

MILITARY RULE IN NIGERIA

The Meaning of Military Rule

Military Rule: This is the government controlled by members of the Armed Forces. This could only be achieved through force known as coup de tat. A coup de tat is a violent change of government by the Armed Forces to remove the existing government. Military rule became prevalent after independence in those countries that experienced it.

MILITARY RULE IN NIGERIA 1966 – 1975

The July 1966 Counter-Coup

There were both civilian and military casualties in the 15 January 1966 coup. However while the prime minister, a northerner, the premiers of both the Northern and Western Regions and some other notable people from these regions were killed, there was no prominent easterner that was killed. There were also many Igbo officers among the coup plotters which gave some other Nigerians the impression that it was intended to usher in Igbo domination of the nation. This impression was helped by General Ironsi's appointment of Igbo officers to head most of the armed forces divisions and positions. He later introduced Decree 34 of 24 May 1966 abrogating federalism and replacing it with a unitary system of government.

Thus came the counter-coup that killed General Ironsi, and Lt Col. Adekunle Fajuyi, his host on the day of the coup, and ushered in Lt Col. (later General) Gowon as head of state.

Structure of Government under Gowon

General Gowon abolished Decree 34 of General Ironsi and returned Nigeria to federalism. He also created twelve states by Decree 27 of May 1967. He retained the titles of head of state, supreme military council (SMC) and federal executive council for the organs of government at the federal level.

The Head of State

He was the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and head of the federal executive council and supreme military council. He appointed the chief justice, other justices of the Supreme Court and other federal judges. The appointment of judges was made on the advice of the Judicial Service Advisory Committee. He also appointed most senior civil servants on the advice of the Public Service Advisory Committee. He in addition appointed Nigerian ambassadors to foreign nations.

Supreme Military Council (SMC)

Members of the SMC included the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces as the chairman. Others included the chief of army staff, chief of air staff, chief of naval staff, the military governors of eleven states and the administrator of the East Central State. The SMC formulated policies, took decisions on major national issues and foreign affairs, and maintained law and order.

Federal Executive Council

The federal executive council comprised the head of state as chairman, the chief of army staff, chief of naval staff, chief of air staff, military governors of eleven states and the administrator of the East Central State. It also included civilian commissioners most of whom were politicians.

State Governments

Each of the states had a military governor and an executive council, responsible to the federal government. The state military governor had legislative and executive powers; so he made edicts and chaired the state executive council, most members of whom he appointed. Other members of the council included the secretary to the state government, civil commissioners, state police commissioner, permanent secretaries and the commanding officer of the army unit in the state.

Achievements of the 1966-1975 Military Regimes

1. Major General Ironsi made some impact during his short rule. He restored normalcy, especially in the West, after the coup. He sought to build a stronger, united nation by instituting the unitary system.
2. Gowon created twelve states which allowed better development in the areas.
3. The civil war could not really be blamed on Gowon. He succeeded in ending the civil war in three years, reconciling with the Igbo and implementing much reconstruction work in the war ravaged east.
4. The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme was established which made young graduates more knowledgeable about their fatherland, and encouraged mobility of labour and unity among Nigerians.
5. There was general development in the educational, health and many other sectors during Gowon's regime.

Failures of Gowon's Regime

1. Gowon's regime failed to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, and so mass poverty continued.
2. The regime failed to carry out a reliable census.
3. In effecting the recommendations of the Udoji Commission on the increase of workers' salaries and allowances, the regime backdated the increases, resulting in very serious inflation and instability in the labour market.
4. Contrary to his programme of handing over governance to the civilians, Gowon did not put in place any political project like the formation/registration of political parties.
5. It appeared that he wanted to perpetuate himself in government, thus unknowingly inviting the 29 July 1975 coup.

Military Rule in Nigeria: 1975 to 1979

On 29 July 1975 Brigadier (later General) Murtala Muhammed in a bloodless coup took over power from General Gowon who was in Kampala for an Organisation of African Unity (OAU) meeting. General Muhammed was himself killed in an abortive coup on 13 February 1976 leaving his deputy, General Obasanjo to continue his programme. This situation gave the regime the tag, Murtala-Obasanjo regime.

Reasons for Murtala's Coup

1. Majority of Nigerians had become disappointed with Gowon's regime after allegations of corruption against some of his key officials at both state and federal levels, officials whom Gowon single-handedly exonerated.
2. After the civil war, Gowon had promised to hand over power to civilians, not later than 1 October 1976. Unfortunately, on 1 October 1974, he announced that the date could no longer be met.
3. The inflation that arose from the payment of Udoji Commission's recommendations and the long-term arrears created instability in the economy, which made Nigerians uncomfortable.
4. In the last years of his government, General Gowon had taken decisions and implemented many programmes without consultation with the people.

Achievements of the Murtala-Obasanjo Administration

1. **National 'purge'.** The administration from its inception stated clearly its mission of ridding the public service of corruption and redundancy.
2. **Creation of states.** The Murtala-Obasanjo administration created additional seven states, bringing the total number of states to nineteen.
3. **Creation of new federal capital territory.** A panel was set up to consider restructuring Nigeria politically and solving the problem of a new, central, acceptable capital for the country. This panel located Abuja which is Nigeria's capital today.
4. **Local government reform.** The administration restructured the local government system and standardised it throughout Nigeria.
5. **Policy of low profile.** Wasteful expenditure was reduced and government personnel were made to use cost-saving measures and embark on only compulsory trips and projects.
6. **Agricultural boost.** The regime initiated the 'Operation Feed the Nation' programme, whereby both state and federal governments established farms and encouraged mechanised farming, making high-yield seeds and fertilizers available to farmers.
7. **Dynamic foreign policy.** The regime pursued a dynamic foreign policy that made Nigeria maintain a leadership position in Africa and a respectable place in the world. The nation spearheaded support for the newly independent Angolan government and liberation movements in Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa.
8. **Demobilization of the army.** The large Nigerian army was reduced by about 50 000 officers and men, making the army more effective and manageable, and saving much cost for other important national needs.
9. **Return to civil rule.** Unlike the Gowon regime, the Murtala-Obasanjo administration was definite and consistent in its programme of handover to a civilian government.
10. It instituted a Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC). The constitution drafted by the CDC was further considered and amended by the Constituent Assembly.
11. A Federal Electoral Commission was set up which registered five parties that contested the 1979 elections, ushering in Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the first (civilian) executive president of Nigeria on 1 October 1979.

Military Rule in Nigeria: 1985 to 1999

The 1985 Military Coup

The bloodless coup that took place on 27 August 1985 brought in Major General (later General) Ibrahim Babangida as head of state (later president) and commander-in-chief of the Nigerian armed forces. Babangida retained most of the personnel of the Buhari regime, in one form or another.

Reasons for the 1985 Coup

General Babangida accused the Buhari regime of failing to revamp the national economy that had declined so much during the civilian rule of 1979-83. Babangida also complained of massive fraud in the issuance of import licences and counter-trade agreement.

Achievements of the Babangida Administration

1. Upon assumption of power, this regime abrogated the unpopular Decree No. 2 and then promised to reorganise the Nigerian Security Organisation. Many detained people regained their liberty.
2. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced to restructure and diversify the economy in order to promote the production of other goods for export, and reduce the dependence on a single product, oil.
3. The notorious import licence system was abolished.
4. There was the attainment of a 'realistic' value for the naira.
5. The civil service was reformed, including the replacement of permanent secretaries with directors-general.
6. There was commercialisation and privatisation of many parastatals in order to enhance their efficiency and productivity.

7. The regime established the Peoples Bank and Community Banks to help the poor in both urban and rural areas. So also were the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure and the National Directorate for Employment set up.
8. The mass transit programme was set up to ease transportation problems of Nigerian citizens in all parts of the federation.
9. The programme "Better Life for Rural Women" was established to improve the lot of women.
10. A new population census was carried out, even if its results were contested as those of all earlier censuses in Nigeria.
11. Two states were created in 1987 and nine states in 1991, bringing the number of states to thirty.
12. The administration set up a political transition programme intended to lead to a return to civil rule. This programme led to the conduct of elections that ushered in civilian governments at the local government and state, levels.

Failures of the Babangida Administration

1. The regime was characterised by a high level of indiscipline and corruption. There was disorderliness and corruption in public conduct and uncleanness in most urban (and rural) streets.
2. During this regime, incidents of hard drug pushing by Nigerians became rampant and there arose drug barons who became emergency millionaires and flaunted their ill-gotten wealth.
3. Most of the bodies established and generously funded by the Babangida regime later became avenues for the self-enrichment of a few. Such organs included DFRRI, MAMSER, People's Bank and the Better Life for Rural Women scheme.
4. There was no accountability in public office while bribery and corruption seemed to have been institutionalised.
5. There was little respect for popular opinion. For instance, none of the many political associations freely formed by Nigerians was registered as a political party. Instead, the government formed two parties, the National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which all interested politicians were required to join.
6. Just as the collation of results of the 12 June 1993 presidential election was about to end, the regime cancelled the election, and cited as reasons issues that had been settled well before the election.

The Abacha Administration

General Sani Abacha came to power on 17 November 1993, having forced Chief Earnest Shonekan to resign as the head of the Interim National Government. General Abacha was the Secretary of Defence in the same administration

Some Achievements of the Abacha administration

1. The administration brought relative peace, law and order.
2. It appointed important figures from all sections of the country as ministers.
3. There was stability in the exchange rate of the naira.
4. It organised a constitutional conference which drew up the draft of a new constitution.
5. The administration introduced relief packages for workers.
6. It encouraged free enterprise and creation of a conducive atmosphere for foreign
7. There was some consultation with people on major national issues.
8. Abacha's regime created six states, namely Ekiti, Ebonyi, Zamfara, Nasarawa, Kebbi and Bayelsa in 1996.
9. It created the Federal Character Commission to address the imbalance in federal
10. The Petroleum Trust Fund was created for road construction, supply of drugs to hospitals and development of infrastructure.
11. The Education Tax Fund was created to utilise the two per cent service charge from quoted companies to support development.
12. It also created the committee on devolution of power, so as to divide Powers between the states, federal and local governments.
13. The National Reconciliation Committee headed by Chief Alex Akinyele was created to attempt to resolve various conflicts in the country.

Failures of Abacha Government

1. Abacha regime became dictatorial, thereby paying very little attention to the
2. The regime introduced ouster clauses to restrain the judiciary from adjudicating on matters in which the government was involved.
3. At some point, the regime had conflicts with the trade unions, students' unions, etc, which led to prolonged strikes and closure of universities.
4. The economy became paralysed with shortages of essential goods and commodities.
5. There were bomb blasts in several parts of the country.
6. Some prominent Nigerians suspected to be anti-Abacha were detained without trial, and some were reportedly assassinated.
7. Members of National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) who were pro "democracy activists fled into exile.
8. The regime appointed military officers without laid down procedures. This created widespread disaffection within the rank and file of the military.
9. Abacha's second in command, Lt General Oladipo Diya was accused of treason and saved from being executed when Abacha died suddenly.
10. Abacha and his associates reportedly looted the national treasury and stashed huge loot abroad.

The Regime of General Abdusalam Abubakar

General Abdusalam Abubakar became the head of state and commander in chief of the armed forces, following the death of General Sani Abacha on 8 June 1998. Prior to this date, he was the chief of defence staff and a member of the provisional ruling council (PRC). General Abubakar terminated the three-year transition programme which General Abacha initiated in 1995 and in its place, initiated a ten-month transition programme that would return the nation to civil rule on 29 May 1999.

Achievements of Abubakars Regime

1. General Abubakar successfully conducted the transition to civil rule, and handed over power to a popularly elected government.
2. He supervised a short and successful transition programme of ten months.
3. The government set up a review panel for the 1995 constitution.
4. The electoral commission (INEC) offered provisional registration to nine political parties, out of which three of them, namely A.D., A.P.P. and P.D.P. were registered.
5. INEC under Justice Ephraim Akpata conducted elections into local governments, states' houses of assembly, national assembly and presidency.
6. The government recovered some money, which some officials of the previous governments had embezzled.

Failures of Abubakar Regime

1. The constitution was hastily produced.
2. The constitution contained so many ambiguities and contradictions.
3. The constitution ignored the fundamental issues of federalism.
4. The government could not alleviate the economic difficulties facing the nation, for example, shortage of fuel and depreciation of the naira.
5. The foreign policy lacked vibrancy and dynamism.
6. The government could not eliminate corruption among officials of the
7. It failed to take crucial decisions on many matters. For example, it failed to release Chief Moshood Abiola from detention, from where he eventually died.
8. The administration was considered very weak.

ASSIGNMENT

What events led to the July 1966 counter coup?