

5. Military Rule in Nigeria

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, after many years of British colonial rule, gained her independence on 1 October, 1960 and became a Federal Republic on 1 October 1963. She experimented civil democratic government for only five years and three months before the Nigerian military intervened in the political process on 15 January, 1966. Since then Nigeria has witnessed four periods of military rule:

- (i) 1966 to 1975: Aguiyi-Ironsi/Yakubu Gowon
- (ii) 1975 to 1979: Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo
- (iii) 1983 to 1985: Muhammed Buhari
- (iv) 1985 to 1992: Ibrahim Babangida

Each of these phases of military rule in Nigeria had causes, institutions, functions, achievements and problems. These are examined in detail as follows:

5.2 1966–1975: AGUIYI-IRONSI/YAKUBU GOWON REGIME

General Ironsi

A few years after Nigeria's independence, she was faced with socio-economic and political problems. The Federal Elections crisis of 1964 and the Western Nigeria Election crisis of 1965 created a conducive political climate under which the military struck after midnight on 15 January, 1966 and took over political power from the civil rulers. The coup was organized by a group of young majors in the Nigerian Army led by Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu. The coup d'état resulted in the death of a number of important military officers. The civilian leaders who were killed in the coup included the Prime Minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Premier of Western Nigeria, Chief Samuel Akintola, the Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and the Federal Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh. The Council of Ministers quickly met and decided to hand over power to the military. Accordingly, on 16 January 1966, the Acting President of the Federation Dr. Nwafor Orizu (the President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, was away on a holiday in Britain) formally handed the government of the Federation to the Nigerian Armed Forces. Ultimately, the General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Armed Forces, Major-General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, took over control of the Government of the Federation as Head of the Federal Military Government, and Supreme Commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces. This was the beginning of military rule in Nigeria.



Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi

The Head of the Federal Military Government, Major-General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi then promulgated “the Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 1 of 1966”™ which suspended certain sections of the 1963 Constitution. The Federal and Regional Legislatures were dissolved and suspended, the President, Prime Minister, Regional Governors and Premiers, Federal and Regional Ministers were all sacked. All the political parties were banned and their assets taken over by the Federal Military Government. The Head of the Federal Military Government then appointed the following Military Governors for each of the Regions:

Lt. Col. C. Odumegwu Ojukwu for Eastern Region;

Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina for Northern Region;

Lt. Col. F.A. Fajuyi for Western Region;

Col. Ejoor for Mid-Western Region.



Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu



Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina



Lt. Col. Francis Adekunle Fajuyi



Col. David Ejoor

General Aguiyi-Ironsi, on 24 May, 1966, promulgated the ill-fated “Constitution (Suspension and Modification) Decree No. 34 of May 1966.”™ The Decree abolished federalism in Nigeria, split the existing regions into groups of provinces and vested supreme legislative powers on the national military government. This Decree was popularly known as the “Unification Decree”™ as it turned Nigeria into a unitary state. The “Unification Decree”™ aroused deep resentment and fear in the North which led to demonstrations. This resulted in the massacre of the Igbo resident in the North in May 1966, and in the counter-coup of July 1966. The coup occurred when General Ironsi started a nation-wide tour as a strategy to convince Nigerians of the Unification Decree. As the violence in the North continued to spread, General Ironsi, travelled to Ibadan to address a meeting of the traditional rulers and chiefs. While there at Ibadan, in the early hours of 29 July, 1966, he and his host, the Military Governor of Western Nigeria, Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi were kidnapped and later killed. In this counter-coup, many other military officers mostly of Eastern Nigerian origin were also killed. This was the second *coup d’état*™ in Nigeria and gave rise to the second Military Government under Lt. Col. (later General) Yakubu Gowon. So on 1 August, 1966, Lt. Col. Gowon took over the political leadership of Nigeria as Head of the Military Government of Nigeria. This marked the beginning of strained relations between the Federal Government under Gowon and the Eastern Nigerian Government under Col. Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu. The death of Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi and hundreds of innocent people in July 1966, the continued massacre of people of Eastern Nigeria origin and the

destruction of their property created a very bitter and tense political climate in the country between 1966 and 1967.

General Gowon

On assumption of power, Yakubu Gowon immediately took three important actions:



General Yakubu Gowon

- (i) released Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the Action Group and the Opposition leader in the Parliament of the First Republic and many other politicians.
- (ii) On 1 September, 1966 repealed the Unification Decree (Decree No. 34 of May 1966) and revived the Federal system in Nigeria.
- (iii) On 27 May, 1967, created 12 states in Nigeria under the State Creation and Transitional Provision Decree No. 14 of 1967.

Barely three days after the creation of the 12 states of the Federation by Gowon, the Military Governor of the former Eastern Region, Col. Emeka Ojukwu declared that the former Eastern Region consisting of the then East Central, South Eastern and Rivers StatesTM had seceded from the Nigerian Federation. This was called TM“The Republic of Biafra”. Four African States: Gabon, Ivory Coast, Zambia and Tanzania and the South American Island of Haiti recognized Biafra. The Federal Military Government declared the action illegal and unconstitutional. Consequently the Federal Government, after all efforts to settle the problem had failed, decided to crush the secession with the TM“Federal might.” Efforts towards settlement were made in Aburi, Ghana, in Kampala in May 1968, in Addis Ababa in August 1968 by the OAU. Consequently, there was a civil war between Nigeria and TM“Biafra” which began on 6 July, 1967 and ended on 15 January, 1970, a period of 30 months, with the defeat and surrender of TM“Biafra”. Immediately after the civil war, the Gowon Federal Military Government embarked on a programme of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation which brought about permanent peace and unity in the country.

The Causes of the Coup

The causes of the first military intervention in Nigeria are outlined as follows:

- (i) The politicians were not able to conduct free and fair elections. There were widespread election malpractices and rigging. The 1964 Federal Elections and 1965 Western Regional Election were characterized by carrying away of ballot boxes by political opponents, “dumping of ballot papers” in supporters’ ballot boxes, whipping-up of tribal and religious sentiments, intimidation, thuggery, arson and wide spread destruction of lives and property. In short, there was sheer election robbery and a rape of democracy.
- (ii) The failure of politicians to fulfil political promises was a very important factor. Politicians gave very lofty and ambitious political promises during elections. But when they were elected into political offices, they abandoned their promises to the electorate that voted them into power and pursued their own personal interests.
- (iii) There were intra-party conflicts. For instance, the Action Group crisis of 1962 which started at Jos marked the beginning of the Nigerian political crisis that finally resulted in the coup of 1966. There were also inter-party conflicts. For instance there were conflicts between the NCNC and the NPC. There were also conflicts between the Action Group and the NNDP of Chief Akintola. There were conflicts between the two big political Alliances — the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) led by the NPC and United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) led by the NCNC. These two Alliances were formed in 1964 for the Federal Government Elections. These intra- and inter-party conflicts created political tension and resulted in political bitterness and hatred among politicians and finally led to political crises.
- (iv) One of the fundamental causes of the military intervention was the newness of the Nigerian state with new political structures. Nigeria gained her independence in 1960 when she started to exist as a state. As the state and its political structures and institutions were new, there were, naturally, conflicts between traditional and modern structures, norms, values, and attitudes. Consequently the political system was weak and fragile.
- (v) There was a tendency for political leaders to sit tight in office indefinitely. Nigerian leaders and in fact those of the developing nations of the world, have great lust for political power. They possess inordinate ambition for power and can use any means to acquire and retain political power.
- (vi) There were massive and wide-spread corrupt practices by politicians and other public servants. There was also maladministration and ineffectiveness of the public services of the Federation. All these resulted in the decline of the national economy.
- (vii) There were also serious economic problems. Among these were low level of development, poverty, poor standard of living, low agricultural and industrial development, unemployment and inflation.
- (viii) Social problems also contributed to the military intervention. There were mass illiteracy, ethnic rivalry and religious conflicts.
- (ix) The Nigerian political leadership was very weak and ineffective. It was incapable of integrating all the various groups of the complex and diverse Nigerian society. There was leadership vacuum created as a result of decolonization. The parliamentary system of government contributed to leadership problem. There was subtle conflict of power between the President and the Prime Minister.

- (x) The Regional governments were in occasional conflicts with the Federal Government. For instance, the Eastern Nigerian Government was in conflict with the Federal Government over the issue of the 1962 census.
- (xi) Finally, the military leaders themselves desired to exercise political power.

Governmental Structures and Functions

The system of government during the Gowon military administration was Federal. With the creation of 12 states in Nigeria in May 1967, the military operated a 12-state structure of Federal system from 1967 to 1975. However, because of the military principles of unity of command and centralism, the Federal Military Government exercised supreme political power over the entire political system. The State governments were increasingly dependent on the central government. However, the states had their respective political institutions and exercised considerable power and autonomy over the functions provided by the 1963 Constitution, such as Local Government, Primary and Secondary education, Agriculture, Industry, Health etc. The states had a share of revenue both internal and external, allocated to them for the discharge of their constitutional functions. However, the Federal Military Government had the supreme power to alter the functions and powers of State governments at any time it desired. This it could with a promulgation of an appropriate Decree. The structures of the government of the Federation were in line with the Federal system. At the federal level, we had the following:

â€¢ Head of the Federal Military Government

â€¢ The Supreme Military Council

â€¢ The Federal Executive Council

â€¢ The Federal Judiciary

â€¢ The Federal Civil Service

At the State level we had the following:

â€¢ The Military Governor

â€¢ The State Executive Council

â€¢ The State Judiciary

â€¢ The State Civil Service

We discuss briefly below each of these political structures.

- (i) **The Head of the Federal Military Government:** The head of the Federal Military Government was the Head of State, Head of the Federal Government, and the Supreme Commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces. All Decrees must receive his assent before they could come into force. He was the Chairman of both the Supreme Military Council and the Federal Executive Council. He was responsible for the appointment of State Military Governors who were responsible and accountable to him. He appointed the Federal Commissioners (Ministers) and could remove them. He controlled and directed the entire governments of the Federation and ensured peace, unity and good government of the Federation.

- (ii) **The Supreme Military Council:** Under the Gowon Military Government (29 July, 1966–29 July, 1975), the Supreme Military Council consisted of the Head of State and Supreme Commander of the Nigerian Armed Forces who was the chairman, all the State Military Governors, the Heads of the Air Force, Navy, Army (Chief of Army Staff), Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Inspector-General of Police and his deputy and the Attorney-General of the Federation. The Supreme Military Council was the legislative arm of the government. The laws made by the SMC were known as Decrees. The Council was also the highest policy-making organ of the Military Government. Decrees were superior to the Constitution whose provisions they could alter at any time.
- (iii) **The Federal Executive Council:** The Federal Executive Council consisted among others of the Head of State who was the Chairman, and the Federal Commissioners (Ministers). Each of the Federal Commissioners headed a Federal Ministry. The Federal Executive Council performed all the duties of a Cabinet. It implemented all the policies of the Supreme Military Council. It recommended policies and legislative proposals to the SMC. It supervised, co-ordinated and controlled the Federal Public Service. It ensured that the objective of the Federal Military Government was realized.
- (iv) **The Federal Judiciary:** The structure and functions of the judiciary remained as provided for by the 1963 Constitution. However, the Judiciary was deprived of the function of reviewing any provision of any Decree made by the Supreme Military Council or Edict made by State Military Government. The Advisory Judicial Committee was created. This body was created by the Ironsi regime and continued to function during the Gowon regime. Its primary function was the appointment, promotion and discipline of judges. It was presided over by the Chief Justice of the Federation.
- (v) **The Federal Civil Service:** The federal civil service retained its structure and functions as provided for by the civilian Constitution. However its powers grew tremendously as a result of the absence of the legislature and political parties, and the lack of knowledge of the military leaders in the art of government. Top civil servants were the principal advisers of the military. The federal civil service was headed by the Head of the Civil Service who was also the Secretary to Military Government. The Civil Servants articulated and aggregated policies, initiated legislation and implemented policies made by the Supreme Military Council and the Federal Executive Council. There was still the Federal Civil Service Commission responsible for the appointment, promotion and discipline of civil servants.
- (vi) **The state military governors:** Each state had a Military Governor who was the chief executive of the state government. He was appointed by the Head of State to whom he was also accountable. He was the Chairman of the State Executive Council, the members of which he appointed. He was vested with all the executive powers of the State Government. He gave assent to Edicts before they could come into force. He directed, controlled and supervised all the activities of the State Military Government.
- (vii) **The State Executive Council:** The State Executive Council consisted of the Military Governor who was the Chairman, the Civil Commissioners who were responsible and accountable to him. The State Executive Council combined the legislative and

executive functions of the State Government. It made laws which were promulgated into Edicts by the State Governor. It made policies and executed those policies. It controlled, directed, supervised and co-ordinated all the activities of the State Military Government. The Federal Military Government had powers to veto any Edict, policy or action of the State Executive Council.

- (viii) **The State Judiciary:** The State Judiciary retained its structures and functions as provided by the 1963 Constitution. However, it lost the power to question State Military Government Edict.
- (ix) **The State Civil Service:** The State Civil Service retained its structure and functions as it had during the civilian administration. It served as the instrument for the implementation of State Government policies and programmes. The top civil servants as a result of the absence of the legislature and political parties played dominant role in the formulation of policies. Some of the (permanent secretaries) attended the State Executive Council meetings with the Civil Commissioners. The State Civil Service Commission was retained to continue in its function of appointment, promotion and discipline of Civil Servants. The State Civil Service was headed by the Head of the State Civil Service who was also the Secretary to the State Military Government.

Achievements of the Regime

The Gowon military administration recorded a measure of achievements during its nine years of existence. The most important of these achievements are outlined below:

- (i) During the First Republic of Nigeria there was an imbalance in the Nigerian Federation as Northern Region was greater than the rest of the Regions in Nigeria combined. Moreover, the agitations of the minorities for their own regions were not considered. All efforts to create more regions failed. When Gowon came to power he created the 12-State Federal Structure for Nigeria. This created a sound foundation on which a stable and virile federal system for Nigeria was laid.
- (ii) There was massive construction of new roads and bridges across the federation. There was also reconstruction and rehabilitation of old roads which were neglected during the civil war.
- (iii) A number of new airports were constructed in most parts of the Federation. This eased air transportation in the country.
- (iv) The government increased the social welfare of Nigeria through building more hospitals and health-care institutions throughout the federation.
- (v) There was a democratization of Native Authorities in Northern Nigeria. Native Authorities had the majority of elected councillors. Furthermore, the powers of the Emirs were reduced in favour of democracy. The veto power vested in the Emir that presided over the Chief-in-Council form of Native Authority was abolished. Decisions in Native Authorities were taken by majority vote of the Council.
- (vi) Native Authority Police System which was an instrument of oppression and victimization was abolished. Furthermore, Prisons and Customary/Sharia Courts were removed from the Native Authorities/Traditional rulers.

- (vii) The government started the process of indigenization of the ownership of economic enterprises in Nigeria thus transferring them from foreign to Nigerian hands. This policy made it possible for more Nigerians to take over industrial and commercial activities which were previously in the hands of the foreigners. The ultimate goal of this policy was economic independence.
- (viii) Although the military caused the civil war, it successfully prosecuted it and gained victory. After the war the government embarked on a programme of national reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation which healed the wounds of the war.
- (ix) The military adopted and executed the policy of State take-over of all Primary, Secondary Schools and Colleges throughout the Federation. Prior to military administration, Primary Schools and most Secondary Schools in Nigeria were under private and voluntary agencies' ownership and management. This measure gave effect to accelerated development in education, increase in student enrolment, uniformity of standards, better working conditions for teachers throughout the federation and an increased state financing of education.
- (x) Government established a large number of Secondary schools and Technical colleges throughout the federation. The period also witnessed the establishment of an unprecedented number of universities and other higher institutions such as polytechnics and colleges of education. There was a massive turn-out of graduates from these institutions.
- (xi) Priority attention was placed on rural development through the construction of rural roads and bridges, dams, establishment of agricultural development projects, and encouragement of self-help development.
- (xii) The public services of the Federation were reformed. This brought about uniform Civil Service Systems, Uniform Salary Gradings for all Public Services (Grade Levels 1–17), Uniform Salaries and Conditions of Service for all Public Servants. The review of the Public Services was done by Public Service Review Commission headed by Chief Jerome Udoji (1974).
- (xiii) The Gowon Military Government established the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) in 1973 aimed at fostering unity and cooperative living to ensure national integration.
- (xiv) Africa was made the centre-piece of the Nigerian foreign policy. Nigeria, led by Gowon, contributed immensely to the formation of the ECOWAS

The Weaknesses and Problems of the Regime

The following are the weaknesses and problems of the military administration (1966–1975):

- (i) The Military administration was the cause of the Nigerian Civil War which lasted 30 months and caused the destruction of lives and property and seriously threatened the unity of Nigeria. However, the military was able to bring back 'Biafra' to Nigeria and maintain the unity of the country.
- (ii) Many military and civilian officials in the Federal and State Governments were accused of corruption and abuse of office.

- (iii) The Military promised in 1970 to hand over government to the civilians in 1976 but in 1974 the Head of the Federal Military government announced that it would not keep to that promise.
- (iv) There were frequent increases in the prices of goods and services. The general cost of living was very high.
- (v) The military administration promised to create more States but these were not created. This unfulfilled promise created strong dissatisfaction in some quarters.
- (vi) The revenue from the oil boomTM was not effectively applied for rapid socio-economic development of Nigeria.
- (vii) The 1973 Census conducted by the Regime was a total failure.

5.3 29 JULY, 1975 – 1 OCTOBER, 1979: MOHAMMED/OBASANJO REGIME

Causes of the Counter-Coup

General Mohammed

The most prominent feature of the Gowon administration was the Nigerian Civil War which the administration fought and won. Moved by the great joy over this victory, the Gowon administration announced a 9-point programme which included the military hand-over of government to civilian rulers in 1976. On 1 October, 1974, to the disappointment of many Nigerians, he announced to the nation that the hand-over of the government to civilians in 1976 was no longer realistic. This was very provocative and unacceptable to politically-aware Nigerians. Moreover, the Nigerian public service was greatly afflicted by corruption, greed and abuse of office. There was continued agitation for creation of more states. Furthermore, Nigerians experienced very massive increases in the prices of goods and services resulting in hardship among the masses.

As a result of the above factors, a group of military men led by Brigadier (later General) Murtala Mohammed, took over the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria while General Gowon was away attending the OAU Summit meeting in Kampala, Uganda. General Mohammed immediately embarked on progressive activities and measures which resulted in lofty and popular policies and programmes. Thus he was highly adored by most Nigerians. After six months of action-packed and forceful rule, General Mohammed was murdered along the streets of Lagos on the morning of 13 February, 1976, in an attempt to take-over his government. This counter-coup attempt was led by Lt. Col. B.S. Dimka. However, the attempt failed and Dimka and his followers were later executed. After the death of General Murtala Mohammed in the abortive coup, Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo took over the leadership of the Federal Military Government as Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces. Major-General Shehu YarTMAdua was made the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters. General Obasanjo continued with the programmes of General Mohammed and completed it successfully in 1979 when he handed over political power to the civilians.



General Murtala Muhammed



General Olusegun Obasanjo

Governmental Structures and Functions

The system of government continued to be a Federal system. However, it was still moderated by the military principles of centralism and unity of command. The governmental structures and functions remained virtually the same as those existing under the Gowon military regime which have been fully discussed earlier under 5.2 However, a few changes were introduced. First, the State Military Governors were excluded from membership of the Supreme Military Council. The Council then included the General Officers Commanding the Four Divisions of the Nigerian Army, the Commandant of the Nigerian Defence Academy and other selected Military Officers. The total membership of the Council was then 22. Murtala Mohammed/Obasanjo regime further created for the first time the Council of States which consisted of the Head of State as Chairman, the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, the Chief of Staff of the Army, Navy and Air Force, the Inspector-General of Police, the State Military Governors and other members as the Supreme Military Council might appoint. The Council of States laid down policy guidelines on social, economic and financial matters as they affected the states and the formulation and implementation of national development plans as they affect the State. The Council of State co-ordinated the activities of the State Governments in the Federation. It was required that the Military Governors would route their requests to the Federal Military Government through the newly created position of the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters. He was regarded as the deputy Head of State or Prime Minister of the Military Government. The removal of Military Governors from the Supreme Military Council, and the creation of the Council of State where they were members and their placement under the control of the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters was aimed at reducing the powers of the State Military Governors which grew very wide during the Gowon military administration.

Achievements of the Regime

The Murtala Mohammed/Obasanjo regime made very remarkable achievements:

- (i) The military launched a determined attack against corruption and abuse of public office. It took positive steps to enhance public efficiency and probity, and worked

towards ensuring public accountability. Thus when Murtala Mohammed came to power, his first policy statement was the announcement of immediate compulsory retirement of all military officers of the rank of General and its equivalent in the Armed Forces, the Inspector-General of Police and his deputy, and all State Military Governors. This was followed by the great purge of the Public Service — the first in the history of Nigeria — which was intended to clean up the public service of Nigeria, resulted in massive retirement and dismissal of thousands of public servants throughout the Federation.

- (ii) Murtala Mohammed on 3 February, 1976 created seven new states bringing the total number of states in the Nigerian Federation to 19. In addition a new Federal Capital Territory at Abuja was created. This satisfied the aspirations of most Nigerians, particularly the minority groups.
- (iii) There was a complete reform of the Local Government System in Nigeria through the Local Government Reform (1976) which for the first time in Nigeria created a Uniform System of Local Government throughout Nigeria, democratized Local Government, made Local Government a *third*-tier of government of the Federation and introduced Federal funding and statutory allocations to Local Governments. Only a total of 301 Local Governments were created throughout Nigeria. The Local Government was guaranteed by the Constitution and its image and status were greatly enhanced.
- (iv) The most spectacular achievement in the field of education was the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) throughout the Federation in 1976. Furthermore, it expanded primary and secondary schools, built more universities and placed top priority on Technical education. For the first time in Nigeria, the Federal Military Government introduced tuition-free university education. Thus the regime made perhaps the greatest mark in educational development in Nigeria.
- (v) There was continued expansion in infrastructural and social welfare programmes. Many roads and bridges were constructed, many hospitals and health institutions were built, and housing programmes were designed and executed.
- (vi) The Land Use Decree which vested the ownership of land on the State authority was promulgated. This was designed to facilitate the acquisition of land for industrial, agricultural and other development projects by the government.
- (vii) The 1973 Census conducted by the Gowon Administration was cancelled as the figures of the census did not command popular acceptance. The regime saved Nigeria from the use of very inaccurate census figures for planning an administration of the nation.
- (viii) There was an evolution of dynamic foreign policy. The principle of Africa being the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy was given greater force and put effectively into practice. Consequently, Nigeria was able, at this period, to claim without any challenge the leadership of Africa.
- (ix) For the first time ever in the history of Africa, the military voluntarily and systematically handed over political power to a democratically elected civilian government after a transitional period of well-articulated and successfully-executed political programme. Among the items in the political programme was the drafting of

the 1979 Constitution. On 18 October, 1975 the Constitution Drafting Committee was inaugurated. The original membership of the committee was 50 persons but when Chief Awolowo declined to serve on the Committee, the 49 others carried out the assignment. The Chairman of the 49-man Committee was Chief Rotimi Williams.

The Committee submitted its Report on 14 September, 1976. The Draft Constitution was subjected to nation-wide debate. Later the Constituent Assembly which was set up in 1977 consisted of 230 members. Out of the 230 members, 203 were elected from the newly created Local Government Areas while 27 were appointed by the Federal Government. The Constituent Assembly which was headed by Justice Udo Udoma finished its task on 20 September 1978 and the Constitution was thereafter enacted into law by a Decree. The most significant feature of the Constitution was the introduction of the Presidential system of government. The ban on partisan politics was lifted on 21 September, 1978. Immediately after the lifting of the ban, over 50 political associations were formed out of which only five — NPN, UPN, NPP, GNPP and PRP, were registered and recognized. The elections which were supervised by the Military were conducted in 1979 and the Military formally handed over to a democratically elected civilian government headed by Alhaji Shehu Shagari on 1 October, 1979.

5.4 31 DECEMBER, 1983 — 27 AUGUST, 1985: GENERAL MUHAMMED BUHARI REGIME

Causes of the Coup



General Muhammed Buhari

The causes of the fourth military *coup d'état* in Nigeria under the leadership of General Muhammed Buhari were mainly economic and political factors. These are outlined below:

- (i) The civilian administration which took over government from the Military on 1 October, 1979 was afflicted with wide-spread corruption and gross financial mismanagement. Most of the political leaders corruptly enriched themselves with public funds. There was high inflation of contract prices, over-invoicing of bills paid by government, payments for goods and services not supplied. There were cases of misappropriation of funds and materials, embezzlement, and gross financial mismanagement. The political leaders (Senators and Parliamentarians) established for

themselves a salary structure which awarded them very fat salaries and allowances that were out of proportion with the economy of the nation.

- (ii) The civilian administration under Alhaji Shehu Shagari was charged with maladministration and mismanagement of the economy. There was irregular appointment of public officers. The administration was not responsive and sensitive to popular demands. The leadership was weak and lacked public accountability. There were bad economic planning, huge importation of food items, neglect of the Agricultural sector, progressive deficit-budgeting, and huge foreign debts. High rate of inflation, irregular payment of workers's salaries and unemployment were the order of the day.
- (iii) There was also non-observance of the provisions of the Constitution. Political leaders at the Federal and State government levels flagrantly breached the Constitution and other laws of the state.
- (iv) The Second Republic witnessed both intra-party and inter-party conflicts. For instance, the PRP and the GNPP suffered very serious internal crises. Apart from intra-party conflicts, there were inter-party rivalries and disputes. The inter-party conflicts became more pronounced with the break-up of the NPN-NPP Accord. These inter-party conflicts ultimately resulted in the formation of Progressive Parties Alliance (PPA) consisting of UPN, NPP, PRP and GNPP. These intra- and inter-party conflicts resulted in political conflicts and tension.
- (v) The 1983 General Elections were not free and fair. There were gross election malpractices, wholesome rigging, thuggery, arson, and destruction of lives and property during the electoral process.

As a result of these economic and political problems, the military led by General Muhammed Buhari took over political power in a bloodless *coup d'état* on 31 December, 1983.

Governmental Structures and Functions

The Buhari Administration adopted the governmental structures and functions as existed during the previous military administration. The first was the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. This political institution was occupied by General Muhammed Buhari. Secondly, there was the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters. This position was occupied by Major-General Tunde Idiagbon who was regarded as Buhari's deputy. The third political organ was Supreme Military Council which was the highest policy and law making body of the Military Government. It had the power to make and unmake. The fourth political institution was the Council of States which co-ordinated policies and laws, their formulation and execution as they affected the states. The fifth political institution was the Federal Executive Council which was the executive arm of the Federal Government. The sixth was the Federal Judiciary which was the judicial organ of the Federal Government. The seventh was the Federal Civil Service which implemented the policies and programmes of the Federal Government. We had also at the state level, the State Military Governor, the details of these political institutions were given earlier under section 5.2 this chapter.

Achievements of The Regime

- (i) Although Buhari's Government was short-lived, it made significant impact on the Nigerian Society. When Buhari came to power, there was wide-spread indiscipline in the Nigerian society. Buhari's first action was to declare war against indiscipline (WAI) to check frivolous behaviour and gross moral decadence. Force was employed to enforce discipline.
- (ii) War Against Filth (WAF) was launched which was designed to combat filth in the Nigerian environment. Prior to that period adequate attention was not given to environmental sanitation and disposal of refuse. This regime was the first ever to declare the last Saturday of every month Environmental Sanitation Day throughout the Federation when every Nigerian should be involved in cleaning his compound and surroundings. During the period of the cleanup, usually between the hours of 7 a.m. and 10 a.m., there was no movement of people or vehicles on the road throughout the nation. Coercion was employed to enforce this.
- (iii) A series of stern economic measures were employed to revive the economy. There was massive rationalization of the public service which resulted in the massive retrenchment of workers.
- (iv) There was a vigorous war against corruption and corrupt practices, and abuse of public office. All the political office holders during the Second Republic were arrested, detained and made to give full account of their office. Various Military Tribunals were set up to probe those who had questions to answer. Before Buhari was overthrown, maximum punishment were meted out to former politicians who looted public funds. Any public officer caught in any corrupt practice, abuse of public office or immoral behaviour was summarily dismissed.

5.5 AUGUST 1985–OCTOBER 1992: GENERAL IBRAHIM BABANGIDA REGIME

Causes of the Counter-Coup



General Ibrahim Babangida

The Buhari and Idiagbo Government was highly criticized for its dictatorial style. It trampled upon Press freedom and the rights of the people. The government seriously curtailed the freedom of the Press and detained many Nigerians for one alleged offence or the other. The

regime, although had good intentions, was criticized for its unpopular style. It was styled a regime of terror as it ruled with brute force. This created a political climate of tension, general dissatisfaction and alienation. Consequently on 27 August, 1985, Major-General (now General) Ibrahim Babangida, the then Chief of Army Staff, seized political power from General Muhammed Buhari in a bloodless *coup d'état*.

Governmental Structures and Functions

The Babangida administration retained the governmental structures and functions created by the previous military administration. However, the administration re-named the titles of three political institutions.

- (i) The "Head of State" title was replaced with the title of "President". Although he exercises exactly the same powers which were exercised before by Military Head of State, Head of Government and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, yet the innovation gives an impression of a democratic and Constitutional ruler.
- (ii) The post of "Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters" was relinquished, and a new post of "Chief of General Staff" was created. The Chief of General Staff performs similar functions as the Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters.
- (iii) The "Supreme Military Council" was given the new nomenclature of "Armed Forces Ruling Council," which has essentially the same composition and exercised exactly the same powers as the Supreme Military Council of the previous Military Regimes. General Ibrahim Babangida as the President of the Republic exercised all the powers of the Executive President, while Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe was the Chief of General Staff but was later replaced with Vice-Admiral Augustus Aikhomu. Other governmental institutions are the Council of State, the Federal Executive Council, the Federal Judiciary and the Federal Civil Service. At the State level, we still have the State Military Governor, the State Executive Council, the State Judiciary and the State Civil Service. The composition, organization and functions of these governmental institutions are essentially the same as their counterparts of the previous regimes which have been discussed fully earlier in this Chapter. The Administration declared four cardinal programmes which it is pursuing throughout its period of rule. These are

• Economic Reconstruction

• Social Justice

• Self-Reliance

• Human Rights

Achievements of The Regime

The Babangida administration has contributed immensely to the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. The most remarkable of these contributions so far are outlined below:

- (i) **Economic Reconstruction:** The most controversial programme undertaken by this regime was that of economic reconstruction. The regime designed and prosecuted the highly criticized Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). This is an economic

programme designed to revive, reconstruct and salvage the Nigerian ailing and depressed economy. This involves a total ban on the importation of all food items eg Wheat flour, maize, meat and rice. There is government encouragement for local food production and for production of all sorts of goods for export. Much emphasis is placed on agriculture and the establishment of industries. Towards the economic policy of SAP, the regime has embarked on privatization and commercialization in which public corporations are either being sold off to the private sector (privatization) or reorganized in such a manner as to stand on their own and make profits (commercialization). Towards the realization of the goal of SAP, government subsidies were removed from most goods and services which in the past were enjoying government subsidies eg subsidy on petroleum was removed. The pursuance of SAP objectives led to the rationalization of staff in all public establishments to make them more productive. This resulted in mass retrenchment of public servants. The regime also introduced the Second Tier Foreign Exchange Market (SFEM) biddings to which the exchange rate of the Naira was subjected and determined by the economic forces of supply and demand of foreign exchange currencies. The SFEM was later replaced by the Foreign Exchange Market (FEM) and further modified to Inter-Banks Foreign Exchange Market (IFEM). These had the effect of devaluation of the Naira which was designed to discourage and control imports, stimulate local production and encourage foreign investments.

- (ii) **Rural Transformation:** The Babangida Military Administration placed high premium on rural development. Towards this goal the government established the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure at the national level and State Directorate of Rural Development at the States. The Federal Military Government pumped money into the Directorate with which it provided rural roads, pipe-borne water, rural electricity etc. The Federal Government also gave special grants to Local Governments for the provision of basic rural amenities.
- (iii) **National Directorate of Employment (NDE):** As a means of alleviating massive unemployment in the country, the Federal Military Government established the National Directorate of Employment for the provision of employment opportunities to the unemployed Nigerians. The Directorate has made remarkable progress in reducing the high incidence of unemployment.
- (iv) **Reform of the Local Government System:** The Local Government was reformed in 1987–1989 so as to make it more responsible to local needs. The Military Government introduced the Executive Chairmanship form of Local Government in 1987. In 1989, all the Ministries of Local Government in all the states of the Federation were abolished in order to give autonomy to the Local Government. The government, on 3 May, 1989, created 149 new Local Government areas which raised the total number in the Federation to 453. The question of creation of new Local Government Areas was then clearly made a Constitutional issue.
- (v) **Reform of the Civil Service:** The Nigerian Civil Service was reformed. The reform involved the abolition of the posts of Permanent Secretaries and the introduction, in their positions, of Director-Generals and the abolition of the post of Head of Service. It also involved the professionalization of the Civil Service, the transfer of the power to appoint, promote and discipline civil servants limited to individual Ministries. As a

result of this reform, Federal Ministers and State Commissioners became the Accounting Officers of the respective Ministries. The reform was aimed at securing a more responsible, responsive, dedicated, professionalized and productive Civil Service.

- (vi) **Creation of More States:** The Administration created two more states — Katsina and Akwa Ibom. These brought the total number of States in the Nigerian Federation to 21.



Map of Nigeria showing the 21 states



Map of Nigeria showing the 30 states

In August 1991, the Babangida Administration increased these to 30.

- (vii) **The Political Bureau and Directorate for Social Mobilization:** In an effort to create a new virile and stable political order, the Government appointed a 16-man *Political Bureau*, made up of Social Scientists and headed by Dr. Samuel J. Cookey, a retired educationist, which was charged with the responsibility of studying the Nigerian socio-political situations and making recommendations that would enable Government “establish a viable and enduring people-oriented political system.”TM Based on the recommendations of the Political Bureau, the administration formulated its comprehensive and compact political programme which spanned 1987 to 1992. The first in this programme was the establishment of the National Electoral Commission headed by Prof. Eme Awa in August 1987 and the establishment of the *Directorate for*

Social Mobilization headed by Prof. Jerry Gana in September 1987. The Directorate for Social Mobilization was created in order to change the negative attitudes, norms, orientation and values of all Nigerians through public education so as to create a new viable and virile political system with positive political culture.

- (viii) **A New Constitution for the Third Republic:** Towards the establishment of an enduring Constitution capable of husbanding a stable and virile political system which is a part of the political programme, the Military Administration appointed a 45-man Constitution Review Committee (CRC) headed by Justice Dr Muhammadu Buba to review the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979. The CRC was inaugurated at Abuja in September, 1987 and completed its assignment in February 1988. A 567-member Constituent Assembly (304 elected members from each of the then 304 Local Government Areas, and 263 nominated members) which was headed by Justice Anthony Aniagolu was set up on 11 May, 1988 to debate the CRC Report and produce a new Constitution. The Armed Forces Ruling Council directed the Assembly not to discuss certain items in the Constitution which were therefore designated "no go areas" but to accept them as decided by the AFRC. These items included Two Party System, Presidential System, Federal System, Sharia/Customary Court of Appeal, ideology etc. The Constituent Assembly completed its assignment on Wednesday 5 April, 1989 when it submitted the Draft Constitution to the President at Abuja. The AFRC made several modifications on the Draft Constitution produced by the Constituent Assembly and it was promulgated into law by Decree on 3 May, 1989. The Constitution copied the fundamental provisions of the 1979 Constitution which include Federalism, Presidential System, Fundamental Human Rights. National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy which is non-judiciable etc. The outstanding innovation of the new Constitution is the Two Party System. The ban on partisan politics was lifted on 3 May, 1989 and it is planned that the military will hand over government to a democratically elected civilian government on 1 October, 1992.

Problems

The weaknesses and failures of this Administration are outlined as follows:

- (i) Although the government saw the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) as the only effective long term solution to our economic problems, the programme has been widely criticized by the masses for its crushing effect on them. The SAP resulted in a great fall in the value of Naira which in turn gave effect to spiral inflation. The ban on importation of goods resulted in scarcity of essential commodities particularly raw materials. SAP also created massive unemployment. Graduates who were turned out every year from Schools, Colleges and Universities roamed the streets as they found no place to work. There was scarcity and high cost of food items, vehicles, spare parts, and building materials which were out of the reach of an average worker or the common man. For instance a car sold at ₦10,000 before SAP was sold during SAP (in 1989) at ₦150,000. The masses found it extremely difficult to provide for themselves basic essential needs. Consequently life became very bitter and unbearable.

- (iii) The removal of government subsidy on petroleum products was highly criticized as it increased the hardship of the masses as it also increased the transport costs which in turn increased the prices of foodstuff and other essential goods.
- (ii) The government was criticized for its capitalist policies. The government was also highly criticized for its privatization policy. Moreover the government policies widened the gap between the rich and the poor.
- (iv) The government interfered with the work of the Constituent Assembly — the elected representatives of the people—in the task of Constitution making. The Head of State directed the Constituent Assembly not to discuss certain aspects of the Constitution eg party system, ideology, Federal System, creation of more states, Presidential System etc. These were the “no go areas”™. Moreover, the final work of the Constituent Assembly was significantly modified by the Armed Forces Ruling Council before it was promulgated into the Constitution of the Third Republic.
- (v) The views of the people were not taken into account in the creation of more states. Thus adequate number of states were not created. This created dissatisfaction in some areas.
- (vi) Finally, the Military stayed too long in office, 31 December, 1983–1 October, 1992.

KEY POINTS

The Coup

- (a) Major Nzeogwu led the first Coup in Nigeria which occurred on 15 January, 1966.
- (b) Major General Aguiyi-Ironsi was made the Head of the Federal Military Government.
- (c) General Yakubu Gowon led the counter-coup which occurred on 29. July, 1966. Gowon became Head of the Military Government of Nigeria in August, 1966.

Causes

- (a) The politicians were not able to conduct free and fair elections.
- (b) The politicians failed to fulfil political promises.
- (c) There were intra- and inter-party conflicts.
- (d) Nigeria was a new state with new and fragile political structures..
- (e) There was a tendency for political leaders to sit tight in office.
- (f) There was massive and wide-spread official corruption.
- (g) There was low level development, poverty and poor standard of living.
- (h) The Nigerian political leadership was weak and ineffective.
- (i) There were illiteracy, ethnic rivalry and religious conflicts.
- (j) The military leaders had the desire to taste and exercise political power.

Governmental Structures and Functions

At the Federal level, there were

- (a) The Head of the Federal Military Government: Head of State.
- (b) The Supreme Military Council: made Decrees and policies.
- (c) The Federal Executive Council: formulated and executed policies.
- (d) The Federal Judiciary: adjudicated laws.
- (e) The Civil Service: implemented Federal policies.

At the State level, there were

- (f) The State Military Governor: Chief Executive of the State.
- (g) The State Executive Council: formulated and executed policies.
- (h) The State Judiciary: adjudicated laws.
- (i) The State Civil Service: implemented policies.

Achievements

- (a) The Twelve-State Federal Structure was created
- (b) There was massive construction of new roads, bridges and airports throughout the Federation.
- (c) There was an increase in Social Welfare Services.
- (d) Native Authorities in the North were democratized.
- (e) Native Authority Police was abolished.
- (f) Indigenization policy was introduced and executed.
- (g) The military successfully prosecuted the Civil War and maintained Nigerian Unity.
- (h) There was State take-over of Schools.
- (i) The Government established a large number of Primary, Secondary and Post Secondary Schools.
- (j) The Public Services of the Federation were reformed.
- (k) Africa was made the centre-piece of Nigeria's foreign policy.

Problems

- (a) The Military caused the Nigerian Civil War.
- (b) There was wide-spread official corruption.
- (c) The Military failed to keep to its promise to hand-over political power to civilians in 1976.
- (d) The Military promised to create more States but failed.
- (e) The revenue from the oil boom was not effectively utilized for socioeconomic development.
- (f) The 1973 census was a total failure.

3. 29 July, 1975 – 1 October, 1979: Mohammed/Obasanjo Regime

The Coup

A group of military men led by Brigadier (later General) Murtala Mohammed took over the government of Nigeria from General Gowon on 29 July, 1975.

Causes

- (a) Gowon did not keep to his former promise to hand-over government to the civilians in 1976.
- (b) There was wide-spread official corruption.
- (c) There was still serious agitation for more states.

Governmental Structures and Functions

The governmental structures and function of the previous regime were retained. However, the following minor changes were introduced:

- (a) State Military Governors were excluded from membership of the Supreme Military Council.
- (b) The Council of States was for the first time created.
- (c) The office of the Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters was created.

Achievements

- (a) The 19-States Federal Structure was created with Abuja as the new Federal Capital Territory.
- (b) A total war against official corruption was launched.
- (c) There was a complete reform of the Local Government System in Nigeria.
- (d) Universal Primary Education Scheme (UPE) was launched.
- (e) Massive expansion at all levels of education was accomplished.
- (f) There was massive expansion in infrastructure and Social Welfare Services.
- (g) The Land Use Decree was introduced.
- (h) The military voluntarily handed over political power to the civilians after a transitional period of well articulated and successfully executed political programme.

4. 31 December, 1983 – 27 August 1985: General Buhari Regime

The Coup

The Military led by General Muhammed Buhari took over political power from the civilian administration led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari in a bloodless coup on 31 December, 1983.

Causes

- (a) There was wide-spread corruption and gross financial mismanagement.
- (b) There was gross maladministration and mismanagement of the economy.
- (c) There was non-observance of the rules of the Constitution.
- (d) There were serious intra- and inter-party conflicts.

- (e) During the 1983 elections, there were gross election malpractices viz rigging, thuggery and destruction of lives and property.

The Governmental Structures and Functions

The Buhari administration adopted the governmental structures and functions of the previous military regime.

Achievements

- (a) War Against Indiscipline (WAI) was launched which reduced the incidence of indiscipline in the nation.
- (b) War Against Filth (WAF) was also launched. This provided for compulsory monthly clean-up by every citizen on the last Saturday of the month.
- (c) Stern economic measures were employed to revive the depressed economy.
- (d) There was aggressive war against corruption and abuse of public office.

5. 27 August, 1985 to 1 October, 1992: General Babangida Regime

The Counter Coup

A group of the military led by Major-General (now General) Ibrahim Babangida seized political power from General Mohammed Buhari in a bloodless coup on 27 August, 1985.

Causes

- (a) The regime violated human rights — curtailed the individual's freedoms and that of the Press.
- (b) The regime ruled with brute force.

Government Structures and Functions

The Babangida administration retained the governmental structures and functions of the previous military regime but made the following minor modifications:

- (i) The Head of State was now known as the *President*.
- (ii) The Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters was given a new title of *the Chief of General Staff*.
- (iii) The Supreme Military Council was given a new name of *Armed Forces Ruling Council*.

The functions remained unchanged.

Achievements

- (a) There were serious efforts toward economic reconstruction.
- (b) Serious efforts were made toward rural transformation. The DFRRI was established.
- (c) The National Directorate of Employment was created to check unemployment.
- (d) The MAMSER was created to educate and mobilize the people.
- (e) There were reforms of the Local Government.
- (f) There was a reform of the Civil Service.

- (g) Serious efforts were made to maintain Human Rights and Public Consultation.
- (h) A new Constitution was established.

Problems

- (a) The Structural Adjustment Programme brought serious economic hardship to the people.
- (b) The regime removed government subsidy on petroleum products which increased the hardship of the masses.
- (c) The government promoted capitalist policies.
- (d) The military government interfered in the work of the Constituent Assembly.
- (e) The military stayed too long in office.

SAMPLE EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

Essay Questions

1. Discuss 5 main causes of the military intervention of 15 January, 1966 in Nigeria?
2. Identify and discuss 5 of the main achievements of Murtala/Obasanjo military government.
3. Compare the Murtala/Obasanjo and Ibrahim Babangida military governments.
4. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) is considered by many as the greatest achievement of Babangida administration while others consider it as the greatest economic doom Nigeria has ever suffered. Discuss.
5. What are the main contributions of the Babangida military administration to the political and constitutional development of Nigeria?

Objective Questions

1. The 15 January, 1966 *Coup d'état* was led by
 - A. Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu
 - B. Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi.
 - C. Major Yakubu Gowon
 - D. Major-General Muhammed Buhari
 - E. General Murtala Mohammed.
2. The military leader who was the first to be vested with all the Executive powers of the Federal Government was
 - A. Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu
 - B. Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi.
 - C. General Yakubu Gowon
 - D. General Ibrahim Babangida

- E. General Murtala Mohammed.
3. Which one of the following was first introduced by President Ibrahim Babangida's Military Administration?
- A. Two Party System
 - B. War Against Filth (WAF)
 - C. Green Revolution
 - D. War Against Indiscipline (WAI)
 - E. Land Use Decree
4. Which one of the following was first introduced by Gowon Military Administration?
- A. 19-States Federal Structure
 - B. 21-States Federal Structure
 - C. Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)
 - D. Indigenization Policy
 - E. Universal Free Primary Education
5. The Political Institution of the Council of States was for the first time created by the Military Administration of
- A. General Babangida
 - B. General Gowon
 - C. General Mohammed
 - D. General Buhari
 - E. Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi.

Answers

- 1. A
- 2. B
- 3. A
- 4. D
- 5. C