



**Politics and Governance
in a Conglomerate Nation, 1977-2017**

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PART TWO

III. Principles and Practices of Nigerian Military Government

The Military in African Politics, ed. by John Harbeson (Praeger, 1987)

In this article, a Nigerian military system of governance is explicated. It was the dominant mode of governance in Nigeria until civilian rule was restored in 1999, initially under a former military ruler. Starting from the first military coup in January 1966, Nigeria experienced over 33 years of this system, with one civilian interregnum (1979-1983). Although touted as “corrective” regimes, what transpired in Nigeria was the evolution and entrenchment of a particular mode of governing with implicit and explicit principles and practices. Like the colonial system which it replicated, these bouts of military rule profoundly influenced the structure and character of the Nigerian polity.

There are certain to be changes in the way Nigerians regard their nation’s politics, and in the kinds of questions scholars will ask, as a result of the dismissal in December 1983 of one of the most careful processes of democratization undertaken in Africa since the transfer of power from colonial regimes to national governments. For many years, rule by the military was regarded in Nigeria as an aberration, as a corrective system that is charged with returning the country to the norm of constitutional civilian rule. What was supposed to be an aberration lasted thirteen consecutive years, 1966-79, more than twice the life of the first independence government which it replaced.

The term “corrective” was stretched to its limits by regimes that altered the federal structure of the country, decreed far-reaching transference of ownership from foreign to indigenous hands within the economy, and played a highly interventionist role in determining the rules and structures of the Second Republic of 1979-1983. Yet, these facts did not significantly affect general perceptions about the transitional political role of the armed forces. The 1983 coup, and the draconian actions of the Buhari regime, signified not only the end of a long era in Nigeria marked by an implicit confidence in the superiority of democratic systems of government but, concurrently, a more confident reliance by the military praetors on their own accumulated principles and practices for governing the Nigerian nation.

Federal Regime Changes in Nigeria, 1960-1985

First Independent Civilian Government, 10/60-1/66

Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Balewa

First Military Government, 1/66-7/66

*Major General J. Aguiyi Ironsi

Second Military Government, 7/66-7/75

Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon
Third Military Government (I), 7/75-2/76
Brigadier Murtala Muhammed
Third Military Government (II), 2/76-10/79
Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo
Second Civilian Government, 10/79-12/83
President Shehu Shagari
Fourth Military Government, 12/83-8/85
Major General Muhammadu Buhari
Fifth Military Government, 8/27/85-
Major General Ibrahim Babingida
(*military grade upon accession to power)

The military government of Major General Muhammadu Buhari was the fourth Nigeria has known since independence in October 1, 1960. In contrast to its civilian alternatives, each of the military regimes marks an evolution from its predecessor, retaining certain established features and introducing new dimensions in what can be termed a military system of governance. The relative cohesiveness and continuity of the armed forces, as a corporate body, have accorded it certain advantages in a country known for its deep cultural divisions. The return to divisive politics, massive corruption, and electoral fraud during the Second Republic served to undermine the fragile superior legitimacy that liberal democracy had enjoyed. The politicians were given their chance, and they seemed to have used it to reintroduce each of the ills that General Murtala Muhammed had ascribed to Nigerian party politics in his inaugural address to the Constitutional Drafting Committee in October 1975.¹

The 1983 coup therefore marked both a rupture and a recuperation. It was a rupture in the sense that the military praetors felt less bound to acknowledge, even verbally, the norm of democratic contestation for power. And it was a recuperation as the military is now able to draw, in a conscious way, on the various elements of its own system of governance – and even look to maintain aspects of that system when it moves, or is pushed, to permit civilian politics. Of course, these matters proceed in cycles, and unpredictable developments could disrupt the course of any Nigerian government, military or civilian. As long as it dominates the country, the Nigerian military will operate an alternate governing system that had remained, since the first coup of January 1966, implicit and of questionable legitimacy.

¹ *Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee Containing the Draft Constitution*, Vol. 1 (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1976, pp. xli-xliii).

The term *system of governance* will be used here when we wish to convey something broader than “government” or “regime.” The return of the military to power in Nigeria brings back more than a set of governmental institutions that differ significantly from those of the First and Second Republics. It also brings back a command style of governing, within the ruling councils as well as in the military’s dealings with various social groups. There are uncoded norms regarding the appointment of military officers to governmental positions as well as the cooptation of civilians into the regime. There is a pronounced non-ideological approach to policy issues, yet certain tendencies to which the terms *nationalist* and *pragmatic* can be applied. There is not an appropriate term to express the preferred foreign policy positions of Nigeria’s military governments, so *dynamic* has frequently been used. Finally, the impact of rule by Nigeria’s Armed Forces—a point to which we shall often return—extends beyond the actual periods it has been in power, and has affected in profound ways the structure of the polity and the rules that determine the legitimate exercise of public power.

The Gowon Era

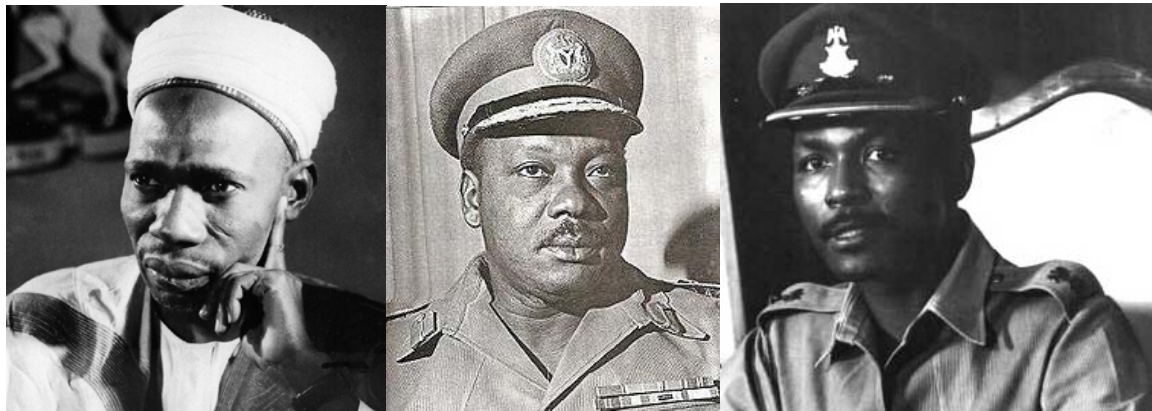
Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon came to power in July 1966 after the erratic six-month rule of General Aguiyi Ironsi ended in his overthrow.² Ironsi was an Igbo and Gowon a Christian from the lower North. Less than a year after this change in government, Nigeria was mired in a civil war that lasted 30 months and consumed an estimated million lives. Despite the intra-military conflicts that contributed to the initiation of hostilities, and the sometimes chaotic prosecution of the war effort, the prestige of the armed forces—and especially Commander-in-Chief Gowon—was high following Biafra’s defeat. The peacetime government of General Gowon, until his overthrow in a palace coup on July 29, 1975, exemplified Samuel Finer’s comment about the ambivalence of military regimes: “They can neither stay nor go.”³ On the one hand, Gowon and his associates emphasized the transitional role of their administration while, on the other, they became deeply involved in implementing a range of socio-economic reforms and construction projects. A prominent civilian politician, and deputy chairman of the Federal Executive Council under Gowon, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, resigned in 1971 citing his opposition to military rule in peacetime. All except one other major politician, Yaya Gusau, remained in their ministerial positions.

With minor alterations, the present structure of military government became established during Gowon’s nine-year rule. At the summit of the government has been the Supreme Military

² Two good reference sources for military government during this period are B.J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1973); and John J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-70* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

³ *The Man on Horseback*, (New York: Praeger, 1962).

Council—Armed Forces Ruling Council after the August 1985 coup—composed almost exclusively of military officers, which exercises undivided power over the armed forces and the wider society. In the executive councils of the government at the federal and state levels, a relatively small group of military officers shares ministerial offices with a preponderance of civilian appointees. Under Gowon, many of these civilians were well-known political figures from the past, including those who belonged to the former ruling party as well as leaders of the opposition, such as Awolowo, Aminu Kano, and Joseph Tarka. Gowon’s predecessor, Ironsi, was accused of relying heavily on fellow Igbos as civilian advisers during his brief rule. From the time Gowon came to power in July 1966, however, the military government could claim to give the country governments that were national in representation.



Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Balewa, Major General J Aguiyi Ironsi, Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon⁴

The second distinguishing feature of the Gowon government, which has remained consistent for successive military regimes, has been the enhanced role of the higher civil service.⁵ In the absence of parliamentary institutions and political parties, decision making soon became a telescoped process under Gowon. After the broad consultation that typified the first year of his regime, with gatherings of “Leaders of Thought” convened to discuss the future of the Federation, the effective sharing of power came to be monopolized by the higher military and civil bureaucracies, with gifted civil servants being given wide latitude in the formulation and implementation of government policies. A handful of civil service heads of the economic ministries came to be designated “superperms” because of the influence they were believed to wield. When the palace coup of July 1975 occurred, many higher civil servants were

⁴ Abubakar Balewa, Digital Image, *Daily Trust*, Jan. 29, 2016 <dailytrust.com.ng>; Yakubu Gowon, Digital Image, *The Guardian*, October 1, 2015 <guardian.ng>

⁵ Many students of military rule have recognized the “partial” nature of military regimes, of how effective power comes to be wielded by civil bureaucrats. For a Nigerian case study, see Chapter 11 of Henry Bienen, *Army and Parties in Africa* (New York and London: Africana Publishing Company, 1978).

compulsorily retired on the grounds of corruption as well as the general wish, shared by members of that regime, of the need to reduce the political power of these stratum.⁶

One of the striking trends has been the relentless growth of the prerogatives of the military as a law-making and constitution-making entity. The Gowon regime had inherited from the Ironsi period the fundamental decrees that suspended the 1963 Constitution, disbanded political parties, and imposed military rule. These decrees (edicts at the state level) multiplied rapidly. They included such erosions of fundamental liberties as Decree No. 24 of 1966, which gave the regime powers to detain without trial anyone considered a threat to national security, and Decree No. 17 of 1967, which empowered it to proscribe any newspaper deemed inimical to the integrity of the nation. The wartime emergency facilitated the resort to such instruments to the extent that the Nigerian polity became a curious legal hybrid: The military government enjoyed extensive dictatorial powers but the judiciary and bar functioned relatively autonomously and was permitted to check excessive and unwarranted uses of the regime's exceptional powers.⁷ We will consider this crucial topic more extensively later.

What was established during the Gowon era, and would be magnified under each of his successors, were the following legal dimensions of military rule: an asserted right of the military to govern by decrees whose validity is not subject to judicial review; the right of the military to enact constitutional provisions for Nigeria, whether under military or civilian rule; and the right of the military to decide which principles of jurisprudence it would respect and which it would disregard. Nigerians never fully grappled with the threefold legal functions assumed by the military—to suspend existing laws and constitutional provisions, to issue its own decrees and edicts, and to rewrite the country's constitutional framework—because of the general belief that these temporary illegalities would be removed once the soldiers returned to the barracks. We will discuss the cumulative effect of these actions, and how the balance shifted in 1984-1985 between Nigeria's common law inheritance and the military's exceptional legal practices.

One of the actions that led to the overthrow of Ironsi in July 1966 was the issuance of Decree No. 34, which abolished the federation and regional governments and substituted a centralized system. Gowon was more fortunate on the eve of the civil war when he declared the breakup of the four grossly unequal regions and the substitution of a federation of 12 states. This act was perhaps the most fundamental constitutional change in Nigeria since the achievement of independence in 1960. Although it was long needed to make the far-flung Federation governable,

⁶ J. Isawa Elaigwu, "The Political Trio on Nigeria's Military Government: The Dynamics of Inter-Elite Relations in a Military Regime, 1967-75," *The Nigerian Journal of Public Affairs*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (1976).

⁷ D.O. Aihe, "Fundamental Human Rights and Military Regime in Nigeria: What Did the Courts Say?", *Journal of African Law*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1971), and B.O. Nwabueze, *A Constitutional History of Nigeria* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1982).

it is unlikely to have been enacted under civilian auspices. The Supreme Military Council (SMC) could act as a Rousseauian Grand Legislator, both governing and functioning as a constitution-giver to the Nigerian nation.⁸ We will see the evolution of this trend with the creation of seven more states under military rule in 1976, the amendments written into the 1979 Constitution by the SMC after the Constitution Assembly had been dissolved, and the reliance by the Buhari regime on some of these amendments in bringing politicians of the Second Republic to trial.

By the time Gowon was overthrown in a bloodless coup in July 1975, the prestige and confidence of his government had given way to a pervasive sense of political decay, indecisiveness, and corruption.⁹ What appeared to seal Gowon's fate was the postponement in October 1974 of the promised return to civilian rule in 1976. Little had been done at that stage to begin the transition process. Unable to decide among the different options – return power to civilians, launch a political movement with himself as its presidential candidate, or make preparations for a designated successor – Gowon opted to do nothing.¹⁰ The asserted legitimacy of military rule was bolstered by the fact that Gowon was overthrown by the collective action of his regime. In addition to his indecisiveness, it was claimed that he had lost control of his subordinates, especially the military state governors, some of whom ran their states as personal fiefs.¹¹ By so acting, the 1975 coup makers presented themselves as intervening to preserve the integrity of the armed forces, and to revitalize the military system of governance.

Gowon's evolution into an imperial, though non-dictatorial, president stood in contrast to the modest soldier who had steered Nigeria through the perilous days of the civil war. Also rescued from Gowon's rule was the broad sense of purpose used to justify the military's involvement in Nigerian politics. As one of those officers who were pressing their views on Gowon in mid-1974 put it, "The important thing is not 1976 but what the military wants to do for this country in the nine-point programme. It has a purpose, an objective. It is not in power merely to hang around till 1976 and then hand over to anybody who wants to take over."¹²

⁸ To an increasing extent, Nigeria can be shown to satisfy the following criterion of modern praetorian states as conceptualized by Amos Perlmutter: "Constitutional changes are effected and sustained by the military which plays a dominant role in all political institutions." "The Praetorian Army and the Praetorian State," *The Military and Politics in Modern Times: On Professionals, Praetorians and Revolutionary Soldiers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 93.

⁹ For a discussion rich in detail about Gowon's rule, see Chapter 4 of Billy Dudley, *An Introduction to Nigerian Government & Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ Gowon's indecisiveness was replicated in 1985 -1993 by the military ruler Ibrahim Babangida. The latter kept interrupting his own transition process evidently for similar reasons..

¹¹ Nelson Kasfir, "Soldiers as Policymakers in Nigeria: The Comparative Performance of Four Military Regimes," *American Universities Field Staff, West African Series*, XVII, No. 3 (1977).

¹² Interview with Colonel Olu Bajowa, *Sunday Times* (Lagos), July 14 1964.

The military had a program for the country and the legitimacy of its rule was promoted, in part, on the reforms it intended to execute on behalf of the nation before returning power to civilian politicians. The nine points of this program, which dated from 1970, were as follows: reorganization of the armed forces; implementation of a Second National Development Plan and repair of the damage and neglect from the war; eradication of corruption; the preparation and adoption of a new constitution; introduction of a new Revenue Allocation Formula; institution of a national population census; organization of genuine national political parties; and the institution of elections and the installation of popularly elected government in the states and in the center. To these nine proposals could be added the establishment of a new federal capital which had become a major goal of the Gowon government.

These proposals, although advanced as a transitional program, implied a great deal more. Such a realization was not lost on Awolowo when they were first articulated. He therefore seized on Gowon's overthrow in 1975 to reiterate the undesirable implications of the military arrogating to itself such political responsibilities:

Our Military Administration must be recognized for what it was originally intended and proclaimed to be: an essentially corrective regime, and not a reconstructing Administration with ready and lasting answers to all our political and economic ills.... It would be too much of a task for it to attempt to undertake the massive and never-ending task of rebuilding or reconstructing our body politic.¹³

Obafemi Awolowo, who never disguised his wish to be elected to lead Nigeria's federal government, understood the broader implications of the military's program for the country. Instead of merely paving the way for civilian rulers, the military was presenting itself as an alternate governing system that could identify (together with its associates from the civil service and the professions) the most pressing needs of the Nigerian people and nation and, with its quicker decision-making procedures, act decisively to address them. Needless to say, performance fell woefully short of promise, and one highly visible consequence of this failure was the congestion of Nigeria's docks by a large armada of commercial vessels at the time of Gowon's removal. What encouraged this "role expansion" on the part of the Nigerian military was the coincidence between their rule and the transformation of Nigeria from an exporter of agricultural products to one which earns almost the totality of its external income from petroleum.¹⁴

¹³ "Advice to New Federal Government," *Daily Sketch* (Ibadan), August 21, 1975.

¹⁴ This theme is woven into several articles in Keith Panter-Brick, ed., *Soldiers and Oil: The Political Transformation of Nigeria* (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1978).



Chief Obafemi Awolowo

Four months before Gowon was removed from power, a Third National Development Plan was issued which included a multiplicity of construction projects inspired by the “oil euphoria” of the previous two years. In the course of shifting from a program of postwar reconstruction to the profuse launching of construction projects financed by oil revenues, administrative waywardness rather than military discipline came to characterize the Gowon regime. After nine consecutive years in power, the system was in decay. His successors hastened after his overthrow to return to the essentials of what they saw as the still legitimate blueprint of military governance in Nigeria.

The Legacy of the Muhammed-Obasanjo Regime

Unlike the late colonial regime, with which it shares many similarities, the Nigerian military now regards the power it exercised in helping create the institutions of the Nigerian republic to imply the power to take back what is given—not so much from the people as from those who appear to be violating the fundamental principles of public trust and accountability. One obvious but crucial difference between the Gowon regime and its immediate successor is that the latter ended on its own terms and at a time of its own choosing. Although the essentials of the military system of governance were laid down during the Gowon era, it is the Muhammed-Obasanjo regime which—in restoring the military's prestige as a governing party and in completing its self-imposed mission—became the essential frame of reference for military rule (and perhaps of political rule) in Nigeria.

The 1976-79 transition to civilian rule was a long, deliberate and costly process. Nigerians of all professions and political persuasions were able to discuss and propose solutions to the well-known political ills of the country. The blueprint that set the framework for this process, and a remarkable document in itself, was the opening address to the Constitution

Drafting Committee in October 1975 by General Muhammed.¹⁵ He outlined the problems that the new constitutional order should progressively eliminate: the identification of political parties with regional and ethnic groups; the bitter nature of electoral competition and the resort to numerous malpractices; the lack of accountability of politicians and party leaders; the prevention of peaceful transitions between governments; and the absence of consensus politics and broad representation of the various Nigerian peoples in the government. By enunciating what should be the norms of a stable and harmonious democratic order, and to widespread acclaim, General Muhammed was also exercising the *de facto* role of the armed forces to be not just an alternate governing party to the civilians but also a supra-constitutional entity. Even as the process was being initiated for the return to party politics, therefore, the military was reinforcing its position as the umpire of Nigerian political life.

The general achievements and shortcomings of the 1975-1979 government can be briefly summarized. Its four-year duration was to give Nigerians a clear basis of comparison with the first term of the Shagari administration. All the clearly political items of the Gowon program were implemented. Certain promises, such as the one to eliminate corruption, were negated by the turn of events, in this case the return of this social blight in full force. Yet, in speaking of corruption in Nigeria—as in any other country—we shall always be dealing with a matter of degree. While new private fortunes were quickly made during the military government, the benefactors were not primarily military officers but rather the host of public and private intermediaries with access to the making and disbursement of government contracts. Here again, the military was able to get the best of all possible worlds. Panels to investigate the assets of public officers during the Gowon era revealed some of the corruption that had transpired. When the purge of civil servants seemed to have served its purpose, a decree was passed protecting officers from mischievous charges, in effect signaling an end to the housecleaning.

Public Complaints Commissions were established in all the states of the federation and in the capital. As will be seen when we look closely at the law-making powers of the Nigerian military, not only was the 1975-79 regime protected from being probed by its ultimate control of the transition process, it was able to leave office as the guarantor of probity in Nigerian governments by writing into the 1979 Constitution the provisions of the Public Complaints Decree which the Constituent Assembly had put aside, as well as by rewriting and tightening the Code of Conduct (Schedule No.5) of the Constitution. Seven more states were created in February 1976 to bring the number to nineteen. The Obasanjo government decided not to conduct a new population census and thus risk being undermined by this most problematic of government duties in Nigeria. The intense demands for political power by sectional groups can be addressed in a variety of ways. The creation of new states, especially when undertaken by an

¹⁵ Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee, op. cit.

authoritarian government, is a surgical way in which to release, or redirect, these pressures. Any governmental action in Nigeria that involves the actual counting of heads—a national census or a list of registered voters—is an invitation to duplicitous behavior or the sharpening of social tensions.

An attempt under Gowon in 1973-74 to conduct the first census since the disputed one of 1963 ended in a complete fiasco. The figures contained so many improbable headcounts for particular areas of the country that the results would never have enjoyed even partial credibility. The reason why a reasonable state creation exercise could be conducted but not a census relates to the military system of governance. In both exercises the Nigerian populace, and especially political leaders, are able to participate and try to influence the outcome of the exercise in their favor. While the Irikefe panel of 1975-76 on state creation could allow all Nigerian groups and individuals to express their views, the decision on which states would be created can be streamlined both in the report of a nonpartisan panel and in the final and absolute decision of the Supreme Military Council. In the case of a census count, however, as could be seen in the highly disputed voter registration and election exercises in 1979 and 1983, the figures that arrive in Lagos from every hamlet—and doctored along the way—have to be either accepted as received by the federal government or risk throwing the census or electoral process into confusion. It is a sad commentary that Nigeria will not have a fair election or an accurate census until the military, or some international organization, devises a way to conduct them that is fully insulated from political influence.¹⁶

The social and economic policies of the 1975-1979 government illustrate the observations already made about the role expansion that took place at the end of the civil war, and as a result of the sharp increase in oil income, especially after the Middle East War of 1973. The Third Development Plan of 1975-1980, inherited by the Muhammed-Obasanjo regime, called for massive government spending on the expectation that large surpluses from petroleum export would continue indefinitely. This regime therefore presided over an increased disbursement of public revenues for a host of “development projects” only to reduce drastically in 1978 the level of imports and internal expenditures when a one billion dollar overseas loan was negotiated.

¹⁶ A fair election based on a satisfactory voter register was accomplished in Nigeria in 2015. This achievement by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), under the guidance of its Chairman, Professor Attahiru Jega, was the consequence of sustained work over several election cycles. <https://africaplus.wordpress.com/2017/05/18/enhancing-electoral-integrity-attahiru-jega-and-nigerias-independent-national-electoral-commission/> A notable advance was made in 1993 but the election results were annulled by the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida.



Brigadier Murtala Muhammed, Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo, President Shehu Shagari¹⁷

Despite its failures in economic management, this military regime will be associated in the minds of many Nigerians with a period of economic reform. The central plank of the military governments of the 1970s in this area was the achievement of greater national control over the economy. Indigenization, not nationalization or socialism, was the catchword. In 1977, the program started under Gowon in 1972 of transferring ownership or control of foreign enterprises into the hands of Nigerian investors, both private entrepreneurs and governments (state and federal), was tightened up and broadened. With the increasing share that the export of petroleum represented in government revenues, the extension of government ownership, regulation and profit sharing in this industry had become a crucial dimension of the policy of economic nationalism. The individual who supervised the Nigerianizing of this key national resource as Minister of Petroleum, and the first director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, was then Brigadier Muhammadu Buhari.

The making and implementing of economic policy during this decade reflects an interplay among three communities: a ruling strategic elite (including military, senior civil service, and academic economists); Nigerian business persons organized in chambers of commerce and other professional organizations; and foreign entrepreneurs and investors.¹⁸ Policy-making in this area reflected considerable continuity because larger popular forces, such as trade unions, peasant groups, and market-women organizations, were excluded. Important decisions were made at the top of a pyramid of corporate entities, economic and bureaucratic. While many initiatives in the realm of economic nationalism were circumvented by indigenous

¹⁷ Murtala Muhammed, Digital Image, February 13, 2015 <lindaikejisblog.com>; Shehu Shagari, Digital Image, <ogbongefriends.com>

¹⁸ Thomas J. Biersteker, "Indigenization in Nigeria: Renationalization or Denationalization?", in I William Zartman, ed., *The Political Economy of Nigeria* (New York: Praeger, 1983), pp. 185-206.

and foreign business communities, the Obasanjo regime did leave its imprint as a government willing to take unpopular action for the economic welfare of the country.

The Land Use Decree of 1978 sought to rationalize the country's haphazard tenurial systems, reduce crippling land speculation and endless litigation over individual and communal property rights, and make possible the acquisition of land for modern agricultural projects. It was one of the amendments that the Obasanjo regime wrote into the 1979 Constitution to prevent its repeal by its civilian successors. Although difficult to implement because of vested interests opposed to it, this law remains fundamental to the modernization of Nigerian agriculture. The second reformist initiative, Operation Feed the Nation, had sought since 1976 to reverse the country's declining agricultural output and labor force. It also represents—even if symbolically since the operation was of questionable success—the commitment of the military leadership to socio-economic action in the “higher national interest” of the nation. The Obasanjo regime emphasized that the modernization of agriculture was an essential dimension of self-reliant development in Nigeria.¹⁹

The nationalist and self-reliant attitudes of Nigerian military governments, which can be traced back to the civil war when Nigeria stood up to international condemnation of its war effort, contrasted with the weak international profile of its civilian predecessor and successor, the Balewa and Shagari governments. Shortly after it came to power in 1975, the Muhammed government made it pointedly obvious that a new era had begun by decisively breaking with the United States over its policy in Angola during the struggle among three political factions to replace the departing Portuguese. Relations between the new government and the Ford administration, and especially with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, were very cool.

Nigeria had usually been counted upon throughout the independence era to play a moderate role in international and even inter-African affairs. The determined support given to the MPLA government by General Muhammed before his assassination was broadened to include support for a transfer of power to the Zimbabwean nationalist forces in Rhodesia. This general policy direction (of making Africa and especially African liberation the central principle in Nigeria's international posture) was reflected in other arenas: the struggles in South Africa and Namibia, meetings of the fledgling Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the negotiations on the civil war in Chad, and various sessions of the OAU. For the first time since independence, Nigeria counted in international and particularly inter-African affairs, and

¹⁹ General Obasanjo, in his public addresses, often stressed the virtues of hard work, self-discipline, humaneness, equity, and sacrifice, which he saw epitomized in the life of farming. He kept to his promise after leaving office in 1979 by launching commercial farming ventures.

this new status was respected and even encouraged throughout their tenures by President Jimmy Carter and Ambassador Andrew Young.

The 1975-1979 military regime not only achieved its primary purpose of restoring the integrity of the armed forces after the slack final years of Gowon's rule, it also re-established the military's capacity to govern. General Obasanjo, a Nigerian leader who was undervalued during his three and a half years in office, will in retrospect appear a more central figure in the fashioning of the military's system of governance.²⁰ If a balance sheet is made of the achievements and shortcomings of the Muhammed-Obasanjo years – economic reforms versus economic mismanagement, probity versus corruption, socially valuable construction versus showpieces – that era might seem undistinguished. However, a different, and more politically relevant, approach can be made. It calls attention to the continuity and refining of governmental institutions, procedures, and styles in a nation that is still politically unsettled after a quarter-century of independence. Some of the advantages that the military has over the civilian system of governance will render any hopes for a straight-line transition from the former to the latter problematic.²¹

A brief word should be said about political style. The images projected by political leaders can sometimes be more consequential than the substance of their policies. Part of the success of Generals Gowon and Obasanjo is that they projected reassuring images to the diverse Nigerian populace. Their ethnic and regional origins were overridden by their national and military identities.²² The general expectation in Nigeria that occupiers of political office will feather their own nests, and those of their kin group, was never a factor in public attitudes towards these two rulers. Moreover, the simplicity of “Jack” Gowon before his final years in office was the dominant characteristic of General Obasanjo throughout his tenure. Indeed, with the introduction of increasingly tighter austerity measures two years before power was handed over to elected civilians, General Obasanjo insisted on a low profile behavior pattern for all government officials. Such a policy was meant to counteract the Nigerian passion for high profile in all matters: dress, entertainment, choice of automobiles, overseas travel, construction projects, and so on. Despite its oil wealth, Nigeria was a poor country and its business persons, in the expression of Obasanjo, were mainly “commissioned agents.” It was a belated message after years of military-led wasteful expenditure. Yet, it was an accurate and sincerely conveyed one:

²⁰ Indeed, Obasanjo has been the most influential Nigerian, whether in or out of office, for four decades.

²¹ It can be argued that such a transition did not occur when a shift from military rule again occurred. In 1999, the hand-over of power from Head of State Abdulsalam Abubakar to Olusegun Obasanjo, elected president, had a number of “hybrid” qualities.

²² Obasanjo took pains to speak in terms of the aspirations of the black race, Africa, Nigeria, and his home village, but not of his home-state (Ogun), his linguistic group (the Yoruba), or his Yoruba subgroup (the Egba).

Nigeria had to begin living within its means and public officials had to take the lead in changing self-destructive behavioral patterns.

The 1983 Coup d'État: Democracy Dismissed

We referred earlier to the fact that each military regime in Nigeria has been able to build on the established principles and practices of its predecessors as well as initiate new departures. The first observation about the Buhari regime is that it was as close a successor to that of Obasanjo as could be expected under the constrained conspiratorial atmosphere in which it was fashioned. In 1983 as in 1975, the overthrow of the government was announced by a strategically placed officer who yielded to a more senior officer as head of the new regime. No attempt has been made to quash the rumor that the 1983 New Year's Eve coup preempted another coup being planned by junior officers. Renewed military intervention was therefore engineered by the country's senior officers, excluding those directly accountable to President Shagari. The retired leaders of the former military administration, Olusegun Obasanjo, Shehu Yar'Adua, Theophilus Danjuma, and Joseph Garba were given advance word of the return to power of the military and initially played advisory roles on behalf of the new regime.²³

It was stated above that the Nigerian military ensured greater continuity in its governing system because of the corporate integrity of the armed forces and its adherence to a rough system of succession to political office. An examination of the composition of the 1984 military government is instructive. Its structure duplicated that of the Muhammed-Obasanjo regime up to mid-1978.²⁴ Forty-three military officers directly exercised political control in association with 13 nonmilitary personnel, two of them police officers. All 19 state governors belonged to the nation's security forces (18 from the military and one police officer). There was a broad distribution of appointments across the ranks from lieutenant colonel to major general (and their Navy and Air Force equivalents), and across the three branches of the armed services. Reflecting the greater size of the army, there was a preponderance of army officers. In the Federal Executive Council, seven of the 18 ministers were military officers, and four of the seven (including General Buhari) were also in the Supreme Military Council. The fifth member of the SMC in the FEC was a civilian, Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Mr. Chike Ofodile.

²³ Their former positions were, respectively, Head of State, Chief of Staff/Supreme Headquarters, Chief of Army staff, and External Affairs Commissioner. Some of this discussion is based on personal interviews with knowledgeable individuals.

²⁴ In July 1978, this regime began the process of demilitarization by reassigning all but one of the state military governors to military posts. They were replaced by military administrators who governed their states in association with civilians appointed as deputy chairmen of the state executive councils.

The Buhari regime adopted the stricter controls exercised by the Obasanjo regime over the military governors following the removal of Gowon.²⁵ It is to the SMC that we must therefore look for indications of the pattern of military succession to political office. What can first be noted is that the SMC under Buhari reflected the movement of officers up a graded ladder. Not present in the SMC, for example, were any of the leading officers of the 1975-1979 regime. General Joseph Garba, a prominent and somewhat flamboyant member of that government, was appointed to the politically peripheral position of Ambassador to the United Nations. Buhari, despite his important position as petroleum minister under Obasanjo, was one of the more technocratic, as opposed to political, members of the former SMC. Moving up along with him to the influential positions of Chief of Army staff and Minister of Defense, respectively, were former SMC members, Major Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Domkat Bali. Completing the cadre of SMC veterans is Air Vice-Marshal Ibrahim Alfa, the Chief of Navy Staff. Finally, included in the SMC for the first time in 1984 were five officers who had previously held subordinate positions: Brigadier Mohammed Magoro, briefly as Minister of Transport, Brigadier Paul Omu as a state governor, and three others as military administrators in 1978-1979: Brigadier 'Tunde Idiagbon, Brigadier Mohammed Nasko, and Captain Ebitu Ukiwe.²⁶

What these appointments suggest is that there is an unwritten understanding of political succession that is invoked whenever the military returns to the political arena. Indeed, this “normalization” of the rules of succession is a powerful incentive to praetorianism. The message that the Buhari regime sent to junior officers in the barracks was clear: Await your turn as we did. Underrepresented in the SMC of 1984-85 were officers who served as former state governors, suggesting that such positions were regarded as also top-of-the-ladder in the praetorian state. This rule does not apply to military administrators of 1978-1979 because they enjoyed only one year of political office, and exercised less power than did the governors. Thus Captain (now Commodore) Ebitu Ukiwe, an appointee to Buhari’s SMC, had been kept on by Obasanjo as a military administrator in July 1978 on the grounds that he had only spent a month as governor of Niger state before the office of governor was terminated. A tradition is being handed on. A capable Nigerian who joins the Armed Forces and plays by the rules has a reasonable chance of enjoying not only the financial security of a military career but also a political tour-of-duty. There is no comparable combination of security and opportunity on the civilian ladders to elite status and political power.

²⁵ Indeed, the newly appointed governor of Cross River State was promptly removed when “improprieties” in his former military posting came to light.

²⁶ Air Vice-Marshal Alfa had served on the SMC as well as being one of the 1978-1979 military administrators. Some of this information is drawn from a report on the Buhari government, “Nigeria after the Coup,” *The Financial Times* (London), January 23, 1984.

A second striking feature about military government in Nigeria, as reflected in the appointments of the Buhari regime, is the military's capacity to take account of "ethnic balancing" without being rigidly bound by it. Care has been taken to have most of the military governors serve in their states or regions of origin although this has not been a rigorous rule in the past. Moreover, the attention paid to achieving ethno-linguistic representation among the governors also compensates for the absence of such a balance among members of the Supreme Military Council. There was a preponderance of northerners within Buhari's SMC, which some observers attributed to an imbalance within the military leadership, participation in the fighting as opposed to more bureaucratic corps, and some mix of personal and political factors.²⁷ The appointment of Brigadier 'Tunde Idiagbon to what is usually regarded as the second slot in the regime, Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters, failed to counterbalance this predominance of northern officers. Idiagbon was only partly of Yoruba parentage and is a member of the family of the Emir (traditional ruler) of Ilorin in Kwara state on the northern margins of Yorubaland.

The Buhari regime has described itself as an "offshoot" of the one that governed Nigeria between 1975 and 1979. In April and May 1984 the country's currency was changed in a decisive manner, demonstrating the surgical reforms the military can execute but which is currently beyond the capacity of party governments. There will be many such governmental capabilities restored with the return to the military system of governance. Yet, December 1983 also represents a qualitative change in the governing of Nigeria. The military has created the dominant system of governance and such a change is most clearly marked in the areas of law and judicial practice. Some of the first politicians convicted since the overthrow of the Second Republic, such as Melford Okilo of Cross River state, were tried not only under decrees issued by the Buhari regime, but also on the basis of amendments that the Obasanjo regime had made to the 1979 Constitution, for example, the ban on public officers holding foreign bank accounts.²⁸

Shortly after coming to power, General Buhari declared to a startled international community that those individuals who mercilessly used their offices to rob the nation would not be allowed to escape by resorting to the "nonsense of litigation." The regime implemented this startling threat by invoking a repertory of exceptional legal procedures to which its predecessors had resorted episodically over a period of thirteen years: the suspension and modification of the Constitution; the declaration that any decree has supremacy over an unsuspended part of the Constitution; the passage of retroactive laws and minimum sentencing requirements (21 years in the case of the Recovery of Public Property Decree No. 3); the denial of rights of appeal and the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Okilo was convicted by a tribunal established under the Exchange Control (Economic Sabotage) Decree No. 7. The use of this decree is reminiscent of the resort to income tax laws to prosecute U.S. mobsters who evaded conviction for the actual crimes they committed. Okilo was sentenced to 21 years imprisonment and Sam Mbakwe, the former Imo state governor, 10 years.

review of sentences being the sole prerogative of the SMC (or governor at the state level); the granting of judicial powers to military officers, one of whom chairs Decree No. 3 tribunals that can choose to sit in camera; and detention without trial on the grounds of endangering Nigerian security (Decree No. 2).

An amendment to Decree No. 3 even allowed an accused person to be convicted of an offense covered by that decree although he or she may not have been specifically charged with it. Nigerians, who had clamored for an end to the ills of the Second Republic, and especially the calling to account of those who corruptly abused their offices, awakened to find a militarized Leviathan whose command of organized violence was bolstered by what it regarded as a popular mandate to serve the nation in an exceptional manner. Even the Nigerian press, which had publicized misrule under previous governments, was muzzled by the Public Officers (Protection Against False Accusation) Decree No. 4. As the Buhari regime no longer saw itself bound by any laws or procedures except those of its own making, more than democracy was placed at risk by the misrule of the politicians of the Second Republic.

Since January 1984, Nigerians have experienced a military regime that guaranteed enhanced public order, limited the level of corruption, and more efficiently conducted certain government functions. They have also been confronted by a full flowering of the military's self-image as a supra-constitutional authority. In an insightful seminar at the University of Ibadan in January 1980, shortly after the Second Republic came into being, General Obasanjo made a vigorous response to a broad critique by Dr. Folarin Shyllon of the demise of the rule of law under Nigerian military governments.²⁹ What is intriguing about Obasanjo's submissions is how he repeatedly portrayed the military as not having really negated the rule of law but having upheld a parallel and equally authoritative legal system when in power.³⁰ The (Suspension and Modification) decrees "only provided the Military with the means with which they could run the affairs of the country in much the same way that the constitution provides the framework of the operation of civilian administration." Good governance under the military, therefore, requires that its "ability, competence and authority...to make law that is valid and binding on all citizens should not be in doubt or questioned once they are effectively in political power."³¹

The Buhari regime did not need to devise new law-making, and excluding, powers; they were already regarded as acquired prerogatives of the Nigerian praetorian state at the very time the 1979 Constitution came into effect with the proviso: "The Federal Republic of Nigeria shall not be governed, nor shall any person or group of persons take control of the Government of

²⁹ Folarin Shyllon and General Olusegun Obasanjo, *The Demise of the Rule of Law in Nigeria under the Military: Two Points of View*, (Ibadan: Institute of African Studies, 1980).

³⁰ For this general tendency among "praetorian armies," see Amos Perlmutter, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

³¹ Shyllon and Obasanjo, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Nigeria or any part thereof, except in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.” The Nigerian Armed Forces considers itself empowered to disregard such explicit provisions of constitutions they helped enact, and even prosecute elected officials for committing offenses that were not statutory crimes at the time of their occurrence.³² Once again, General Obasanjo has shown that such actions on the part of past (or future) military regimes are not just *ad hoc* measures but derive from the military’s sense of its supra-constitutional powers: “In any society the making of retroactive laws must be very rare indeed. But when occasions do call for such laws to save the nation from political or economic destruction, the governing majority must be able to act in defense of the nation.”³³

The Babangida Regime: An Exit from Instability?

The regime of Muhammadu Buhari lasted 20 months, until a bloodless palace coup of August 27, 1985.³⁴ As stated above, Buhari sought to establish a “militarized Leviathan”. His failure reflected the fact that many Nigerians did not agree that four years of civilian maladministration had reduced them to a Hobbesian “state of war”. They were not willing to give absolute obedience to any commands of a new sovereign in order to escape their predicament. Buhari had decided to take on not just the politicians, parties, and institutions of the Second Republic but also the fundamentals of Nigerian civil society, and he lost.³⁵

Almost every major interest group and professional association in Nigeria found itself at some point in conflict with the commands of the Buhari regime. These organizations were confronted with banning orders, the detention of their leaders, or mass firings when they refused to knuckle under. Disaffected groups included the union of airline pilots and flight engineers, the Nigerian Medical Association, the National Association of Nigerian Students, and the Academic Staff Union of the Universities. The regime found itself at loggerheads with the powerful Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) at the outset of its rule. The NBA rejected the panoply of exceptional legislation enacted after December 1983, and particularly the special tribunals created to try former politicians accused of embezzlement and abuse of office (such as Decree No. 3 of 1984 on Recovery of Public Property). In the opinion of the NBA, accused individuals could have been tried under existing laws in the regular courts, and been subject to established procedures of due process. In face of the regime’s determination to use special tribunals, the

³² Such is the case with prosecutions under the Recovery of Public Property Decree No. 3, and its subsequent amendments, which established offenses that apply retroactively to September 30, 1979.

³³ *The Demise of the Rule of Law in Nigeria*, p. 25.

³⁴ For an initial response, see Larry Diamond, “Nigeria Update,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (1985), pp. 326-336.

³⁵ The same could be said of the Sani Abacha regime, over a longer and more devastating period of autocratic rule, 1993 – 1998.

NBA issued an injunction against the participation of any of its member lawyers in these proceedings.

The Buhari regime went in a short space of time from being a regime of “national salvation” to a regime at war with its own people. Regarded as unacceptable assaults on the liberties of Nigerian citizens were Decrees Nos. 2 and 4 of 1984, the former permitting indefinite detention without trials of persons on grounds of state security while the second forbade the “publication of any matter, true or false, capable of embarrassing public officers.” The resort to such decrees to detain journalists, former politicians, and university lecturers eventually undermined public support for the regime. The long sentences of imprisonment handed down by the Decree No. 3 tribunals, even of corrupt former officeholders, became increasingly viewed as examples of the high-handedness of the regime because the procedures were deemed to contravene “natural justice.” By the time Decree No. 20 had been enacted, imposing the death sentence for a range of criminal offenses including drug trafficking, arson, and the illegal sale of petroleum products—all subject to retroactive application— support for the regime had gravely declined.



Major General Muhammadu Buhari, Major General Ibrahim Babangida³⁶

Nigerian military rulers have learned the range of skills needed to govern their country, as stressed above in the review of the Obasanjo government, 1976-79. Major General Ibrahim Babangida, in explaining the removal of his predecessor, stated: “a diverse polity like Nigeria required recognition and appreciation of differences in both cultural and individual perceptions.”³⁷ Policy decisions and government appointments in Nigeria are constantly assessed according to their apparent fairness in reflecting the “federal character” of the nation. No Nigerian government is able to escape criticism for its alleged discrimination against one or another section of the nation. The Buhari regime, however, seemed not to know how, or to care

³⁶ Muhammadu Buhari, Digital Image, <sanishaaban.com>; Ibrahim Babangida, Digital Image, *Nigerian Infopedia*, September, 14, 2017 <Nigerianinfopedia.com>

³⁷ Cited in Yakubu Mohammed’s “Special Report” in *Newswatch* Vol. 3, No. 3, January 1986), p. 50.

how, to avoid the most serious of such charges.³⁸ He led a Supreme Military Council that began with a preponderance of northern officers. The release of detained governors from the northern states of Sokoto and Kaduna, who belonged to the former ruling party—while northern governors from the former opposition parties or southern governors against whom no evidence had been brought were still in detention—was just one of several charges of partiality.³⁹

The government of Ibrahim Babangida has generated the sense of excitement, though cautiously expressed, that recalls the short-lived Murtala Muhammed regime of 1975-1976. So much has been done during its first 250 days in power that these actions can be reviewed in light of the principles and practices of military governance discussed above. Ibrahim Babangida has taken on the title of president of Nigeria, the first Nigerian military rule to do so. Such a “civilian” title has symbolic implications. The nation’s first president was the renowned nationalist and later statesman, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. After much debate, the Constituent Assembly of 1977-1978 decided to create the position of a directly elected executive president of the federation. Major General Babangida, therefore, without giving up any of his military prerogatives, has appropriated the political gains associated with the title of president.

There are other indications that the Babangida government is attempting to further merge the two traditions of governmental legitimacy by using the term “military democracy.” If the Buhari regime had failed because of its unwillingness to function as a Nigerian military-in-government – and instead to treat the Nigerian nation as a disorderly barracks that should be subjected to military discipline – the Babangida project is to bring greater political sensitivity, and even accountability, to military rule in Nigeria. It is a project that seeks to combine the military’s arrogation of the right to cashier civilian politicians for misconduct and an acknowledgement of the refusal of Nigerian civil society to be governed in ways that disregarded the acquired liberties of the people. Such an experiment seems to confirm Henry Bienen’s comment in 1978 that “there will be no military exit from power in Africa, but there will be complicated civilian-military systems of power.”⁴⁰

Immediately after assuming power, President Babangida responded to the criticism of the disregard for due process and natural justice by the release of many political detainees, including

³⁸ And these criticisms have mounted again under the post-2015 Buhari government.

³⁹ Such charges have featured since his return to power in 2015.

⁴⁰ For Dr. Azikiwe’s early proposal for a “combined civil and military diarchy” in Nigeria, see “Stability in Nigeria after Military Rule: An Analysis of Political Theory,” The Samuel Jereton Mariere Inaugural Lecture, University of Lagos, 27 October, 1972. This lecture was subsequently published under the title, *Democracy with Military Vigilance*, (Nsukka, Africa Book Co., 1974). For a recent adaptation of Azikiwe’s schema, see Larry Diamond, “Nigeria in Search of Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 4 (Spring 1984), pp. 906-927.

journalists Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor with a full pardon. Decree No. 4, under which the latter had been held, was abrogated. Despite the frequent declaration of its determination to honor “human rights” in Nigeria, the regime has not divested itself, however, of the capacity to complement the common law system with its own methods of “military justice.” Harmonization of the two will not be easy. A review panel ruled that there was insufficient evidence to justify the continued detention of former President Shehu Shagari and his vice-president, Alex Ekueme. Nevertheless, they were not promptly released.

The Babangida regime brought critics of the former government into the cabinet. Since Buhari had been overthrown in a palace coup, several senior figures such as Major Generals Domkat Bali and Sani Abacha continued in the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC).⁴¹ Here we see another striking feature of governance in Nigeria throughout the post-independence era, namely that the critics and even vanquished of yesterday could be returned to positions of high or even higher authority tomorrow. Professor A. Bolaji Akinyemi, who made clear his differences in important areas of policy with the Buhari regime, was named Foreign Minister by Babangida. Prince Bola Ajibola, who had led the resistance of the Nigerian Bar Association to the extra-judicial practices of the Buhari regime, was appointed Attorney General and Minister of Justice. Professor Olukoye Ransome-Kuti, whose younger brothers had been detained under Buhari, was named to Minister of Health. The list takes on even more significance when added to it are individuals appointed to important committees or panels by the government. Thus, on the Political Bureau established to promote an orderly debate regarding Nigeria’s political future could be found Dr. Haroun Adamu, previously detained under Buhari, and several other persons known for their independent, and even critical, stance vis-à-vis both military and civilian governments in Nigeria.

The press is once again relatively unshackled. On issues of high importance, the Babangida government has set up consultative committees to examine them and make policy recommendations. In addition to the Political Bureau, charged with designing a suitable political philosophy and model for the country, are panels on foreign policy. In response to the uproar that greeted the announcement of the membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), a political solution was sought. The blue-ribbon committee established to review it was suggested as a possible permanent “clearing-house for ideas on how religion can best serve the nation.”⁴² In short, the Babangida government has sought ways of establishing *ad hoc* consultative organs that could eventually give substance to the paradoxical notion of a “military democracy.”

⁴¹ Three civilian ministers were also retained, Kalu I Kalu, Tam David West, and Rilwani Lukman. The new regime generously thanked individuals who had served its predecessor.

⁴² *West Africa*, 10 February 1986, p. 316. It is worth noting that both the critics of the decision to join the OIC, initiated under the Buhari regime, and the Babangida government when calling for its review, acknowledged the authority of the 1979 Constitution regarding the secular nature of the Nigerian polity.

The quashing of an attempted military counter-coup in December 1985, and the execution of ten of the alleged leaders and imprisonment of several others, could give the Babangida regime the security that the failed counter-coup, and subsequent draconian sentences imposed on alleged participants, gave the Obasanjo government after February 1976. President Babangida has made a commitment to return to civilian rule on October 1, 1990, which distinguished his government markedly from its predecessor, which had even banned public discussion of the issue. Such a commitment has proven in the past to confer some legitimacy on military regimes. As did Murtala Muhammed in 1975, President Babangida has expressed a preference for finding a unique political model for Nigeria. It is possible that while such a model is being sought through organized debate, another will be fashioned *de facto* in the institutional experimentation underway.

Odumegwu Ojukwu, the former leader of secessionist Biafra, and briefly an elected senator in 1983, has called on the government to retire all military officers with political experience (and who may conniver to return to power). Instead, stability should be pursued through a process of trial and error among civilian politicians.⁴³ It will be a challenge to cure Nigerian soldiers of their desire to cap their military careers with a stint in government. Moreover, with each coup and countercoup, large numbers of officers are compulsorily retired from the military. Only six of Buhari's governors were retained after August 1985, the majority of new appointees being officers in their mid-thirties. The circulation from military to political outposts is therefore accelerating. Not only does the military ladder to political power and its material benefits persist, it is perhaps the case that public office is being anticipated at an earlier stage in a military career. Excluding the military from a share in the governance of contemporary Nigeria has been shelved for the foreseeable future.

More probable than trial and error among civilian politicians is trial and error among military praetors and their civilian associates.⁴⁴ Although marking a break from its predecessor by having a reduced representation from the emirate or Hausa-Fulani North, the Babangida regime has received indications from influential individuals and organizations in that section of the country that they will not seek to undermine it. The government has made warm gestures to individuals who have long been at odds with military rule such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The appointment of Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe, an Igbo, to the position of Chief of General Staff in the AFRC, albeit a weakened position compared with the former office of Chief of Staff,

⁴³ *West Africa*, 24 February 1986, p. 434.

⁴⁴ That trial and error would continue for more than another dozen years before the military, as an institution, departed from political power.

Supreme Headquarters, is a conciliatory act in a country with unresolved grievances from the civil war (1967-1970).

We conclude by noting the country's precarious economic situation that includes reduced earnings from petroleum export and increasing external indebtedness. The Second Republic came into being in 1979 with a contracted but still healthy treasury, low indebtedness, and a buoyant world market for crude oil.⁴⁵ By 1984-1985, Nigeria was devoting over 40 percent of its earnings from petroleum to finance its external debts. It sought international agreement in 1985-1986 to reduce that proportion to 30 percent. Further sacrifices would be needed to implement a strategy of economic restructuring in a framework of "economic independence." Led by an open, disciplined, and honest government, the Nigerian economy could be significantly improved. In the governance of plural societies, Nigeria has for decades been an arena of sustained debate and active experimentation. It is a country which, economic conditions permitting, could still forge a system that responds to the need for governmental efficiency and authority without sacrificing established laws and liberties. The Nigerian military must now be regarded as a central actor in confronting this challenge.

⁴⁵ See Richard A. Joseph, "The Overthrow of Nigeria's Second Republic," *Current History* (March 1984), pp. 123-124.