

## ABACHA, Sani

(Nigeria, 1943–1998)

General Sani Abacha, who engineered coups that first brought Muhammadu BUHARI to power and then removed him, finally took control of the Nigerian government for himself and ruled as a corrupt kleptocrat.

Abacha was born in Kano in northern Nigeria, an area which became his power base. In the early 1960s he attended the Nigerian Military College, and at three different times in his career he was trained at advanced programs in Great Britain. Abacha fought for the federal forces in the 1967–1970 Biafran civil war, rising to colonel. This was followed in rapid succession by training at the Command Staff College and the Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies. In 1982, already a brigadier, Abacha was sent for defense training with the United States Army at Monterrey, California.

On his return, Abacha joined a cabal of senior officers who overthrew Shehu SHAGARI in 1983. He was chosen to announce the coup on Nigerian radio and television, after which he was promoted to major general and appointed to the Supreme Military Council. In 1985, Abacha, by then the most powerful military figure in the country, removed Buhari in favor of General Ibrahim BABANGIDA. Abacha was then named Chief of Staff of the army (1985), and five years later became minister of defense, followed by promotion to full general. When Moshood ABIOLA won the 1993 elections, Babangida nullified the results. A transition government was chosen to prepare for new polls, but Abacha sensed his opportunity and seized power.

Abacha moved immediately to suppress all opposition and democratic movements. Political parties were disbanded and elected officers were replaced by army officers loyal to him. Other military officers were purged from the services. Potential competitors for power were imprisoned, including Abiola, Olusegun OBASANJO and Shehu YAR'ADUA. The regime earned international

opprobrium for the arrest and execution of Ken SARO-WIWA, the Ogoni activist and writer. The charges against Saro-Wiwa were widely seen as falsified, and his conviction predetermined. After Abacha's fall, his son Mohammed was imprisoned for complicity in the murder of Abiola's wife. Of all these prominent leaders, only Obasanjo survived.

In 1998, Abacha announced a return to military rule, with five newly sanctioned parties—all of which declared him their candidate. This electoral farce was made moot when Abacha died suddenly under mysterious circumstances. Officially, he died of heart failure, but there is evidence that, lured to his palace by prostitutes, he was murdered by military officers.

In five years, Abacha and his family looted the Nigerian oil revenues to a degree almost unprecedented. The later Nigerian government traced some \$4 billion hidden overseas in the names of various family members. After Abacha's death, the government reached an agreement with the family for the latter to return \$2.1 billion. The Abachas retained approximately \$400 million. This deal caused an uproar, with Babangida accused of collaborating in the reward of criminal theft. Even under these most favorable circumstances, however, Abacha's eldest son has always disputed the settlement and claimed that all the money in foreign investments and accounts was legally and properly owned by the family. Their position was bolstered by a statement of Swiss banking authorities that \$100 million did "not derive from criminal sources." In exchange for the money settlement, charges against Mohammed Abacha were dropped. Since Great Britain refused to freeze the Abacha accounts in British banks, the deal was perhaps the best that Babangida could hope for, sordid though it appeared to many.

*Reference:* *adb*, CB, EB, *wiki*.

## ABBOD, Ibrahim

(Sudan, 1901–1983)

General Ibrahim Abboud was president of the first military government in the Sudan. He began his army career under the Anglo-Egyptian condominium that governed the Sudan until 1956. Commissioned as an engineering officer at age 17, he was educated at Khartoum Military College in the Sudan and then sent to the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst, England. In World War II he served as an officer in the Sudan Defense Force (SDF), assisting in the liberation of Eritrea and Ethiopia from the Italians and leading troops into action against Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps in the Libyan campaign. He rose to the rank of SDF deputy commander, in which capacity he served from 1945 to 1956, when the Sudan became independent. Abboud was then named commander and chief of staff, titles he retained until he was toppled from the presidency in 1964.

Abboud masterminded a coup in late 1958, after three civilian governments had brought the Sudan to economic paralysis. His first pronouncements ended all democratic institutions, suspended the constitution, and banned the press, political parties and public assemblies. Parliament was dissolved and replaced by a Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, acting under martial law.

Abboud's economic policies brought temporary economic relief. He sold off a huge cotton surplus to bring in required foreign exchange and negotiated a water treaty with Egypt that met much of the Sudan's needs. As a result, Abboud was able to double the amount of irrigated land and attract foreign investment.

Abboud never grasped the extent of the ethnic gulf between the Islamic north and the animist and Christian south. Economic improvements benefited only the former, and unrest continued to mount in the south until guerrilla warfare broke out. When Abboud suppressed debates at the University of Khartoum on the state of the country, student demonstrations resulted. Government workers and members of the transport unions soon joined the students, and the government was unable to control the situation. Abboud went into exile in England but returned as an elderly man to the Sudan, where he died.

Abboud was a personally austere man, ever the Anglo-Sudanese officer. As president, he lived in a

modest brick home with his family and tended his garden. His loyal service to Britain—and his friendliness during his time as head of state—were recognized by several royal honors.

*Reference:* AO.

## ABDALLAH Abderrahman, Ahmed

(Comoros, 1919–1989)

Ahmed Abdallah Abderrahman, the first president of Comoros, maintained a tenuous hold on Comoran politics after independence.

The four islands of the Comoros chain have extremely limited arable land, forcing most sons of peasant families into the class of "the dispossessed." Until 1946, the Comoros Islands were tied to Madagascar, and the young Abdallah went there seeking further economic opportunities. He began working as a trader and returned home to develop a highly successful commodities export business in vanilla and ylang-ylang, a tree extract used for perfume. At the same time, Abdallah never forgot his roots as a member of the landless peasantry. He became a spokesman for the dispossessed on Anjouan, his home island. He was, however, never accepted by the Comoran elite, despite his personal wealth.

Abdallah was elected to the colonial general council for two years after World War II, and when the colonies obtained representation in the French parliament, he was elected to the French Senate, where he served from 1959 to 1972. Abdallah was an ardent nationalist and was well positioned to become the first president of Comoros. In 1972 he became prime minister when his party won elections on three islands, with only Mayotte supporting continued ties to France. In July 1975 independence was declared and Abdallah assumed power. Mayotte has continued to be controlled by France.

Within a month, Abdallah was ousted in a coup led by Ali SOILIH, who used forces commanded by the French mercenary Bob DENARD. Abdallah was exiled to France, but three years later he returned after Denard was hired to lead a second coup to overthrow Soilih. France provided economic assistance, but to gain credibility among nationalists, Abdallah proclaimed Comoros an Islamic republic, drafted a constitution, and held elections. Denard,