**. This is to avoid being trapped in or being mobilized for, narrow power struggles between factions of the ruling class, and be able to articulate popular democratic responses as the various ruling factions raise battle cries for us to echo. We are not obliged to answer either Yes or No to every question or support one side or the other in a debate. Questions and issues often need to be interrogated and reformulated.

What, for instance, are the fundamental questions that need to be asked on the controversy generated by recent statements on the 2015 general elections credited to General Muhammadu Buhari? It may be asked if the general has violated any specific law of the Nigerian state or the admonitions in the Sheik Lemu Report on 2011 post-election violence. If he has, then take him to court, or tell us why you cannot or will not. Beyond this, we may ask: What now constitutes a free and fair election in Nigeria? This question is crucial because the way mainstream politicians are now debating the issue, suggests that an election is free and fair if no main contender for a position loses, or if all the main contenders for a position win! In that case, why not construct a political system consistent with your present political culture?