

Who is Afraid of the Coalition?

By Jibrin Ibrahim

The “owners” of political power in Nigeria appeared to have entered panic mode on Wednesday when the platform of the opposition, the African Democratic Congress was to be launched. A few hours before the event, the organizers got a rude shock when the hotel abruptly cancelled a fully paid reservation. The Wells Carlton Hotel and Apartments in Asokoro, Abuja, said they had to cancel the event due to an unspecified “internal compliance matter.” The very late cancellation could only have meant some powerful people wanted to stop the inauguration of the coalition because they were afraid. Nonetheless, it was very strange behavior because the reality of Nigeria is that you cannot stop the opposition meeting. On numerous occasions over the past few months, the police have been sent in to stop PDP meetings or occupy their offices. It was essentially the concerns of opposition parties that the government is crossing red lines in interfering with their structures that created the impetus for unity. Clearly, the Forth Republic might be facing an existential risk if the government seeks to destroy opposition parties.

It is interesting that immediately after the inauguration, the Presidency launched a scathing attack on former President Muhammadu Buhari's appointees who have joined the opposition coalition that is organizing to challenge President Bola Tinubu in 2027. Bayo Onanuga, the special adviser to President Tinubu on media and strategy, criticized some opposition members for their alleged personal ambitions and lack of ideology. Some of those mentioned by Mr Onanuga include: Rotimi Amaechi: a former transportation minister and APC stalwart, who Mr Onanuga claimed “lost interest” in the party after losing the presidential primary to Mr Tinubu in 2022; Abubakar Malami: a former Attorney-General, who was said had been estranged from the APC when President Tinubu assumed leadership and since he (Malami) lost the governorship bid in Kebbi and Hadi Sirika, a former aviation minister facing trial for contract splitting and other allegations, which Mr Onanuga claimed compromised his integrity. Finally, there was Rauf Aregbesola, a former governor and internal affairs minister under President Buhari, who Mr Onanuga said was expelled from the APC for anti-party conduct during the last Osun election. If these people have been divorced from the ruling party, why would they not seek new companionship with an opposition platform.

The key political problem facing the country has been the expectation that President Tinubu would use his vast political networks in every nook and corner of Nigeria to establish an all-inclusive government in which all sections of society would have a sense of belonging. What happened was the emergence of a clannish government with a strong ethnic

marker. That was a key characteristic of the preceding Buhari administration and there was deep concern that the same problem had been replicated. Precisely because the key sentiment about the current administration is its lack of inclusiveness, there is no surprise that opposition to the government would blossom. The response of the government has been to apply slash and absorb tactics on opposition parties by actively encouraging factional crises within the parties and enticing key members to abandon ship and join the ruling party.

This is not a sustainable tactic because there are limited positions within the ruling party and giving the new entrants many goodies would mean depriving those within the party; a crisis generating mechanism for the ruling party itself. As the saying goes, their turn will come. This was indeed the context that encouraged opposition parties to strategize on the establishment of a unified mega opposition platform to face the APC in the 2027 elections. We now know that the said platform is the African Democratic Congress (ADC) which was launched

on Wednesday. In a swift move, the existing leadership of the ADC stepped down to enable the new entrants takeover control, an action that will no doubt be contested by surrogates of the APC. The new leadership includes former Senate President David Mark as National Chairperson, ex-Osun State Governor and former

Tinubu ally Rauf Aregbesola as National Secretary, and former Minister of Youth and Sports Bolaji Abdullahi as spokesperson. The coalition is mostly composed of members of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP), Labour Party, and some APC members. The opposition coalition includes prominent politicians such as Atiku Abubakar, Peter Obi, Nasir El-Rufai, Bukola Saraki, Rotimi Amaechi, Abubakar Malami, amongst others. By making opposition parties ungovernable, the ruling party has created the need within them to opt out and seek unity in another platform. Let us not forget that the APC itself was born from a merger of opposition parties in 2013, culminating in its historic victory over the then-ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) in 2015. One of the hopefuls for the presidential candidate of the coalition, Peter Obi has declared that the platform would offer Nigerians “a competent, capable, and compassionate” leadership: “Our commitment is to sacrifice and work together towards the 2027 General Elections, ensuring that Nigeria gets a competent, capable, and compassionate leadership that will prioritize the nation's future by putting the welfare of Nigerians first.” This is easy to say. There are many others within the coalition with the same ambition and the success of the coalition would depend of their establishing a level playing ground for intra-party democracy to produce the best candidate. If they fail to do so, their success cannot be guaranteed.

