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POLITICAL STABILITY IN NIGERIA

The new government in Nigeria, under the leadership of General Ironsi, has turned in an impressive performance during its first six weeks in power. The military government has been able to consolidate its power and to absorb the considerable tensions which exist within the army. The younger officers who planned and executed the coup have been subdued or isolated and General Ironsi's regime has been given the stamp of legitimacy as the legal successor of the old Federal Government.

Immediately following the coup there were some fears the Federation would disintegrate or, at the very least, that the Northern Region would feel compelled to wage a jihad against the South to avenge the death of Sir Ahmadu Bello. Surprisingly, Northern resistance to the new government has not developed and the diversity of that Region is once again emphasized. It has also become evident that a number of leaders in the North were relieved, if not overjoyed, with the Sardauna's removal from the scene. General Ironsi wisely appointed Lt. Col. Hassan, the Emir of Kano's son, as Military Governor of the Northern Region.

It is clear that the new government is trying to dampen the charges of an "Ibo coup" through the appointments it makes and the policies it follows. Ironically, a number of Yorubas feel that the very fact this was a coup engineered and executed largely by the Ibos, and the fact that Premier Okpara (Eastern Region) and other leading Ibos were spared, has caused the new government to lean over backwards in placating the Yorubas. (For example, Dr. Biobaku, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos, does not expect the Lagos University controversy to be reopened for the reason just given even

though a number of Ibos would like to see Dr. Njoku restored to the Vice-Chancellorship.)

Throughout its first six weeks in power, the new government has been able to maintain an impressive momentum. Drawing heavily on the advice of the permanent secretaries and other senior civil servants, General Ironsi has been able to keep the machinery of government operating and there has been a fairly substantial improvement in the efficiency of some of the ministries. In all regions and at the federal level there has been a reduction and consolidation of ministries and agencies. Of special interest to The Rockefeller Foundation is the addition of Agriculture to the Ministry of Internal Resources and Research at the federal level. This is the first time Agriculture has been listed as a federal responsibility.

It is clear that popular support for the coup and the new government is related to the revulsion of the populace against the widespread and evident corruption under the old regime. In making a clean sweep of the politicians and of political appointees in the corporations, a major start has been made in dismantling the patronage system which was part and parcel of the political arrangement under the federal scheme. Even though the new regime has promised a widespread investigation into corruption, it has not yet, at least publicly, initiated this inquiry.

Perhaps the major problem confronting the new regime is the determination and the initiation of the degree of centralization which seems desirable in the "new Nigeria." There is widespread support for a unitary system of government with the provinces (there are some 30 of them) being given a degree of autonomy in some matters of primarily local concern. To shift Nigeria from a federation with highly independent regions to a unitary

system will require a good deal of skill and decisive action. There is some danger that Ironsi's government will move too slowly and that regionalism will again reassert itself.

The new government seems to be determined to make the most of its opportunity to provide Nigeria with better leadership and to move the economy ahead. Certainly there is a high degree of optimism at the U. S. Embassy in Lagos and the business community has responded positively to the new political climate. While it is risky to draw conclusions about the future stability of Nigeria, the signs are promising and one can reasonably expect continuing improvement in both planning and policy execution. The tests Nigeria has passed the last two years would make me hopeful that Nigeria will not only continue as one political unit but that there will be wiser use of both material and human resources.

J. E. Black.