

CHAPTER 15

THE INTERIM NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND THE THIRD COMING OF THE MILITARY (1993-1994)

Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to

- describe the events that led to the emergence of interim national government under Ernest Shonekan;
- discuss the era of Sani Abacha's Military Administration (1993-1998), achievements and shortcomings;
- discuss the era of Abdulsalami Abubakar's Administration's (1998 – 1999) achievements and shortcomings.

Introduction

On June 12, 1993, Nigeria had a free and fair election which was alleged to have been won by Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola. However, General Ibrahim Badamosi – the then Nigerian military president that planned and conducted this election, without genuine reasons annulled or cancelled the presidential election of June 12, 1993. This annulment created serious political crisis in the Nigeria polity which caused General Babangida to step aside and install an interim national government headed by Chief Ernest Shonekan, who eventually was swept out of power on November 17, 1993. Sani Abacha died suddenly on the 8th day of June, 1998 paving the way for the emergence of General Abdulsalami Abubakar's regime whose transition to civil rule programme restored civilian-democratic governance on Nigeria in May 29th, 1999.

15.1 The Emergence of the Interim National Government (ING), Chief Ernest Shonekan



Fig 15.1: Chief Ernest Shonekan-Head of Interim National Government

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election cut short Babangida's bid deemed the freest and fairest in the chequered political history of Nigeria angered many Nigerians who resorted to violent and peaceful demonstrations throughout the major cities of Nigeria like Lagos, Ibadan and Abuja.

The Nigerian populace was very uncomfortable and dissatisfied about President Babangida's transition to civil rule programmes. For instance, Babangida changed the transition time table twice from October 1, 1992 to January 1993. The January 1993 exit date was also changed to August 27, 1993.

As the June 12, 1993 annulment over-heated, the Nigerian polity thereby creating a chaotic political situation, President Babangida was pressurized to step aside thereby leading to the installation of an interim national government on August 27, 1993 under the headship of Chief Ernest Shonekan of Yoruba extraction.

Ernest Shonekan's Interim National Government

As Babangida was stepping aside as military president, he installed a puppet regime Ernest Shonekan's led Interim National Government (ING) on August 27, 1993. Ernest Shonekan was thoroughly ill-equipped to manage the crises that arose from the annulment of the June 12, 1993. Shonekan was a political lightweight who had no political base or firm control of the military. The choice of Shonekan became serious to the nation and its democratic experiment. Babangida chose Shonekan in order to pacify the Yoruba ethnic group who were denied of Abiola's presidency.

Chief Ernest Shonekan's Interim Government had to grapple with a lot of social and political problems. For instance, the civil unrests and violent demonstrations continued, forcing the army under General Sani Abacha to use soldiers and police to quell (stop) the violent demonstrations. These antiriot squad brutally killed more than hundred demonstrators in Lagos. Equally, Nigerian

workers/organized labour obeyed sit-at-home directives from the parent union, the Nigeria labour crises which paralyzed both economic and social activities.

As the political impasse degenerated, both NUPENG and PENGASSAN supported the victory of Chief Moshod Abiola while a Lagos High Court declared Chief Ernest Shonekan's Interim National Government unconstitutional, null and void. Shonekan's problems were also compounded by the domineering tendencies of his secretary of defence, General Sani Abacha who refused to take instructions from the chairman of the Interim Government. A proof of Abacha's lack of disrespect for Shonekan can be shown in the ignoble manner, he, that is Sanni Abacha unilaterally and without due approval from his boss sacked a newly appointed chief of defense staff – Lt General Joshua Nime Dangoye from his post.

As Nigeria was almost heading to a civil war, an opportunistic coup strategist – General Sanni Abacha, in what should be described as a faceless and an unprecedented palace coup sacked Shonekan's led Interim National Government on November 17, 1993.

15.2 The Era of General Sani Abacha's Military Government (1993–1998)

General Sani Abacha became Nigeria's military Head of State after forcing Ernest Shonekan to resign his position as the chairman of the Interim National Government. Abacha's administration was characterized by squander mania, political killings, censorship of press freedom etc.



Fig 15.2: General Sani Abacha- Seventh Nigerian Military Head of State

Achievements of Abacha's Administration

- Political Achievements:** Sani Abacha created six new states which raised the Nigerian federation to thirty-six states on 1st October, 1996. These states include Bayelsa (Yenagoa), Ebonyi (Abakaliki), Abia (Umuahia), Enugu (Enugu), Nassarawa (Lafia), Zamfara (Gusau), Abacha, also created 183 new local government areas thereby increasing the number of local

governments in the country from 593 inherited from the Babangida era to 776. He also inaugurated the National Constitution Conference in June 1994.

On 1st October 1995, inaugurated a Transition Implementation Committee (T.I.C) which had Justice Mamman Nasir as chairman and S.G. Ikoku as vice chairman.

2. **Economic Achievements:** As part of his economic reforms, he adopted a guided policy of deregulated economic policy. He stabilized the value of the Naira at N22 per dollar and banned operators of illegal Bureau de change.

He reformed the banking industry by using the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Company (NDIC) to revoke licences of fraudulent Nigerian banks that failed to recapitalize with the Central Bank with which deposit of N500million. In 1994, he established the failed banks tribunal that made sure that Nigerian banks obeyed the fiscal policies of recapitalization. Abacha also worked hard to revive the health, educational and rural infrastructure under the aegis of the Petroleum Trust Fund (P.T.F) which he established.

3. **Social Achievements:** Abacha hypocritically waged fairless wars against corruption and drug trafficking in order to impress the international community. In the pursuit of his anti-corruption programmes, Sani Abacha inaugurated the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC).
4. **Foreign Policy Programmes:** Abacha's poor human rights record earned him a lot of economic sanctions from western powers like Britain, United States of America (USA). Sanctions imposed on Abacha's military administration strained Nigeria's relationship with the western world such that Abacha's junta had no alternative than to forge bilateral trading relationships with Asian countries including China. Abacha's bid to divest Nigeria from international isolation, enrolled Nigeria as a member of D.8 group comprising Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh. D.8 countries that ensured mutual co-operation with member states in the spheres of banking, investments, international communication technology and transfer of technology.

Sani Abacha's identification with Asian countries like Malaysia, China, Singapore and Taiwan brought about vision 2010 project.

Abacha's major foreign policy exploits was the visit of the Pope John Paul II in 1997. The Catholic pontif paid a papal visit to Nigeria at the peak of her tattered international image. Other landmark achievements of Abacha's administration was Nigeria's active participation in the Beijing conference as well as the Sino-Nigerian economic trade and technological commission in China.

Shortcomings of Abacha's Administration

1. **Political failure:** Abacha's regime never promoted national unity and integration. The Abacha junta's failure in promoting national cohesion encouraged the formation of a network of pan-

ethnic associations like the ‘Afenifere’ (for Yoruba Land), Oha na Eze Ndi Igbo and the Eastern Mandate Union (for the Igbo), the Northern Elements Coalition (for the north).

Abacha’s constitutional conference which ended in June 1995 was very eventful because Nigerians were more desirous for a sovereign national conference even before the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. Historians and political analysts think that the constitutional conference convoked by Sani Abacha was meant to divert the attention of Nigerians from the June 12, 1993 political impasse and his palace coup against the Shonekan led Interim National Conference. It was speculated that the Abacha junta used the constitutional conference to lobby conference delegates about his self-succession agenda.

2. **Economic failure:** Due to sanctions imposed by western powers, Nigeria’s economy seriously declined as many investors left Nigeria. The exit of foreign investors affected the pace of industrialization. As a government in dire need of legitimacy, Sani Abacha most times compromised corrupt business and political elites at the expense of national economy. Abacha’s poor macro-economic policies of de-regulation led to the closure of many refineries in Nigeria and as a consequence, Nigeria imported refined crude from oversea countries. Fuel was constantly in short supply leading to long queues at the filling stations. Fuel scarcity caused serious hike in transportation costs with its resultant effect on high cost of living.

Abacha was a kleptocratic head of state who engaged in squandermania and lootocracy. It was alleged that Sani Abacha stole about 10billion US dollars and 5billion British pounds. Sani Abacha’s materialistic tendencies also manifested in his heinous criminal acts of collaborating with foreign companies to loot the national treasury through inflation of contract awards.

3. **Social failure:** The Abacha led military administration was very oppressive and repressive. Members of the pro-democracy movements who fled the country to overseas had to return to their father land in order to participate in the transition to civil rule programme. Abacha used the coercive apparatus of the state to intimidate, chastise, detain and imprison innocent Nigerians, pro-democracy groups and other organs of the civil society. Abacha’s human right abuses and brutal dictatorship can be shown in the crude force he used against the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) who fought relentlessly to restore Abacha’s stolen mandate. The leadership of NADECO who stayed back in the country like Pa Alfred Rewane and Kudirat Abiola were mysteriously murdered by Abacha’s hit squad. Other NADECO members like Michael Ajasin Faseun, Olu Falae, Opadokun, Adebayo and Bola Tinubu were constantly trailed by security agents. Members of NADECO who operated overseas like Wole Soyinka and Alani Akinrinde were tagged terrorists by Sani Abacha.

Another instance of human rights abuse was the hanging of Ogoni Nine including Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995 and the “setting up” of prominent Nigerian citizens like General Olusegun Obasanjo and Shehu Musa Yar’adua who were linked up a phantom coup and jailed. It was also alleged that Abacha’s National Security Advisers, Ishmaila Gwarzo and Al-Mustapha

secretly eliminated General Yar'adua while Obasanjo escaped death due to divine intervention.

In 1997, General Oladipo Diya, Olanrewaju, Adisa, Akinjide, Fadipe and Engineer Adebanjo were all sentenced to death over their participation in a phantom coup against Sani Abacha. However, General Diya and other people associated with the 1997 coup were all granted state pardon after the ascendancy of General Abubakar following the mysterious death of Sani Abacha.

General Sani Abacha never respected the sanctity of traditional institutions as he used his coercive power to dethrone former Sultan of Sokoto, Ibrahim Dasuki of his revered position and installed Muhammadu Macito.

Under Abacha, student unionism/activism waned in importance. He coerced the gullible ones into supporting his self succession moves through massive financial backings.

Abacha used state money to woo five political parties to him as the sole presidential candidate.

Abacha's War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) could not run the moral war against corruption since Abacha and his kitchen cabinet were highly engrossed in corruption.

4. **Foreign Policy Failures:** Abacha's leadership style and his undeclared war on pro-democracy movements and NADECO and CLO created a lot of social insecurity for both Nigerian business and foreign investors. The junta wasted much of Nigeria's resources on image laundering devices. He romanced seriously with Muamar Gadaffi of Libya who was very notorious for his anti-American/Western outburst. The western powers accused Sani Abacha of sponsoring and enhancing the political fortunes of emerging dictators in the West African sub-region such as Republics of Benin, Gambia and Niger.

Another blunder of the junta at the foreign scene was the manner in which the General after receiving the papal blessings of Pope John Paul the second paid deaf ears to the Pope's passionate plea for the release of political prisoners like Olusegun Obasanjo and other political detainees like Chief Frank Kokori, Chief Olu Falae, Otunba Olabiyi Durojaiye, etc.

15.3 The Era of the Abdulsalami Abubakar's Administration (1998–1999), Achievements and Shortcomings



Fig 15.3: General Abdulsalami Abubakar-Eight Nigerian Military Head of State

Abdulsalami Abubakar's emergence as military Head of State came about as a result of the mysterious death of General Sani Abacha on the 8th day of June, 1998. The death of Sani Abacha was highly celebrated amongst many Nigerians who felt that his demise marked the end of a reign of terror in Nigeria. On June 10, Major Abdulsalami Abubakar (former Chief of Defence Staff) was promoted to the rank of general and sworn in as the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

Achievements of Abdulsalami Abubakar's Regime

1. Political Achievements: On his ascendancy, Abdulsalami Abubakar released all political prisoners and detainees. This made detainees like General Olusegun Obasanjo and others regain their freedom. He also unbanned labour unions, civil liberty groups and students union. He set up an Independent National Electoral Commission that prepared a blueprint for the termination of military and commencement of civilian rule. Abubakar's transition time-table were as follows:

- | | | | |
|-------|---|---|----------|
| (i) | Conduct of local government election | - | 5-12-98 |
| (ii) | State government and assembly elections | - | 9-01-99 |
| (iii) | National assembly elections | - | 20-02-99 |
| (iv) | Presidential election | - | 27-02-99 |
| (v) | Presidential inauguration and swearing in | - | 29-05-99 |

Abdulsalami Abubakar worked tirelessly to actualize the objectives of the transition to civil rule's time-table. He demonstrated his love for democratic governance handing over power to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who won the presidential election on 29th day of May, 1999. The swearing in of Chief Mathew Olusegun Obasanjo as the new civilian president was a landmark development in the political history of Nigeria.

2. Foreign Policy Crisis: Abdulsalami as Nigerian Head of State, renewed Nigeria's foreign policy programmes under General Sani Abacha and looked towards the United States of America and European powers for support and recognition. He fulfilled Nigeria's fiscal obligation in the areas of joint venture, business agreements with western multi national oil companies. This gesture was stopped during Abacha's tenure on the accusation that the Trans National Companies only invest a little of their profits in utter violation of the joint venture contract. This singular act of Abubakar earned him the confidence of western countries who felt Abubakar's regime will protect their imperial interests in Nigeria.

Abubakar on assumption of office toured many western countries like London, Washington and Paris where issues of bilateral interests were discussed. He also reassured the west that nothing will derail his transition to civil rule programme.

Abdulsalami Abubakar helped Nigeria to regain her position as the giant of Africa, which was at its lowest ebb under Sani Abacha. He extended his hands of fellowship to African countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe and Sierra Leone.

Abdulsalami did his best to launder Nigeria's image abroad ad pledged to abide by all international conventions and treaties that appertains to the inalienable rights of Nigerian citizens.

Abubakar's genuine intentions and his commitments to democratic values and ideals made the western powers to lift some of the economic sanctions imposed on Nigeria. During his tenure, he played host to world leaders like Chief Emeka Anyaoku – the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations and Koffi Anan – the erstwhile Secretary-General of the United Nations.

3. Social Achievements: The policy thrust of Abubakar's domestic policy was to reconcile different ethnic-nationalities who were steeped in mutual suspicion, hatred and rancour as a result of the political impasse created by the cancellation of June 12 elections in 1993 as well as thepressive regime of Sani Abacha. His regime took steps to redress the injustices that characterized the british Abacha era.

Abubakar's programmes of peace and reconciliation made many members of the pro-democracy movements who fled the country to overseas return back to their father land in order to participate in the transition of the civil programme.

Abdulsalam Abubakar's administration did well to motivate Nigerian workers through the payment of "living wages".

Shortcomings of Abdulsalami Abubakar's Administration

The tragic death of Abiola on the 7th day of July 1998 battered the image of Abubakar's administration. Abiola died after a tea break with Abubakar in the presence of United States assistance secretary of state for African affairs – Mr Thomas Rickenberg and his delegation from Washington. The sudden death of Abiola remains a puzzle to many Nigerians who felt that Abiola

was poisoned. However, forensic reports from Britain and United States confirmed that Abiola died of ‘natural causes’.

The tragic end of Abiola forced members of NADECO and other pre-democratic fronts to give up the struggle for the actualization of the aspirations of June 12, 1993 annulment and to embrace in full swing the transition to civil rule time-table prepared by Abdulsalami Abubakar.

Summary

- The Interim National Government (ING) which produced Ernest Shonekan was a child of expediency which followed the political impasse that followed Babangida’s annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election which political analysts believed was one by Chief Moshood Abiola of the Social Democratic Party.
- The Interim National Government (ING) which lasted between August 27, 1993 to November 17, 1993 failed to actualize its objectives because of Shonekan’s inexperience to restore law and order following violent demonstrations that preceded the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections.
- Abacha’s emergence as Head of State after a palace coup against Ernest Shonekan in November, 1993 replicated a dictatorial regime that was characterized by squandermania human rights abuse, economic decline due to sanctions, unwholesome foreign policy programmes that made Nigeria a pariah state in the country of nations.
- Abdulsalami Abubakar’s emergence as Head of State sequel to the mysterious death of Sani Abacha on 8th day of June, 1998 replicated a government that laundered Nigeria’s foreign image, through its pursuit of reformist programmes such as granting of amnesty to political prisoners, payment of living wages, and the actualization of the tradition to civil rule-time table through transfer of power to Olusegun Obasanjo on 29th May, 1999.

Revision Questions

Objectives

1. The Nigerian military president who annulled the June 12, 1993 presidential election is _____.
A. General Muhammadu Buhari
B. Gen. Sani Abacha
C. Gen. Ibrahim Babangida
D. Gen Joshua Dongoyaro
2. _____ was a political arrangement that came into existence as a result of developments that followed the annulment of the presidential election of June 12, 1993.
A. Sovereign National Conference
B. Ethnic National Conference

- C. Interim National Government
 - D. Supreme Military Council
3. The leader of the coup that swept Shonekan led Interim National Government out of power on November 17, 1993 is _____.
- A. Gen. Oladipo Diya
 - B. Gen Olanrewaju
 - C. Gen Adisa
 - D. Gen. Sani Abacha
4. The following political achievements are credited to Sani Abacha's administration except:
- A. creation of six new states
 - B. creation of 183 new local government areas
 - C. inauguration of national constitution conference in June 1994
 - D. establishment of directorate of foods, road and rural infrastructure (DFRRI)
5. The Nigerian Head of State who inaugurated the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption is _____.
- A. Mohammadu Buhari
 - B. Tunde Idiagbon
 - C. Gen. Sani Abacha
 - D. Col. Fadipe
6. The Sultan of Sokoto whom Sani Abacha used the state coercive apparatus to dethrone is _____.
- A. Muhammadu Maccido
 - B. Ibrahim Dasuki
 - C. Saidu Abubakar
 - D. Attahiru
7. One of the following is not associated with Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition to civil rule time table:
- A. Conduct of local government elections 5-12-98
 - B. State government and assembly elections, 9-01-99
 - C. National assembly elections, 22-02-99
 - D. Constitutional conference
8. _____ mobilized Nigerian youths under the auspice of Youths earnestly ask for Sani Abacha for a two-million march for the actualization of Abacha's self succession bid.
- A. Rear Admiral Ndubuisi Kanu
 - B. Orji Uzor Kalu
 - C. Daniel Kalu
 - D. Kalu Ezera

9 . The military regime which ordered for the hanging of ‘Ogoni Nine’ including Ken Saro Wiwa in 1995 in defiance of appeals for clemency by Nigerian and international civil society groups is _____.

- A. Gen. Muhammadu Buhari
- B. Gen. Sani Abacha
- C. Gen. Abdul Salami Abubakar
- D. Gen. Jeremiah Useni