On the basis of what we have learned in the eight weeks since the New Year's Eve military coup in Nigeria, the following nine-point appraisal of the character and policy guidelines of the new regime can be made:

1. Ideology
Like the popularly elected civilian regime of President Shehu Shagari that preceded it in power, Nigeria's new military government is essentially non-ideological. Within a fortnight after the December 31 coup, the ruling Supreme Military Council had dispatched emissaries to selected Western, Middle Eastern, and African capitals to make it clear that no drastic foreign or domestic policy shifts were on its agenda. The economic orientation will remain toward the West, for the very pragmatic reason that the Soviet Union is out of tune with the Nigerian entrepreneurial psyche and is neither able nor inclined to supply the kind of economic and financial support Nigeria requires in the short and medium term.

2. The Countdown
In 1979, the year he took office as Nigeria's first popularly elected civilian president since the military first seized power in 1966, Shagari reminded wrangling civilian politicians that there are, in fact, only two parties in Nigeria that really count—the civilians and the military. Recalling this comment, The Times (London) observed on January 20 that the New Year's Eve coup “could be seen as simply a transfer of power in accordance with overwhelming popular desire: the opposition has taken over again.”

Since coming to independence in 1960 under an elected civilian government headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria has had five military and two civilian heads of state. The first military coup occurred in January 1966 (when Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi became head of state, to be succeeded on his assassination a few months later by Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon). In July 1975, the drifting Gowon regime was ousted in a bloodless coup that placed power in the hands of a Supreme Military Council headed by Brigadier (later General) Murtala Ramat Muhammad, which within six months had committed itself to drawing up a new constitution that would return the country to civilian rule by 1979. Although General Muhammad was assassinated before an abortive counter-coup in February 1976 could be put down, his successor, Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo, carried forward the preparations for transition to elected civilian rule in 1979.

The Shagari regime took office just before the global recession of the early 1980s brought oil revenues plummeting downward, and the American-style constitution under which it operated complicated the task of making the hard-nosed decisions that circumstances dictated on ongoing capital-intensive development projects, imports, corruption, and other controversial issues. By May 1983, when the first quadrennial federal and state elections specified in the new constitution were only months away, there were indications that various elements of the military were growing impatient with the economic and political malaise into which the country had fallen since power had been transferred. If violence during the elections were to reach proportions that the understaffed police could not contain, it was predicted, the military would step in to “restore order” and then assume power “for the sake of law and order.”

When the elections took place relatively peacefully (see "Nigerian Democracy on Trial," by John de St. Jorre, CSIS Africa Notes No. 19, September 30, 1983), talk of a coup subsided and relief was expressed that Nigeria had made it through a crucial rite of passage. By the time of Shagari's second inauguration in October 1983, the word in Lagos was that a coup would now occur only if there were a disastrous turn for the worse in the economy, and that Shagari could and would prevent this by a new and more effective...
crackdown on corruption and inefficiency. Observers were less sanguine by early December, by which time the pattern of Shagari's second-term appointments did not suggest that as much was being done against "dash-as-usual" as had been promised. Even then, however, the betting was that the military would give the civilians at least three and perhaps six months or more to get through pending negotiations with the IMF and act on the Fund's almost certain demands for the new and politically risky austerity measures that are clearly required to restore Nigeria's economic health and credit rating.

It is not entirely clear why the military moved as early as it did. In an interview with *The New York Times* published on January 18, Major-General Mohammed Buhari, who emerged as chairman of the new Supreme Military Council and head of state, denied reports that the so-called "generals' coup" had been timed to preempt a takeover attempt by younger, more radical officers. Some sources believe that the preemptive coup rationalization, heard frequently in the first days of January, was shelved out of concern that it might become a self-fulfilling prophecy if aired to excess. Other Nigerians and Nigeria-watchers have argued that the months-long process of coup planning developed a certain momentum of its own, and was carried to its end for lack of a strongly convincing reason not to move forward. The manner in which the takeover was carried out lends credibility to the argument that it was planned down to the last detail over many months. A more cynical view is that the main motivation was a simple desire by the new leaders for power and its perquisites. Perhaps all three factors contributed to the decision to act before 1984 dawned.

3. Economic Priorities

The primary cause of the current economic crisis is that Nigeria became a classic example of a Third World phenomenon that has come to be known as "the oil syndrome." As Helen Kitchen writes in *U.S. Interests in Africa* (Praeger, 1983, p. 43): "In pre-oil days, [Nigeria's] real gross domestic product (GDP) was growing at an annual rate of 4.5 percent, agriculture was the leading economic sector, and Nigeria was one of the world's largest exporters of peanuts, palm oil, and cocoa. The manufacturing sector had grown from 1 percent of GDP in 1950 to 5 percent in 1964. Following the 1967-69 civil war, which significantly dislocated both the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, oil income rose dramatically—from $189 million in 1964 to almost $24 billion in 1981. This rapid influx of foreign exchange and the massive increase in funds available to the government for public spending set in motion a self-perpetuating cycle of hyperinflation. Maintenance of an unrealistically high exchange rate for the naira allowed imports to flood the market at prices lower than domestic producers could meet and remain solvent. Meanwhile, thousands of Nigerians were abandoning the farming areas every year to seek the higher paying jobs that were available in the cities. By 1980, oil earnings accounted for over 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange, and agriculture had shrunk from 58 percent of total GDP in 1964 to 20 percent. From a position of food self-sufficiency, this largely rural nation had slipped into a significant dependency on food imports (over $2.2 billion annually as of the early 1980s)."

There appears to be a clear recognition within the new Supreme Military Council that maintenance of its credibility within Nigeria, as well as the country's future economic health, are crucially dependent on the regime's ability to get the economy back on a growth track. In the short run, the challenge is to obtain financial relief in the form of new grants, loans, and credits, while convincing creditors of the regime's commitment to honor the massive foreign debt that has accumulated (now estimated to be in the neighborhood of $16 billion).

The policy guidelines that are emerging in Lagos do not appear to be significantly different from Shagari's. Austerity measures introduced in early 1982 had cut back imports from $1.5 billion per month in 1981 to $800 million by the end of 1983, although the 1983 trade deficit is still reported to be around $1 billion. Negotiations with the IMF, initiated under Shagari, resumed in mid-February. Gradual devaluation of the naira is likely in the year ahead, along with new cutbacks on capital spending and imports. Increased oil earnings are viewed as crucial (see section on OPEC below) in the short term, and revival of indigenous agriculture carries over as a longer-term priority.

The major differentiation being emphasized between the new government and the Shagari regime in the economic area is the crackdown on corruption and "inefficiency."

4. The OPEC Link

At the time of the coup, Nigeria's oil production quota under a March 1983 OPEC production-limitation agreement was 1.3 million barrels per day, a figure far below the peak production rate of 2.3 million barrels per day reached in 1979. In mid-January, Festus Marinho, managing director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), was dispatched on a mission to OPEC capitals to press the case for a rise in the quota.

In an interview with the *Financial Times* (London) published on January 14, Buhari hinted that Nigeria might leave OPEC. "It is more advantageous to remain in than get out," he said, but if the quota raise request were turned down "we will first see how we can manage the resources we have, before we decide on breaking the club we feel so committed to." In a February 9 statement, however, Buhari ruled out withdrawal from OPEC or a price war, while reiterating his call for a quota hike: "We can increase our productivity by 1 million barrels a day, but I don't think OPEC will give us that... But if OPEC gives us half a million, that will help us a great deal."

OPEC's press agency reported on February 10 that Saudi Arabia's petroleum minister, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, on an official visit to Lagos, had stated he would undertake to canvass support for an increase in the Nigerian quota. Although noting that production quotas are "a sensitive and purely internal issue of
OPEC and should be discussed “behind closed doors,” Yamani said he personally believed “Nigeria should have special treatment for obvious reasons.” The current overall production ceiling for all 13 OPEC member states is officially 17.5 million barrels per day. OPEC analysts have noted that a decision to raise Nigeria’s quota substantially could unleash similar requests by Indonesia, Venezuela, and other OPEC members under stress, posing grave problems for the organization’s cohesion.

5. Prospects for Future Democratic Rule
Although General Obasanjo, Nigeria’s head of state under the military government that returned the country to civilian rule in 1979, was apparently not actively involved in the coup, he has taken on a role that has been characterized as “elder statesman” of the new regime. His comment in the wake of the coup seems to reflect the present attitude of the SMC toward constitutional democracy:

...you can imagine that if you have given time and effort to something and that thing had to be shattered, you feel a sense of loss. I have come to the conclusion, painfully though, that democracy as it is understood by the West is not what we can toy with now; it is something we cannot afford.

In contrast to the Muhammad and Obasanjo regimes in the 1970s, the new rulers have not emphasized the interim nature of military government. In his previously cited interview with The New York Times, Buhari said that the question of returning Nigeria to democratic rule would be dealt with after the country’s economy was well on the way to recovery and that it was too early to speak of a timetable. Stating that he would be
prepared to relinquish power "at a time and a point when the Supreme Military Council decides to ask Nigerians about whatever system they want," Buhari went on: "At some point, the Supreme Military Council will decide which kind of system they will recommend to Nigerians or the Nigerians will be asked which kind of system they want. But it might not be the presidential system or the Westminster system of democracy. I don't know what it's going to be but ultimately it's going to be up to Nigerians to decide whatever it is."

In an interview with The Sunday Concord (Ikeja) published on February 12, Buhari added a new dimension to the discussion of prospects for a return to civilian rule. Recalling that the deposed Shagari government had left the country in "bad shape," he said that his government "is not thinking of returning power again to the civilians now." Aside from other considerations, he pointed out that Nigeria cannot afford to hold elections: "I'm afraid to say that we cannot afford any expenditure now to bring back the Federal Electoral Commission, start buying boxes, ballot papers, getting elections and sending the police to supervise them."

6. Foreign Policy Priorities

Continuity was the underlying theme of the foreign policy passage in Buhari's initial address to the nation on January 1: "The FMG will maintain and strengthen existing diplomatic relations with other states and with international organizations and institutions such as the OAU [Organization of African Unity], the United Nations and its organs, the OPEC, ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States], and the Commonwealth organization, etc. The FMG will honor and respect all treaty obligations entered into by the previous governments. And we hope that such nations and bodies will reciprocate this gesture by respecting our country's territorial integrity and sovereignty."

Official statements and actions in the ensuing weeks suggest, however, some unresolved ambivalence on the extent to which the new military government can or should seek to regain the high-profile role in intra-African affairs that Nigeria played in the Muhammad-Obasanjo period. In a January 5 press conference, Buhari implicitly endorsed the Shagari regime's controversial 1983 expulsion of some 2 million laborers to their neighboring countries-of-origin in an effort to provide improved ethnic balance. The body's membership is predominantly northern, but the SMC also has some Yoruba from the west, and a few Ibo easterners were added at the last minute to provide improved ethnic balance.

Brigadier Sanni Abacha, who was the initial spokesman for the FMG, is a member of the SMC, but has returned to his regiment in the north. The head of state and SMC chairman, 41-year-old Major-General Joseph Garba, who served as external affairs commissioner under the last military regime, as Nigeria's representative to the United Nations. Whereas Dr. Gambari is generally viewed as a cautious and pragmatic academic, Garba's record from 1975 to 1978 suggests that he will seek for Nigeria a role in African and UN councils commensurate with its status as a regional heavyweight. Garba, who was an active and influential figure in the protracted negotiations that led to Zimbabwe's independence, said before his departure from Lagos for New York that Namibian independence would be his first priority. His first tactical objective has been to thwart a move by Guinea (whose President Ahmed Sekou Touré is slated to become 1984-85 chairman of the OAU) to take over the chairmanship held by successive Nigerians since 1978 of the UN Special Committee against Apartheid.

Some observers view the Gambari-Garba team as part of a calculated two-pronged policy—with Gambari focusing on "softer" foreign relations issues and Garba using his "old boy" SMC links and his high-level OAU connections from the 1970s to reestablish Nigeria's visibility and clout on harder issues in the African arena. These could include, besides Namibia and South Africa, a stronger commitment to the Western Sahara.

7. Structure of the New Government

The new Federal Military Government suspended much of the 1979 constitution, banned all political parties, and shut down the legislature, but left the court system intact. The Supreme Military Council, consisting of 16 military officers and 4 civilians, now rules by decree. The body's membership is predominantly northern, but the SMC also has some Yoruba from the west, and a few Ibo easterners were added at the last minute to provide improved ethnic balance.

Brigadier Sanni Abacha, who was the initial spokesman for the FMG, is a member of the SMC, but has returned to his regiment in the north. The head of state and SMC chairman, 41-year-old Major-General Buhari, did not lead the coup. The possibility remains that his position may be an interim one. In his New York Times interview, Buhari stressed that Nigeria now has "a collective leadership," and correspondent Clifford D. May noted that "Many of his statements seemed to suggest that he was more the spokesman for the new military regime than its unquestioned leader." Buhari served as the commissioner for petroleum resources in the previous military government and was a military state governor in the mid-1970s; in the course of these jobs he gained a reputation for competence, probity, and realism. He says he "had no idea" that he would be chosen to head the new government until the day of the coup: "I was just called by the armed forces to be the head of state."

Some observers have pointed to Brigadier Babatunde Idiagbon, supreme headquarters chief of staff, as first on the list if a requirement arose to name a successor to Buhari. The third key player on the SMC at this time is Major-General Ibrahim Babangida, army chief
of staff. Buhari and Babangida are both Moslem northerners, while Idiagbon is a Yoruba Moslem from Oyo who was raised in the northern state of Kwara.

The Federal Executive Council (cabinet) appointed on January 18 consists of 7 military members and 11 civilians; four of its members are on the SMC. The cabinet is remarkably balanced in geographical terms; each minister is from a different state, so that 18 of the 19 states are represented. Only 4 of the 11 civilians have not held government positions prior to their new appointments and some, according to informed sources, are still wondering how they were chosen. All are expected to have a significant degree of autonomy in conducting their respective ministries, although it is clear that the SMC is the highest authority in the country and thus the type of influence held by their civilian predecessors will definitely not be in reach.

The FMG's 19 state governors seem to have been selected largely on the basis of regional and service branch considerations; all but one are military officers. It is expected that they will have less autonomy with respect to Lagos than did their civilian-era predecessors; already, a number of state parasatal organizations are being closed. In response to complaints by women's organizations about the absence of females in the cabinet, Buhari has directed the governors to ensure that women are represented on state executive councils.

According to Buhari, there is no plan to militarize the bureaucracy. In the New York Times interview, he is quoted as having said: "We are not going to abandon our posts and take political office, all of us." Many key government jobs would be filled by civilians, and "only a small number" of military officers "will be involved in political appointments."

8. Nigerian Public Opinion
Most Nigerians took the return of military rule in stride. As the economic situation worsened in 1983 and a period of increasing austerity loomed, nostalgia for Most Nigerians took the return of military rule in the relatively ordered and prosperous Obasanjo years will be judged on the extent to which it lives up to its promise. Although economic realities that any Nigerian government faces in the 1980s. Having come to power on a platform of restoring efficiency and curbing corruption, the military will be judged on the extent to which it lives up to its reformist rhetoric. Nigerians have no reason to look at the return of military rule in the 1980s. Having come to power on a platform of restoring efficiency and curbing corruption, the military will be judged on the extent to which it lives up to its reformist rhetoric. Nigerians have no reason to look to the return of military rule in the 1980s. Having come to power on a platform of restoring efficiency and curbing corruption, the military will be judged on the extent to which it lives up to its reformist rhetoric. Nigerians have no reason to look for any incarnation of the army itself as the one possible source of serious opposition in the near term. Some junior officers are said to have aired their objections to the continuity in domestic and foreign policy from the Shagari regime, to the retention of some senior civil servants in the positions they held under the civilian administration, and to the presence on the Supreme Military Council of certain senior officers suspected of having used their positions under previous military regimes to gain illicit wealth. While these signals of dissatisfaction do not constitute a present danger, they bring to mind the unconfirmed rumors (see 2 above) that the senior officers' timetable may have been moved forward to forestall a coup attempt by more radical junior officers.

The most difficult challenge facing the new government in the months ahead will be to balance the yearnings and diverse demands of an estimated 80 million Nigerians against the pressures for more and more austerity that will come from another audience of key importance to the regime's and the country's future—foreign bankers and the IMF.

9. African Responses
African responses to recent developments in Nigeria have been mixed. In Senegal, the government-aligned daily Le Soleil described the takeover as a "breach of the democratic experiment undertaken by President Shagari...Where democracy is wounded, it is liberty that bleeds." In Nairobi, the Daily Nation condemned the coup as "untimely and thoughtless," and observed that "Ignoring [last year's elections] this way is tantamount to making a bad favor not only to millions of Nigerian electors, but yet again to all those who, in other countries, are for the expression of the people's will." President Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone sent a message to Buhari entreating him to "look with the spirit of forgiveness and understanding" on Shagari and to spare him from "physical harm." The New Citizen (Freetown) observed that "what hurts most is that a nation that has taken the lead to evolve a system that would give credit to Africa does not deserve a leadership that does not have the mandate to rule." In Dar es Salaam, where there may still be resentment over Nigeria's criticism of the Tanzanian role in the 1979 overthrow of Uganda's Idi Amin, the newspaper of the country's ruling party said that the coup "threatened democracy" in Africa; but the government, declining to comment, dissociated itself from this position.

Other voices were warmer. Zimbabwe's Prime Minister Robert Mugabe expressed surprise at the coup, but did not condemn it. "Though Zimbabwe is not in favor of coups," he said, "we would respect the right of Nigerians to change their government." Ethiopia's head of state, Mengistu Haile Mariam, who is 1983-84 chairman of the Organization of African Unity, announced that "inasmuch as the government in power [in Nigeria] is seeking to eradicate the deeply rooted system of injustice and exploitation, the Ethiopian people and government would accept it..."

The most positive endorsements came from several neighboring West African states whose ruling military juntas viewed the Nigerian shift as a vindication of their own form of rule. The message of congratulations sent by Liberia's leader, Samuel Doe, addressed Buhari as "my dear colleague and brother." In Ghana, Accra radio praised the coup for "having blown sky-high... the false myth of Nigerian
democracy,” citing Buhari to the effect that rigging of the 1983 elections “on a massive scale” had rendered the previous government “anything but democratic.” The People’s Evening News (Accra) viewed the Nigerian and Upper Voltan coups of 1983 as not only imitations of the December 31, 1982 military coup in Ghana, but also the beginning of a political reawakening in Africa.

The first head of state to visit Nigeria following the change of government was Sudan’s President Jafar al-Numeri, who also came to power by the military route in 1969. Although Numeri reaffirmed Sudan’s solidarity with Nigeria’s military government in the course of his two-day visit (January 19-20), West Africa (February 6) notes that no communique was issued at the end of the visit. Columnist Clem Baiye suggests that the two heads of state could not agree on what to do about Chad or Libya. Guinea’s President Ahmed Sekou Touré was expected to begin an official visit in Lagos on January 22, but this was postponed until January 28 for unexplained reasons.

A January 16 West Africa editorial describes the possible long-term significance of the coup for Nigeria’s neighbors in these words:

It cannot go unnoticed that the political map of Africa is now once again dominated by the military and the hopes that were raised in the latter part of [the 1970s] that the era of coups was ending have now been dashed to the ground. In ECOWAS alone, out of 16 countries, 10 now have rule by the military to a greater or lesser extent, where at the end of 1979 there were only five states in the sub-region with the soldiers in power.