

**IMPACT OF NIGERIA CIVIL WAR ON THE COUNTRY'S FOREIGN POLICY,
1967-1975**

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by SHEDRACK EFEMENA KEMU with matriculation number ART1701749 in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Art, University of Benin, under supervision

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God Almighty for His love and protection throughout my study in University of Benin

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My profound gratitude goes to God Almighty whose grace and mercy has kept me thus far.

My special gratitude goes to my project supervisor Mr. Emmanuel Toby for his fatherly advice that he showed me during the course of this project your connection and guidance has made me a better student. Thanks to all the good men and women of History and International Studies Department who have imparted me with knowledge, your names are engraved in my heart and God Almighty will reward you all beyond measure.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Certification	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction	1
Aim and Objectives of the Study	3
Scope of the Study	3
Methodology	4
Literature Review	4
Structure of Chapters	6
Endnotes	7

CHAPTER TWO: NIGERIA HISTORY PRIOR TO 1960

Introduction	9
British Colonial Rule	10
Nationalist Movement	12
Independence Achieved	15
Endnotes	19

CHAPTER THREE: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Introduction	22
Pre-Civil War Years 1960-1966	23
Nigerian Foreign Policy at the Eve of the Civil War	26
The Involvement of the Organization of African Unity	28
Endnotes	35

CHAPTER FOUR: NIGERIA AND THE SUPERPOWERS: IT'S IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY'S FOREIGN POLICY

Introduction	39
The Soviet Union and the Nigerian Civil War	41
The United States and the Nigerian Civil War	46

Britain and the Nigerian Civil War	49
France and the Nigerian Civil War	53
Nigeria at the End of the War and Her Foreign Policy towards Her Neighbours	56
Endnotes	61

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Conclusion	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Whenever political differences within a society or a state takes on a territorial and organizational character, that is, inspire the consolidation of territories with organizational structures, with the addition of a triggering condition, conflict is inevitable.¹ What the history of conflict, whether civil or international, will show is that there was a stage in which differences took on a territorial character, which is, it became possible to recognize the territories of the contending and already mobilized groups.

The history of Nigeria since 1914 is deeply rooted in major political issues which are violently contested along the lines of ethnic, religious, and regional boundaries in the country.² It can be noted that Nigeria inherited a constitution, from the British which gave absolute majority to one region, thereby promoting regional politics and political division in the country.³ For Nigeria, the civil war that raged between mid 1967 and early 1970, has been described as inevitable.⁴

James Robertson, the last British governor-general of Nigeria, in his Memoirs recall a note he wrote in 1956, in which he described the several differences among the peoples of Nigeria, particularly between the peoples of the North and South. “When the British has left he had wondered, “what will keep these diverse peoples together within the artificial boundaries drawn on the map in the 1880s and 1890s”.⁵

The events that led to the Nigerian civil war cannot be separated from ethnic and religious distrust between the three major groups being the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa/Fulani. There were events that occurred prior to the civil war ranging from the Kano riot of 1953, the Census crisis of 1962, the Federal election crisis of 1964 and the coups of 1966.⁶

During the Nigerian civil war, Nigeria had thought that by turning to her traditional friends for assistance in the west, the war would have been expeditiously prosecuted.⁷ Unfortunately, this did not work out as the so-called friends turned down her request for arms and ammunitions, thus introducing a new dimension to the country's perception of friends and enemies in external relations.⁸ The impact of the civil war on Nigeria's foreign policy was significant, causing the Nigerian leaders to draw some lessons and conclusions from the war. Firstly, that the country's survival as a sovereign independent state can no longer be taken for granted and that control and deployment of the country's armed forces must remain entirely with the federal government. Prior to the civil war, the former regional government had control over the policemen in the region.

Secondly, that it is good to have friendly governments in the neighboring countries. If Nigeria had been surrounded by hostile neighbors during the civil war, it could probably have lost the war. That is why they could not easily forgive Dr Emile Zonsou, then the president of Dahomey for allowing Cotonou to be used by the international committee of the Red Cross for sending relief to the rebels.⁹

Thirdly, that there is danger in relying excessively on one power bloc, and relying entirely on external sources for arms required for maintaining internal security. And also the importance and value of publicity in the conduct of external relations. Prior to the civil war, the Nigerian government did not realize the importance of propaganda in diplomacy. The skillful and successful manner in which Biafra used propaganda baffled the Nigeria government. Biafra propaganda was so ably competently handled that it largely succeeded in persuading many international humanitarian agencies and powerful world leaders, including the pope, that Nigeria was bent on genocide.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this project is to examine how foreign involvement impacted upon the country's post- war foreign policy

- i To analyze the major events that took place outside Nigeria during the civil war, and how it changed the way Nigerian leaders conduct external relations.
- ii To examine Nigeria change of policy towards her neighbors at the end of the war.
- iii To analyze the impact of the civil war on the country's post- war foreign policy.
- iv To discuss how foreign involvement changed the foreign policy of the country.

Scope of the Study

This project covers the Nigerian civil war from 1967 to 1975 especially the events that took place during the war, which at the end shaped Nigeria's foreign policy. It also covers period prior to the civil war, activities and events that led to the civil war, the

inadequacies that was left unresolved by the British. The project also covers strategic areas such as Nigeria diplomacy during the war, its relation with the western power, and also what Nigeria foreign policy was before and after the war.

Methodology

This project will make use of findings from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source includes written documents such as government publications, documentaries and some descriptive account of personal account during the war. Also the project will make use of materials both online and offline and also official publication on websites will also be used. Books, journals, articles, conference, seminar papers and publication will be used as secondary information for this project.

Literature Review

Chinua Achebe, in his book entitled, *There was a country*,¹⁰ provided a personal account of his life and events during the war. He examined the history of ethnic tensions and resentment prior to the civil war. This book will reviewed in this project because it dealt extensively on events that rocked Nigeria history before, during, and after the civil war.

Ola Balogun in his book entitled, *The Tragic Years: Nigeria in Crisis 1967-1970*,¹¹ examined the history of Nigeria before independence, the road to secession, hostilities among ethnic groups and also discussed foreign intervention of western powers.

But it failed to analyze the involvement of the O.A.U. and it is this gap that my work will fill.

Brigadier-General Godwin Alabi-Isama in his book entitled, *The Tragedy of Victory*,¹² gave an on-the-spot account of the Nigerian-Biafran war on the Atlantic Theatre. Although his book was based on his personal life, it will be useful because of the detailed events that occurred during the period.

Ehimika .A. Ifidon and Mike .A. Orieso, in their article entitled, “the Anglo-Soviet arms Supply and the Struggle for influence in Nigeria 1967-1969”.¹³ This article examines the struggle between the western powers and the soviets for arms supply to Nigeria, with soviet aim of introducing communism into Nigeria. The article failed to talk about the involvement of other states in the crisis and that is where this work will fill in.

Olajide Aluko in his book *Essays in Nigeria Foreign Policy*,¹⁴ hinted on the patterns in Nigeria’s foreign policy, Nigeria relation with extra- African powers, and details of the civil war and Nigeria foreign policy. This book will be useful to this project, because it analyzed the country’s foreign policy and foreign involvement.

Oye Ogunbadejo in his article entitled, “Nigeria and the Great Powers. The Impact of the Civil War on Nigerian Foreign Relations”,¹⁵ gave an essentially detailed analysis on the conducts of western powers during the war and how it shaped their post war relations. This book will be useful in this regards.

Structure of Chapters

The chapter is divided into five chapters

Chapter One: Background to Study

This chapter covers the background to study, its aims and objectives, scope of work, methodology and literature review.

Chapter Two: Nigerian History Prior to 1960

The chapter covers Nigerian history before independence, before and during British Colonial rule. It also covers nationalist movement along the line to independence, constitutions adopted, and independence achieved.

Chapter Three: Developments of Nigeria Foreign Policy

This chapter covers the events prior to the war, coup and countercoup, prewar foreign policy, O.A.U. and diplomatic shuttle and propaganda, used by the two warring sides.

Chapter Four: Nigeria and the Great Powers: Its impact on the country's Foreign Policy.

This chapter covers foreign involvement during the civil war, its impact on the foreign policy of the country and Nigeria relations towards her neighbours after the war.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter examines the general overview of the research work.

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CHAPTER TWO

NIGERIA HISTORY PRIOR TO 1960

Introduction

Seen on a map, Nigeria can best be described as an approximately square expanse of vast territory divided into three unequal parts by a rough letter Y, which is formed by the confluence of that majestic African River, the Niger, with its chief tributary, the Benue, on its coast ward journey to the Atlantic Ocean into which it merges in the mangrove forest that line the intricate network of the Niger Delta.¹ It is a land inhabited by people of various ethnic origin and culture, that is now known as Nigeria, in successive waves over many centuries. Among the chief ethnic groups that occupy these territories are the Ibos, Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, Edo, Urhobo, Ijaw, and a host of other smaller group each with its own tongue and specific cultural practices.²

The people of what is known today as Nigeria, have a unique and distinctive history which dates back to several millennium.³ The people had attained great deal of social, economic, and political developments long before they contact with the Europeans. They had established great kingdoms, states, and empires. They had also evolved unique and elaborate system of government, which enabled them to regulate their daily lives.⁴ These groups (Ibos, Yorubas, Hausa, Edo, Urhobs, Ijaw) among others also interacted with each other at various levels, politically, economically and socially.⁵

The period during the colonial rule witnessed major epochal developments in the history of the people.⁶ Nigeria came into being in its present form in 1914, when the two

Protectorate of Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated by Sir Fredrick Lugard. Sixteen years earlier flora Shaw had suggested in Daily Times⁷ that the several British Protectorate in Niger be known collectively known as Nigeria.⁸

British Colonial Rule

From as early as the mid-fifteenth century, the European, first the Portuguese had already established contact with some people in the later day Nigeria. These were mainly on the coast such as the Binis. These early contacts were inspired by commercial and religious Considerations.⁹ Before 1960, the peoples of later day Nigeria had gone through close to two centuries of British colonial over lord ship. The duration of British colonial control over different parts of Nigeria varied depending on the time the people of each area were brought under effective British control.¹⁰

Long before the British eventually occupied the territories of Nigeria, they had maintained contact with the people and it was the developments in that erstwhile relationship and other socio-political and economic developments in Europe that sparked of the now historic European scramble and partition of Africa which culminated in the Europeans sharing African territories in the Berlin conference of 1884/1885.¹¹ By 1884 when Bismark called the conference.¹² Britain-was firmly established in Nigeria. As was the purpose of the conference, Africa was divided among the European nations into spheres of influence.¹³ This division was made wholly on the competitive political situation in Europe and did not take into account the geographical and cultural influences

such as national boundaries, tribal locations, and tribal differences and this set the stage for the artificial fusion of three distinctly different population.¹⁴

In 1885, the national African company (also known as the royal Niger Company) was granted a royal charter to oversee the territories north of oil Rivers protectorate; by 1893, this had become the Niger coast protectorate.¹⁵ The national African company was empowered to establish a police force and provide governmental services in the north. By 1897, the kingdom Of Benin was brought under British control.¹⁶ After the annexation of other south west areas, the protectorate of southern Nigeria was established in 1900.¹⁷ In the same year, the charter of the National African Company was revoked and the north redesigned to the protectorate of Nigeria.

By 1900, the British colonial office had taken responsibility for the whole of Nigeria. The first concrete step taken to bring major blocs of Nigeria's administrative units together, came by way of the May 1906 amalgamation of the Lagos colony and protectorate with the protectorate of southern Nigeria and by 1914, the consolidated control over all of Nigeria.¹⁸ What had in fact happened was the joining of three different foreign administrative organization than the unification of three different indigenous peoples.¹⁹ As regards the case of amalgamation, the British did not seek the views of the people in the two territories as to whether or not they supported an amalgamation.

Tamuno had observed that the primary aim of the government was economical, that is to use the better financial positions of the protectorate of southern Nigeria, to cover the costs of administration and development in the financially weak colony and

protectorate of Lagos, then saddled with the White Elephant of a railway in need of extension since 1901. Lugard being the first governor of Nigeria,²⁰ introduced the system of indirect rule in which the local government was essentially delegated into tribal chiefs or indigenous ruling bodies.²¹ These local authorities acted under the supervision, or more accurately in many cases, the advice of British administration. While the system worked well in the north, in both the western and eastern provinces, it caused discontent and turned out to be unsuitable and disruptive and due to protest and the change of British personnel, the local administration in southern Nigeria was reformed. The reform was anchored on establishing the 'true' traditional systems of the people of the governed areas and were now adapted to the new dispensation.²²

Nationalist Movement

Colonial rule was forcibly imposed on the people of Nigeria. By its nature, British rule in Nigeria was exploitative and this engendered protest from Nigerians.²³ British objective were far from being altruist hence in their administration of the country, they pursued policies which in all ramifications were geared towards the economic, political, and social benefit of the British over lord.²⁴ And these policies alienated Nigerians and at different stages denied him effective participation in the affairs of his country.²⁵

These people who shared sentiments of belonging to Nigeria and executed activities aimed at the establishment of an independent Nigerian state were referred to as 'Nigerian Nationalist.'²⁶ Little progress occurred in Nigeria until the end of the Second

World War, when nationalist movements surfaced in Africa as well as much of the rest of the colonial world and thus powerful political parties developed in all sector of the country. Chief Awolowo founded the Action group (AG) in the west.²⁷ And the East saw the formation of a single democratic party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroun (NCNC), the northern Emirs responded with the Northern Peoples Congress.²⁸

The first true nationalist organization that emerged in the Nigeria is the Youth Movement (NYM) IN 1936, with Samuel Akinsanya, H.O. Davies, Ernest Ikoli, and J.C. Vanghan at its head.²⁹ By 1941, the NYM had become moribund because of internal dissensions within it and with the breakup of the party, new associations emerged in Nigeria politics which unfortunately had ethnic taint, an element which has remained a cankerworm in Nigeria politics.³⁰

The impact of the Second World War and the general ideals prevalent in the colonies during the period, facilitated the establishment of a nationalist party. The national council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) on 26 August 1944 with Herbert Macaulay as president and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe as its secretary.³¹ Although the party started as a ‘truly national’ party, its membership was later to be dominated by the Ibos.³² It was in their bid to act as a counterpoise to the NCNC and protect their ‘tribal interest’ in the struggle for political representation in Nigeria that other parties were now established, with roots among the other major ethnic groups.³³

The Action Group was formed in 1948 which was led by Chief Obafemi and had its base in Yoruba land.³⁴ The party had at its core, members of the panYoruba

organization- “;Egbe omo Oduduwa”. To represent the northern interest the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) was established in 1949 led by Mallam Aminu and Mallam Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Because of ideological differences within the NPC, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) led by Mallam Aminu Kano was organized as a political party and its leadership was formed by the less privileged, traders, smaller farmers and craftsmen.³⁵

Under the pressure of growing national forces, a new constitution was adopted in 1954 which transformed Nigeria into a federation and gave considerably increased participation in government to Nigerians.³⁶ The federation comprised the northern, eastern and western region, the federal territory of Lagos and the territory of the southern Cameroun. In this federation, two of the three parties had to form a coalition to gain control of the government, which incredibly, was the Ibo of the east who advanced a strong federal union, and the mere conservative North who favored a weak confederate union.³⁷ Dr Nnamdi became president and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the north was named prime minister.³⁸

The westerners as odd man out vented their frustration in a division of their party between Awolowo and his followers, and local party segment led by western regional premier Akintola. Akintola’s faction aligned with the North and formed the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA), while the other faction united with the Eastern Ibo to establish the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA).³⁹ Open hostilities in the west resulted in federal intervention under strange circumstances and the discovery of immense misuse of

regional revenues into the party fund and private hands.⁴⁰ Awolowo was tried, convicted and imprisoned for treason and his rival Akintola gained power based on his alignment with the Northern party.

Independence Achieved

Nigeria on her path to independence witnessed the introduction of three major constitutions namely; the Richards 1946, Macpherson 1951, and Lyttleton 1954 constitutions.⁴¹ After the first of 1946, each of the other two was aimed at rectifying the anomalies in its predecessor. Furthermore, the last two constitutions were preceded by constitutional conference in which Nigerians actively participated and represented their interest. Nigeria's decolonization was facilitated by the election of the Labour Party in Britain, which was quite amenable to improvement in the colonial set up.⁴²

In order to do this, new constitutions were promulgated for British colonies in West Africa while the Gold Coast had the Burns constitution of 1946, the Richards constitution was promulgated for Nigerians the same year along the line proposed by Sir Arthur Richards.⁴³ The constitution was attacked by nationalists for both its content and the way it was introduced without consulting with the people of Nigeria. It was criticized as the foundation of tribalism in Nigerian politics. This is because whereas the constitution brought about the unification of Northern and Southern Nigeria in a common legislative council, it brought to the forefront the concept of regionalism which tended to encourage divisiveness and negativism.⁴⁴

As a result of the orchestrated criticism of the Richards constitution, sir John Macpherson drew up a new constitutional arrangement between 1949 and 1951 which brought to fruition the 1951 constitution also known as the Macpherson constitution. In putting together the 1951 constitution the people of Nigeria were consulted at every level from the village, district, through the divisional and provincial to the regional levels. A number of conferences were held most prominent being the Ibadan constitutional conference 1949, and this conference witnessed the clear manifestation of the ethnic and regional inclination of the particular. The Macpherson constitution was obviously more liberal in outlook than its predecessor and satisfied some of the aspirations of Nigeria nationalists but the life span of the constitution was very short, and this was essentially due to the deficiencies in the constitution and antagonism among the parties.⁴⁵

In line with the procedure for enacting the Macpherson's constitution, two conferences were held in Lagos and London to revise the Macpherson Constitution. The revision led to the promulgation of the Lyttleton constitution of 1954.⁴⁶ The 1954 constitution established a federal system of government for Nigeria and this structure gave each of the major ethnic group dominance in each of their regions. The nature of this federal constitution was that it tended to weaken national unity since it tended to engender regionalism through isolationism and the relative independence of each region.⁴⁷

The 1954 constitution formed the basis of all subsequent constitutional amendment that gave Nigeria the independent constitution of 1960. It is generally held

that the 1954 constitution marked the end of nationalist struggle for independence, for until 1960, Nigeria leaders were now concerned about the date for their assumption of self government and what the best government arrangement should be for their country.⁴⁸

By the late 1950s the British were rapidly accepting the inevitability of independence coming to one of their major colonial territory.⁴⁹ Chief Anthony of the Action Group had moved a motion in 1953 for self government from 1956, but this was opposed by northern politicians who felt they were not yet ready for self government. The self government motion caused bitter disagreements between the southerners and northerners which degenerated into mob violence in Kano which led to violent attacks. As Hatch rightly observes ‘the dreadful dangers of communal separatism introduced into the politics of a single state structure could hardly have been more brutally demonstrated’.

As a result of further conferences that were held in 1957 and 1958, the two southern regions were granted internal self government in 1957, the north in 1959. Federal elections were held in 1959 with the Northern Peoples Congress and National Congress of Nigerian Citizen, originally known as National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun, it changed its name when the southern part of Cameroun was later excised from Nigeria and joined to Cameroun-foreign, a coalition to form a government at the national level with the Action Group (AG) as opposition.⁵⁰

This was the platform on which Nigeria was granted independence on October and the country adopted the West Ministry parliamentary system of government.⁵¹ When Nigeria attained her independence, there were deep fissures within the structure. And

among things, the ethnic proclivities of the parties, and their domination of their different regions; the feeling of marginalization by minority groups in the different areas, a fact that had been confirmed by the Minorities Commission of 1958 and the unbalanced federal structure whereby the northern region could dominate the Western and Eastern Regions, gradually snowballed into political crisis that that eventually sought to disintegration the country.⁵²

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CHAPTER THREE

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIAN FOREIGN POLICY

Introduction

Accounts of the origin of the Nigeria civil war are numerous.¹ For Forsyth, the disintegration of the Federation of Nigeria is not an accident of history, but an inevitable consequence of it. To him, it would be unreal to suppose that Biafra simply came into existence out of a vacuum.² Accordingly, he traced the civil war to the formation of the country.³ Also, to Kirk-Greene, the tragedy of 1967 is that many of its seeds were not, as is often claimed, sown in October or even in July 1966 but in the 1950s, or as some see it, in 1914 or maybe in 1900 itself.⁴ Ola Balogun, traces it from the aftermath of the 1966 crisis. According to him:

Over the years following independence political life in Nigeria developed into a cut-throat struggle for power at the federal level.. each of the Nigerian political parties developed primarily as an instrument in the hands of the local leadership groups seeking to attain a number of given economic and social ends...⁵

The failure of Willink Commission to recommend the creation of more states in 1958 for the ‘Nigerian type of Federation’ is also proffered as a cause of the Nigerian civil war. It planted the most potent seed of instability into the evolution of Nigeria as a nation in the 1950s. Support for this is found in the acknowledgement made by the Federal Military Government of 1967 that:

In our common desire to win independence, many vital problems were left unresolved. One of these outstanding

problems was the creation of more states which would have provided a more lasting foundation for stability of the Federation of Nigeria. The British Government pointed out at the time that if new states were to be created, the new states must be given at least two years to settle down before independence could be granted. On reflection, Nigerian leaders have admitted that the British were right and they were wrong on this vital issue in hurrying to independence without solving the problems of instability of the Federation.⁶

To Crowder, the causes of the Nigerian civil war rests on the complete breakdown of law and order in the Western Region in late 1965, which made the military finally overthrow the government and suspended the constitution.⁷

Pre-Civil War Years 1960-1966

Prior to the civil war, Nigeria had witnessed series of political crisis. The most prominent were the Kano Riot of 1953, the Census Crisis of 1962, the Federal Election Crisis of 1964, and the Coup and Counter-Coup of 1966.⁸ Some analyst have argued that these were major remote causes of the Nigerian civil war.⁹ For instance, the Kano Riot of 1953, occurred as a suspicion on the part of Northern leaders, that the Southern leaders were trying to force them into a national integration which they were not prepared for.¹⁰

In an attempt to educate the Northerners about the benefits of self-government, the Southern leaders led by Chief S.L. Akintola of the Action Group went to Kano to gather support. This eventually led to a four days rioting at Sabongari Kano between 18th and 19th of May 1953. The implication of this riot apart from loss of lives, is that it worsened the relationship between the Southern and Northern leaders.¹¹

Moreso, the Census Crisis of 1962, which was also part of the civil unrest and incident during this time, was based on ethnic suspicion where the Southerners assumed that the Census Director had been influenced to perpetuate Northern agenda.¹² The 1962 Census results were released in 1963 and it showed a total number of Nigerian population of 55.6 million people, of which 29.8 million were identified as living in the Northern Region. This outright majority caused other regions to vehemently discount the accuracy of the census.¹³

The Federal Election Crisis of 1964 centered around regional politics, between the United Progressive Grand Alliance (comprising of NCNC and AG), and Nigeria National Alliance (comprising of NPC and NNDP). UPGA is South dominated, while NNA is North dominated. Conversely, this pattern of political setting was crisis and on the large scale, full blown coup d'etat.¹⁴

It was however the impact of the coups that were even more devastating to the country as a whole. The early coup destroyed the delicate first Republic. Although the coup was organized to end corruption throughout Nigeria political system, the net effect only placed the military in power, while corruption found a way to continue.¹⁵ In a British TV interview the leader of the January 1966 coup Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu stated thus:

We wanted to get rid of rotten and corrupt Ministers, political parties, trade unions, and the whole clumsy apparatus of the federal system. We wanted to gun down all the bigwigs on our way. This was the only way. We could not afford to let them live if this was to work. We got some but not all. General

Ironsi was to have been shot, but we were not ruthless enough. As a result he and other compromisers were able to supplant us.¹⁶

On January 15 1966, a small group of army officers mostly Southern Ibos, overthrew the government and assassinated the Federal Prime Minister and the premiere of the Western and Northern Regions. The Federal Military government that assumed power was unable to calm down ethnic tensions or produce a constitution acceptable to all sections of the country. Its effort to establish the Federal structure, and the appearance of complexity and growing nationwide unrest, caused tension and created the climate for the counter-coup in July. Ironsi was brutally slain and his Chief of Staff Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, was a compromise choice as his replacement.¹⁷

Gown was the senior Northern Officer serving in the army at that time. However, his choice created some interesting aspects since he was Christian, from the Middle Belt majority tribe, and had been hitherto relatively obscure.¹⁸

The second coup of July 1966, saw the directed movement of troops, especially the Ibos to the region of their respective ethnic heritage, as a result of the rioting which resulted in the mutilation and death of thousands of Ibos, and a mass flight to the Eastern Region by a million and a half Ibo.¹⁹

According to Ajetunmobi, hostilities broke out between Lt.Col. Ojukwu, the Military Governor of the Eastern Region and Lt.Col. Gowon, Head of the Federal Military Government.²⁰ The resulting civil war lasted two and half years. The cost in

human life has been estimated as high as two million people, and Nigeria's expanding oil-based economy simmered when its unimpeded growth could have raised the country to a position of international responsibility unparalleled in Black Africa.²¹

Nigerian Foreign Policy at the Eve of the Civil War

Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, in enunciating an independence foreign policy in 1960, elaborated on Nigeria's non-alignment posture. According to him:

We shall not blindly follow the lead of any one, so far as it is possible, the policy on each occasion will be selective with a proper independent objectives in Nigeria's national interest. We consider it wrong for a foreign government to associate itself as a matter of routine with any power bloc.²²

Nigerian leaders have stated that they follow the policy of nonalignment.²³ But questions have been raised about how well the policy has been pursued. Under sir Abubakar's regime, Nigeria professed to be non-aligned, but instances of strong partialities to those she called "our old friends"-the Western powers-were many.²⁴ When the Soviets Embassy was established in Lagos in 1961, the number of its diplomatic staff was limited to ten whereas no such restriction was placed on the diplomatic missions of Britain and the US. And while only five diplomatic car plates were allocated to the Soviet Embassy, hundred each were given to the Americans and the British.

Other instances of partiality to the West included Abubakar's defense of the resumption of atomic testing by the US early in 1962, whereas he had earlier in 1961 condemned the Soviet Union for the breach of the moratorium on atomic testing; his

defense of the US- Belgian operation in Congo in 1964, and the failure to condemn the US involvement in Vietnam, even in 1965 when public opinion in many western capitals favoured the US withdrawal from that country.²⁵

No aid was sought from the Soviet Union and the Soviet scholarships for Nigerian students were not received with enthusiasm, and the first trade agreement with the Soviet was not signed until 1963. In short under Abubakar, Nigeria's non-alignment was as put by Radio Kaduna, "Pro-West".²⁶

According to Corea in his book 'Non-alignment: the dynamics of movement', he says that non-alignment is the conscious choice by a state not to get involved in the system of mutual suspicion and hostile politico-military alliance. Also, that non-alignment is state that tends to refuse joining an entangling alliance especially the cold war alliance.²⁷

Under Balewa's government, it was pro-westernism and conservatism. Balewa shaped the pattern of Nigerian foreign policy which Britain continued to occupy a prominent position in Nigerian foreign relations, in terms of trade and politics, as countries of Eastern bloc were not reckoned with in Nigerian foreign relations under Balewa. When the USSR wanted to open an Embassy in Nigeria, they were turned down with the excuse of not accruing enough resources to reciprocate by opening an Embassy in Moscow.²⁸

Meanwhile, Balewa's non-alignment was basically on Anglo-Nigerian defence pact of 1960, thus he showed a glaring performance of relations with the western powers

and avoided the Eastern bloc. Also during the cold war, Balewa's government was hostile to the communist powers and refused to recognize the Republic of China.²⁹ Therefore Nigeria's attachment to the western bloc did not help in upholding the non-alignment policy in practice.

Balewa's regime though non-alignment in principle was pronouncedly pro-west in ideological leaning. He made a speech at the United Nations Organization summit, saying that Nigeria shall not follow the lead of anyone.³⁰

The Involvement of the Organization of African Unity

The official position of the organization of African unity in the Nigerian civil war, was that the conflict was an internal affair of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.³¹ Therefore, Nigeria's federal leaders, as the recognized member of the O.A.U., were entitled to all the charter provisions regarding non-interference in the domestic affairs of a member state.³² Throughout the conflict, this constituted the only acceptable policy of the O.A.U. and an overwhelming majority of its members. It is possible from the tenacity with which the organization maintained this policy, as well as its support for the federal side that nothing could have changed it even if the entire Biafra territory was turned into a mass grave yard or a desert.

It is also important to note that this hard O.A.U. policy accounts for one of Nigeria's most spectacular diplomatic successes in the entire episode. One, it had the effect of making any political case for Biafra irrelevant in Africa and the world. Secondly, it

effectively and officially closed Biafra's road to the United Nations as well as to any substantial political and diplomatic backing. Thus, it was the O.A.U. which in a purely political sense doomed Biafra and Biafrans in the eyes of the outside world and thus guaranteed Nigeria's survival as a united entity.³³

In fact, all African leaders realize that 'effective government control has not become coterminous with the limits of the state.'³⁴ This factor was reflected in the O.A.U. anti-Biafra policy. Essentially, no African state was willing to risk setting a precedent that may sign its own death warrant in the near future. Every African state had its own Biafra situation, and wanted to effectively kill Nigeria's Biafra in order to balance its own fluctuating domestic political fortunes as well as serve as a warning to its own domestic rival states.³⁵

It was this diplomatic policy initiated by the O.A.U. that the other African states followed. There were however factors which helped to gain support for Nigeria during its crisis. First, federal Government role in organizing diplomatic opposition to Nkrumah who was regarded by his neighbours notably Togo, as a subversive element, earned it the respect and confidence of many African countries.³⁶ Secondly, the ethnic, sectional, regional, religious and other related problems, which faced Nigeria, were also shared by virtually all African states though it was particularly pronounced in West Africa.

Nigeria's immediate neighbours were confronted by this problems immediately after independence. In addition to the North-South, Muslim- Christian problems, Cameroon faced the Anglophone- Francophone question, which sometimes assumed an

unpleasant aspect, akin almost to tribalism.³⁷ These were accompanied by other problems arising from differences caused by inequality in levels of development in economy and education. For instance, in Chad Republic, the North-South, Christian-Muslim problems fanned by divisive forces had led to a shooting war in the late 1 980s.³⁸ Niger Republic and Dahomey had the same ethnic problems.³⁹ The next close neighbour, Togo ⁴⁰ and Ghana, also had sectional and regional problems.⁴¹

Chief Anthony Enahoro was therefore quite right to warn that ‘if Nigeria breaks, no one knows how many African countries will survive.’⁴² it was the fear of secession, more than anything else that united African countries behind Nigeria, it was fear that made the Kinshasa meeting resolve to send a consultative mission of six heads of states (Mobutu, Tubman, Ankrah, Ahidjo, Diori, and Haile Selassie) to the head of the federal government of Nigeria to assure him of the Assembly’s desire for territorial integrity, unity, and peace in Nigeria.⁴³

The members of the mission from time of the debate on their resolution in Kinshasa, to the end of the civil war, went out of their way to virtually canvass for support for the federal government of Nigeria.⁴⁴ In Kinshasa, Emperor Haile Selassie set the tone for the discussion that followed for nine hours. He sought to re-assure the federal government and said:

The situation in Nigeria is of concern to all of us. It concerns us because secessionist tendencies are to be found in almost all African states. This is the legacy we have inherited from the colonialists who had to rule Africa by dividing them. We know that secession, if it were tolerated on our continent,

would lead to destruction of what Africans hold in high esteem, their independence and their progress.⁴⁵

The decision taken by the committee was quite significant for Nigeria. Through the period of the civil war, the O.A.U. stood by the recommendations of the committee.⁴⁶ The committee always drafted all its resolutions on the war for ratifications by O.A.U. summits.

Commenting on the claims of the rebels about being recognized by four African countries, the Cameroon Republic consul in Northern states, Mr G. Ngoo described this as meaningless and emphasized that as far as his country was concerned, Nigeria was one and there was nothing like the Republic of Biafra.⁴⁷ Earlier on the Cameroon president, Adhmudu Ahidjo, said in Yaounde that there was no question of his country recognizing the rebels.⁴⁸

The Chad president, Mr Francois Tombalbaye assured the Head of the Federal Government that his country would do nothing that might have unfortunate effect of impairing the corporate existence and territorial integrity of Nigeria. According to him:

At this time. . . I come to express in my name personally and in the name of the Government of Republic of Chad, our sympathy and encourage in your unceasing effort to preserve the unity of the great federation of Nigeria.⁴⁷

Documented moral support for Nigeria from Dahomey was late in coming but it did eventually come. The president of Dahomey, Dr Emile Zinsou, on his way to Paris

through the Lagos airport, said it was not competent for any outsider to dictate to Nigeria the solution to its conflict and declared that:

I am against secession any day and in any part of Africa. The political life of Nigeria is not for outsider to decide but I wish this year (1969) would bring peace and unity.⁵⁰

All the neighbouring West African states, except Ivory Coast, sent messages of support to the Federal Military Government on the outbreak of the civil war. Many of them kept on re-affirming their support from time to time. The colonel said:

I have followed with keen interest and some concern the events since January is and the steps taken by your Government to safeguard the territorial integrity of the Federation of Nigeria.⁵¹

It is clear from the foregoing sections that most of the neighbouring countries cooperated fully with the federal government in its attempt to maintain the territorial integrity of Nigeria. For a number of reasons, a few of the neighboring countries either refused to support the Federal Government completely or wavered along the way.

In the first category, only Ivory Coast qualifies. After making many hostile statement against the federal Government, it finally recognized the rebel regime in May1967.⁵² As already been shown, Gabon was initially in support of the Federal Government, but it leader was influenced by Houphouet-Boigny in his decision to recognize the rebel regime.⁵³

Ghana's initial active solidarity waned later largely because of the influence exerted on the Ghanaian leader by Arthur Nzeribe, allegedly a financial crony of General Ankrah.⁵⁴ The Ghanaian delegations to the consultative committee started to adopt a pro-rebel position from the Niamey meeting. By the last stages of the meetings of the consultative committee Ghana's proposals to it were identical with those put forward by the rebels. Ghana appeared to have become so indifferently to the Nigerian problem that it sent packing 75,000 Nigerians from Ghana in December 1969.⁵⁵ It thus aggravated the relief situation in Nigeria.

The United Republic of Tanzania was the most articulate in making a political case for Biafra's existence. In attempting, to clarify his government's decision to recognize and defend Biafra's right to statehood, President Julius R. Nyerere released a rather long and detailed study of his own. In it he compared Biafra's case to the fate of the Gibraltar in order to expose the inconsistency of British policy in the Nigerian civil war. He said that Britain appear to be arguing that she is helping Nigeria to stop the Ibos from unilaterally breaking the Treaty under which all the people of Nigeria agreed to accept independence as a single Federation.⁵⁶

In this case, in other words she is leaving out the question of self determination, although it is the main plank of her argument on the Gibraltar question. If the principle of self-determination is relevant in the case of Gibraltar as it is then surely it is relevant under this circumstances.⁵⁷ He argued that no one bothers to ask the consent of the

Biafrans, but instead they simply are satisfied with a policy that amounts to shoot and starve them into submission.⁵⁸

President Nyerere also dismissed as irrelevant and ill-informed all the attempts to compare the Nigerian civil war to both the American and the Congolese civil war, emphatically stated that “Had there been a Lincoln in Nigeria, he would fought prejudices which led to that inordinate and almost pathological hatred of the Ibos, which made secession inevitable and justifiable”.⁵⁹ Finally, he warned all African states against the selective morality that makes them tolerate injustice done to the black people by blacks but respond differently to a similar injustice when it was perpetrated by the Whites.

Asides this, the position of the organization of Africa Unity generally influenced majority of African states, the other states that supported Biafra in any way were quick to supply justification for their actions.⁶⁰

Endnotes

1. Since the Nigeria civil war was a contest between two sides, most authors on the Nigerian civil war are either pro-Biafra or pro-Nigeria. For example, the works of Frederick Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafra Story* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978),
2. Ralph Uwechue's *Reflection on the Nigerian civil war: Facing the Future* (New York: Africana, 1971), are tainted with historical bias on the side of the secessionists. For the Nigeria view point, see O. Obasanjo, *My Command* (London: Heinemann, 1980). More balanced and objective account is that of Michael Crowder, *The Story Of Nigeria* (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), pp.259-272.
3. F. Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafra Story* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.4.
4. *Ibid.*, p.9
5. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria 1967-1970*, vol. 1, January 1960- July 1967, p. 12
6. O. Balogun, *The Tragic Years: Nigeria in Trouble, 1966-1970* (Benin: Ethiope, 1973), p.14.
7. *The Struggle for one Nigeria* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1967), p.3.
8. M. Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria* (London: Faber&Faber, 1976), pp.259-260.
9. Interview with M.F. Fakayode, 54yrs Professional Historian and Lecturer, Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Ijanikin, Lagos. October 18, 2009.
10. S. Oyoubaire, et al: *Government*. Ibadan: Foludex Press Ltd, 2004. P.55
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. S. I. Oluya, H. M. Olu-Bruraimo, O. O. Okeje, *Readings in Citizenship Education in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Lukas Printers, 1996, pp 3 6-39.
14. Legum, *Africa Contemporary Record 1968-1969*, pp.6-7

15. S. I. Oluya, H. M. Olu-Bruraimo, O. O. Okeje, *Readings in Citizenship Education in Nigeria*, Ibadan: Lukas Printers, 1996, pp36-39
16. O. Balogun, *The Tragic Years: Nigeria in crisis, 1967-1970*, pp.54-56.
17. *Ibid.*, pp.62-63.
18. F. Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: Biafra Story*, pp.54-56.
19. O. Balogun, *The Tragic Years: Nigeria in Crisis, 1967-1970*, p.50.
20. *Ibid.*, pp.54-56.
21. R. O. Ajetunmobi, "The Ethnic Foundation of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970" in *Journal of Arts and Social Science*, Vol., 2001.p.67
22. O.Awolowo, The Financing of the Nigeria Civil War and its Implications for the Future of the Nation, Lecture at the University of Ibadan, 16th May, 1970.
23. J. Ogwu, *Nigeria Foreign Policy: Alternative Future* (Lagos:NNA,1986), p.103
24. C. S. Philips, *The Development of Nigeria Policy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p.50.
25. O.Aluko, "Nigerian Foreign Policy", in Olajide Aluko(ed), *Foreign Policies of African States*(London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p.164
26. *Ibid.*,p.165
27. *Ibid.*, p.165
28. E. Corea, *Non-Alignment: The Dynamics of a Movement* (Lagos: 1977), p.1.
29. *Ibid.*, p.2.
30. *Ibid*
31. *Ibid.*,p.5
32. G. Obiozor, *Uneasy Friendship: Nigerian-American Relations*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1992),p. 67
33. O. Aluko, *Essays in Nigerian Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen and Unwin Publishers Ltd 1981), p 109.

34. G. Obiozor, *Uneasy Friendship: Nigerian-American Relations* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1992), p.69.
35. P. J. McGowan and H. B. Snapino, *The Compulsory Foreign Policy: A Survey of ScientJlc Findings* (Beverly Hills: Stage Foundation, 1973), p.83.
36. This was easily foreseeable, Nigeria was a frontline state and a leader of the continent, it was very easy to make a precedent out of the events of the country.
37. For details of the Nature of the Relationship and Diplomatic Competition between Nigeria leaders and Dr Kwame Nkrumah, read, Stremlau, op. cit, p.15.
38. *West Africa*, February 4, 1985, p. 1
39. *New Nigeria*, (NN), August 29, 1968, p. 1
40. J. J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 225.
41. *Ibid.*
42. A. Mahadi, "The Role of Negotiating Countries in the Nigerian Civil War", Tekena Tamuno and Samson Ukpabi (ed), *Nigeria since Independence: The First Twenty-five Years: The Civil War Years*, Vol.VI.(Ibadan: Heinemann, 1989), p. 252.
43. J. J. Stremlau, "The International Politics of Nigerian Civil War", 1967-1970. p. 87.
44. J. J. Stremlau, 'The International Politics of Nigerian Civil War,' 1967- 1970.p. 82.
45. All of the members of the Consultative Forum had Ethnic and or Sectional! Regional problems in their respective Countries.
46. They were actually supposed to maintain a 'neutral position'. General Ankrah, however for reasons given in the text shifted his position later.
47. J. J. Stremlau, 'The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War', 1967-1970. p.261.
48. A. Mahadi, "The Role of Neighbouring Countries in the Nigerian Civil war", Tekena Tamuno and Samson Ukpabi(ed)., *Nigeria since Independence: The First Twenty-five Years: The Civil War Years*, VOL, VI. p. 261

49. *New Nigeria* (NN), June, 1968,p.12
50. *Ibid.*
51. *New Nigeria* (NN), July 8, 1967,p. 2
52. *New Nigeria* (NN), January 9, 1969,p. 2
53. *New Nigeria* (NN), July 8, 1969,p. 2
54. G. Aforika, Nweke, *External Intervention in African Conflicts: French- Speaking West Africa in the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970* (Boston: Boston University, African Study Center, 1976), p.16.
55. J. J. Stremlau, 'The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War ',1967-1970. pp. 137-138
56. *Ibid.*, p.139
57. *New Nigeria* (NN), January 7, 1970, p. 7
58. *Ibid.*
59. *Ibid.*
60. *Ibid.*
61. *Ibid.*, p.3
62. These justifications were necessary, though wanting in most cases, because these recognitions were contrary to the position of O.A.U, supported by the UN, Britain, and the United States. However, these recognitions were not too significant. The states according to them were not capable of commanding influence in the community of nations.

CHAPTER FOUR

**NIGERIA AND THE SUPERPOWERS: ITS IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY'S
FOREIGN POLICY**

Introduction

Traditionally and formally, the central theme of Nigeria's foreign policy has always been "non-alignment". But like most Third World countries that profess to be non-aligned, Nigeria's stance is far from being truly independent. Indeed, during the civilian administration Lagos was openly, though not slavishly, pro-west.¹ In 1967 however, the exigencies of civil war forced the Federal Military Government to court Moscow. Soviet involvement, on the side of the Federalists introduced another dimension to the conflict.

As for the Western powers, while Britain backed Lagos the United States assumed a dubious neutral posture and France embraced the Biafran cause. It was clear from the political and ideological line-up behind the belligerent, that there was no logical pattern in these foreign involvements. The fact that Britain and the Soviet Union backed the Federal side, for instance meant that there was no danger of a cold war confrontation but even so there were obvious cold war instances at work.

While the Soviet Union wanted to establish a foothold in Nigeria, the Western powers had an eye on the retention, if not the extension of their influence. Although, the external involvement played a decisive part in the scale, length, and final determination of the conflict, it nevertheless served one useful purpose. By enabling Lagos to bloc,

Nigeria has given more substance to its 'nonalignment' foreign policy.

A number of reasons can be adduced for foreign involvement in intra-state conflict. Interest, inability to manufacture sufficient arms to undertake war, effective propaganda, pressure from public and on humanitarian ground.²

That the super powers were involved in the Nigerian civil war is trite.³ However, the roles or support by these states may not be easily categorized into pro-Federal or pro-Biafran. For instance, while that of France and the Soviet Union can be rightly placed as pro-Biafran and pro-Federal respectively, that of the United States and Britain may not easily come under the heads. The most controversial is the role of Britain in the Nigerian civil war.

According to Tafawa Balewa after independence, 'Britain would not become a 'foreign country to us' because 'we all belong to the same club, the British Commonwealth of Nations'.⁴ Together with the United States, they constitute 'real genuine friends'. But the initial role played by the British Government was not accepted by the Federal Government, who had relied heavily on Britain for the supply of arms. The British Government refused outrightly to supply the federal side with aids and military hardware to prosecute the war on the ground of neutrality.⁵

According to Aluko:

The decision of the British government to remain neutral at the outset of the war was regarded in Nigeria as the betrayal of a former friend. . . until after a military aid agreement had been concluded with the Soviet Union early in August 1967.⁶

The effect of this was to be seen from Enahoro's statement at the end of the war that,

Friends who desert you in your hour of need deserve that much less friendship afterwards- When you are in difficulties, those who come to your rescue naturally have a claim in your gratitude.⁷

The position of the United States was also that of neutrality, and this was also a problem particularly when this position juxtapose with pre-war relationship between the two states. In fact, from independence on October 1960 to the coup of January 1966, Nigeria's policy of non- alignment exhibited a great deal of partiality in favour of the United States and the rest of the Western Powers, but against the USR.⁸

The Soviet Union and the Nigerian Civil War

With the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in July 1967, the USSR abandoned its posture of non-involvement in Nigerian affairs and openly backed the Federalists. This stance was one of the several options available to Moscow at the time. It could have given aid to neither side and remained political neutral; it could have publicly given support to the federal government but withheld material aid; provided material aid to the federalist; or provided material aid to the secessionist. The first alternative was entirely feasible, because Moscow's involvement in civilian Nigerian had been minimal and the civil war had not provided a confrontation of outside powers in which the Soviet Union was obliged to participate. Moreover, Moscow's previous non-committal policy gave the USSR a free hand in a situation in which ideological factors were relatively unimportant.

Russo-Nigerian relations from 1960 to the start of the war was no more than mere diplomatic niceties. Nigeria, despite its non-alignment posture was not totally non-aligned. The Government of Tafawa Balewa was almost completely aligned with the West, particularly Britain in the period immediately after independence. It could be recalled that in the late 1961 Chief Awolowo, as leader of the opposition accused the Abubakar government of turning Nigeria into a satellite of Britain and other NATO powers, and of gross inability to take any major decision without first consulting Whitehall.⁹

On the part of the Soviet Union, their involvement in Africa had always been moderate. But as the center of gravity of the cold war shifted towards the periphery, the USSR became increasingly interested in extending its influence in Africa. This interest was sharpened as Sino-Soviet rivalry intensified under Khrushchev. soviet policy was expansionist, vigorous and unrealistically optimistic both in its assessment of African attitude towards Moscow and in its estimation of the capitalist potential of certain regimes. A series of setbacks in the Congo, Ghana, and Mali led Khrushchev's successors to reevaluate their Third World policies and downgrade Africa as an area deserving extensive Russian resources.¹⁰

When the Nigerian civil war broke out, the USSR was unwilling to become involved in another African crisis. Disillusionment with 'progressive' states and an awareness that its prestige in Africa had plummeted, made Moscow cautious. Favourable results were now more important than increased contacts. Yet two and a half years later,

Russia's popularity in Nigeria has risen sharply and its conduct during the war had increased its prestige with other African countries. Moscow's involvement in the civil war represents a revived interest in Africa.¹⁰

Although the Soviets at first moved cautiously, striving to keep open as many options as possible, Britain's refusal to supply Lagos with air force equipments, the declared neutral posture of USA at the outbreak of the war, the pro-federal stance of the OAU, and the role of the radical members of General Gowon's war cabinet, all helped the Kremlin reach a decision. By mid-August 1967, the first batch of Soviet combat planes had arrived in Nigeria. But even at that first stage, caution was still essential and it was not until two months later before Moscow publicly committed itself irrevocably to the federal cause. From this time on arms supplies were steadily increased and Soviet journals, newspapers, and radio broadcasts began a sustained bitter campaign against the Biafran leaders.¹²

Going to Moscow for arms, was of course a sharp reversal of the pre-war Nigerian government's anti-Soviet bias. The Soviets welcomed this change for the simple reason that it offered them the opportunity of securing political, economic and diplomatic influence in a country that they had long coveted. They also made various attempts to consolidate their presence in Nigeria. Apart from their anxiety to open consulates in all the states, they were reported to have adopted a tough line on becoming the sole supplier of arms in quantities that would ensure a quick victory. Although they also made occasional attempts, notably with Canada to formulate peaceful solutions to the conflict,

they did not press these, and it seems likely that their main motive was to demonstrate that they, like the Britain could exercise some political influence on the federal government. Nevertheless, the weight of the Soviet support ensured that East Europe countries backed Lagos.¹³

In any case, Moscow's readiness to supply the federalist with their heavy 122mm guns, in the last phase of the war undoubtedly boosted the morale of the federal troops and played a crucial part in the capture of Owerri, Orlu and Uli airships. It is clear, therefore that Soviet aid and assistance was an important element in the federal government success in maintaining the unity of Nigeria. Certainly, this was the view of the Nigerian ambassador in Moscow, Brigadier Kurubo, who maintained that in the first analysis, Russian support was responsible for the federal victory more than any other single thing, more than all other things put together.¹⁴ The Soviet Union saw it as the victory of the progressive force of the whole African continent over imperialism.¹⁵

As might be expected, the exclusive traditional trading position which the West enjoyed in the pre- war years had diminished somewhat. In this regards, the Russians made a good start at establishing themselves when in 1967, AVTOEK SPORT, the Soviet state owned motor exporting firm took an 80 percent interest in a Nigerian company, West African Automobile and technical company, which quickly developed a sales and servicing network throughout Nigeria, selling Moskvitch cars. By early 1968 it was already in a position to import over six hundred Moskvitch passenger cars.¹⁶

The overall volume of trade between the two countries increased during the war years and by 1969 had reached 14.3 million.¹⁷ The Soviet supplied trucks and passenger cars, motor scooters, welding machines, cement, fabrics, sugar, and many other consumer goods, while Nigeria supplied cocoa-beans, groundnuts, palm products and commercially valuable timber.¹⁸

More important, perhaps than these economic links are the close diplomatic ties between Nigeria and the Soviet Union, which certainly did not exist in the period before the civil war. Western powers however, need not worry unduly about the Soviet penetration and threat in Nigeria, as Martin Dent had argued:

There have been many totally unnecessary fears. An increase in Soviet activity in Nigeria in the form of technical assistance, educational assistance, is inevitable. It can be nothing but good, for there is plenty of room in this field for Britain and the Soviet Union both to operate and co-operate together.¹⁹

In any case, there is a limit to Soviet influence in Nigeria. Admittedly, partly as a result of the civil war, and partly as a result of Nigeria's stand in the African issues, Lagos has now become noticeably more non-aligned. But there is fairly little, if any, ideological compatibility between Lagos and Moscow. Throughout the war, General Gowon stated quite explicitly that 'Nigerian development could be attained only by remaining in the system of world capitalism.'²⁰

Soviet-Nigerian relations have remained cordial since the end of the war. In may 1974, General Gowon visited the Soviet Union. That visit, the first by a Nigerian head of

state, enabled the General among other things, to convey his country's appreciation of the moral, political, and material support the Soviet provided for Nigeria in the period of the struggle to safeguard her unity and integrity.²¹

Agreements for cooperation were to be concluded in area of oil exploration and geology, the petroleum industry, agriculture, technical education, public health and the training of Nigerian personnel as well as further development of trade on a long term basis; and the Soviet reaffirmed its commitment to aid Nigeria in building an iron and steel location.²²

The United States and the Nigerian Civil War

The United States, unlike Britain had clearly pointed out right from the start of the war, that it intended to stay aloof from the whole affair. As the conflict fell within Britain's sphere of influence it was a British rather than an American problem. So four days after the outbreak of hostilities in July 1967, Washington announced that it would neither sell nor otherwise supply arms to either side in order not to deepen the conflict.²³

There were of course, many reasons why the US adopted this posture. Washington was naturally wary about any deep involvement in another civil war, with the Vietnam war still on, the internal difficulties which it had created, and the memory of the American involvement in the Congo. Even when the Soviet stepped into the conflict by effectively arming the federalists, the US did not find it necessary to reverse its declared policy partly because it felt that Britain's commitment to the federal cause

would check, if not neutralize Moscow's effort, and partly because it had worked out the Nigerian equation and came to the conclusion that as General Gowon was hardly a Bolshevik, there were obvious limitations to the extent he would flirt with the Russians.²⁴

Although Nigeria was angered by the US imposition of an arms ban, it managed to play this down as much as possible at the official level. For one thing, with the Soviet in its side, Lagos was anxious to avoid a cold war confrontation. It issued a statement which said that British, and to a lesser extent, the US were the traditional arms suppliers to the federal armed forces, and both countries still remain Nigeria's first choice for the purchase of arms for many reasons. While the statement regretted the US refusal to issue permits for federal arms purchase, it pointed out that;

The recent purchase from the Soviet sources have been strictly for cash on commercial basis. The Nigerian Government maintains its traditional friendship and foreign policy of non-alignment. The Federal Military Government expects its friends, particularly in the West, not to do anything to hamper its current efforts to defend the territorial integrity of the federation of Nigeria and to guarantee justice to all communities.²⁵

With the prolongation of the war, and the reports of starvation and suffering among the Biafran civilian population, coupled with the high-powered secessionist propaganda, Washington's policy of non-intervention came under severe attack from a strong Biafran lobby. Eventually, the Americans opted for a low profile approach. But by declaring an arms embargo and political support for the federal government and the one Nigeria's concept, the US was able to provide relief for the secessionist. To justify the

humanitarian intervention, President Johnson explained that ‘while we have no intention of interfering in Nigeria affairs, we do not believe that innocent persons should be made victims of political maneuvering.’²⁶

In spite of a change of administration in 1968, the policy of remaining aloof from all commitments other than relief operations was strictly adhered to throughout the conflict. True, president Nixon wanted to do something radical about the US relief supplies to the secessionists as soon as he assumed the presidency, but this was not feasible, given the strong pro-federal bias in the US embassy at Lagos, the department of state in Washington, and the apparently anti-Biafran stance of Dr Kissinger in the White House.²⁷

However, as the war drew to a close in the autumn of 1969, many Americans became increasingly irritated with Colonel Ojukwu’s apparently cavalier attitude towards the suffering and starvation of his own people. The state department became even more pro-federal, and Biafra never obtained the recognition from the United States for which it had hoped. Ironically, when Biafra finally collapsed in January 1970, President Nixon was among the very first world leaders to send congratulatory message to the federalist. In February 1970, Mr William Roger, the Secretary of States, visited Nigeria with a personal letter to General Gowon from the presidency. In the letter, Nixon expressed his;

‘Admiration for your leadership in reconciliation and reunification of your country. . .I hope we can have the benefit of your thoughts on the broader question of our country’s relationship to Africa. He (Roger) will convey to you also, I know, the support and understanding of the

American people as you in the words of Abraham Lincoln, bind up your nation's wounds'.²⁸

While the Nixon administration fully recognized that the arms embargo and the US relief efforts seriously strained United States- Nigerian relations, the fact that by 1970 Nigeria ranked as America's largest trading partner in tropical Africa, confirmed the secretary of states' opinion that the non-involvement policy was the right one, given the circumstances surrounding the Nigerian conflict.²⁹

If the post- war years have witnessed much easier US- Nigerian relations, there is still room for improvement. Nigeria had acquired a new status in American foreign policy, with Washington now more than ever committed to support Nigerian economic development.³⁰ Apart from the major constraint of southern Africa, it seems reasonable therefore to suggest that the future US- Nigerian relations are bound to be as cordial, if not better than now.

Britain and the Nigerian Civil War

Of all the ramifications of the Nigerian civil war, none seemed to be as sensitive or as vexed as the role of the western powers.³¹ Whether or not they gave material aid or diplomatic backing to the federalist, relations were in varying degree, on shaky grounds throughout the conflict.³² The position of Britain probably the most involved of all the foreign powers seemed to epitomize this phenomenon.

From the start, it was clear to the belligerents that since Britain as the former colonial power enjoyed a tremendous amount of diplomatic, political, and economic influence in Nigeria, its stance would influence the course of the war. Both sides were quick therefore to explore the possibilities of getting Britain's recognition and with it the fringe benefits of arms supplies, technical assistance, advice and relief aid. Britain on the other hand, was or seemed to be at the time, anxious to limit the scale of the conflict and far more important, to safeguard its own commercial and political interests in the country.

Once the situation became more clear-cut, with the federalist regaining physical control of the oil regions in the Mid-West and Rivers states, and the soviet putting its full weight behind the federalists, the only honourable option left for Britain was to back Lagos. Admittedly, Britain supplied the bulk of Nigeria's ground weapons. Nevertheless, the strident, and sometimes worthless parliamentary debates, the hostile mass media, the wavering attitude of some key cabinet ministers, and the refusal to supply the Nigerian air force with aircraft and bombs, all helped to inflict serious damage to the goodwill that Britain enjoyed in Nigeria.³³

There is no doubt that Britain's role was one of the crucial factors that helped the federalists to achieve victory. However, this did not lead to warmer Anglo- Nigerian relations in the immediate post-war period and there were many reasons for this outcome. Firstly, coming fast on the heels of the federal victory was the celebrated Scott report affair. On 11 January 1970, a confidential report written by Colonel Robert Scott, the British defence adviser at the British High Commission in Lagos, was published in the

Sunday Telegraph. In it, he set out in some detail, certain weaknesses of the Nigerian armed forces.

The Federal government angrily reacted against this leak by deporting him; and the whole affair seriously, if not temporarily, aggravated the tension in Anglo-Nigerian relations. The need to placate the federal military government was at once realized in Whitehall, and after several weeks of investigation by Scotland Yard, those responsible for the leak were prosecuted for offences under the official Secret Art.³⁴

Although subsequently, they were all freed, the British Government move, coupled the efforts of the foreign secretary, Mr Michael Stewart, appeared to have mollified General Gowon and his colleagues, as their hard attitudes gradually eased.³⁵ Relations were not completely off the boil when a change of government took place in Britain. In the first two years of the conservative administration, Mr Heath's policies seemed, if anything, to re-open certain wounds of the civil war period.

In the first place, one of the consequences of the conflict on Nigeria's foreign policy was the systematic radicalization, or progressiveness of Nigeria's African policy which among other things, was strongly militant on decolonization and against South Africa's apartheid policy. This attitude, stemmed partly from broad consensus of the Organization of African Unity on the war, which supported the federalists, and partly because of the assistance and encouragement that the 'White South' offered to the Biafran separatists.

In the view of Lagos, therefore, any friendly foreign powers that unduly flirted with the white minority regimes of South Africa and Zimbabwe was seen as pursuing policies which are indirectly hostile, if not openly antagonistic to Nigeria's interest. Obviously, the federal government would have preferred its British counterpart to see things in this context. But the Heath administration evidently took the opposite view and in the process, incurred the federal government's odium.³⁶

In fact the policies like the sales of arms to South Africa, the nebulous and ambivalent stance on Zimbabwe, and the strong commitment to get Britain into Europe and by implication weaken common wealth ties, all helped to widen the gulf in Anglo-Nigerian relations. By early 1971, the Nigerian mass media had turned against Britain. It was even suggested by the press that Nigeria should pull out of the common wealth.³⁷

At the diplomatic level however, Lagos assumed a wary posture. Even then it was clear that the federal government did not hide its strong feelings against Britain policies which in the pass, would have tallied with the British position. On the issue of joining the EEC for instance, Nigeria's answer was emphatic No.³⁸ At the same time, Nigeria never relented on issues affecting the White South. With the state of affairs at such a low ebb, it gradually began to dawn on the two countries that a major diplomatic initiative was necessary to put relations on a former footing. In the event, it was the British government that clearly went out of its way to establish cordiality.³⁹

In doing this, it evidently recalculated the complex equation of its stand in Africa. British commercial interest in Nigeria, and the latter's oil boom apparently helped to

demonstrate to the Heath administration that the country that mattered in Africa was not Ian Smith's Zimbabwe, or Vorster's South Africa, but Nigeria. Such a realization must have involved a shift emphasis, if only marginally, to reflect the new situation.

By June 1973, General Gowon was in apposition to honour a long standing invitation to pay a state visit to Britain. That visit revived much of the goodwill on both sides, and helped to put relations on a more secure basis. Moreover, while it was broadly true that the Head of state was invited, in the first instance as a result of the growing political and economic importance of Nigeria in Africa and in the world at large, the invitation was also extended as a significant gesture of appreciation by Her Majesty's government, of General Gowon's personal qualities in leading his country through such a tragic civil war, and at the end for showing an extraordinary magnanimity.

After the visit, Anglo-Nigerian relations improved. If the cloud had prevented sunshine, at least it was weak, which certainly could not be likened to a total eclipse. By 1975, much of the lost ground had been regained. In this, the loss of power by the conservatives to the Labour party in the spring of 1974 was crucial. In retrospect, it is now clear that for all his virtues Edward Heath lagged far behind Harold Wilson when it came to the complex issue of calculating and retaining the friendship of black African states.⁴⁰

France and the Nigerian Civil War

The position of France in the Nigerian conflict was totally and openly sympathetic to the idea of Biafran independence. Initially the French assistance was implicit, but by

September 1968, when the Biafra fortunes were very low their support was publicly acknowledged by President de Gaulle, who went to the extent of saying that the diplomatic recognition could not be ruled out. There were of course, many reasons why France backed Biafra. The fear of a United and successful Nigeria presenting a strong pole of attraction to the weakened and fragmented francophone states around it and so, by implication threatening to upset the balance of power in the region to the detriment of the French influence; the attraction of oil; de Gaulle's distrust of the Anglo-Saxons; his general dislike for federation; and the role of president Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast and M. Foccart, the secretary-general for African affairs at the Elysee, were all important factors.⁴¹

For all this, however French assistance to the secessionist was far from total.⁴² In a way, the whole affair seemed rather enigmatic. Why, for instance, did President de Gaulle choose the low point of Biafra's fortunes as the moment to intervene publicly? And having intervened, why did he not go all the way and recognize Biafra? It seems probable that France decided at a late stage in the conflict to keep its options open by playing the game both ways. This became necessary partly because of the unexpected solidarity and strength of the federal allies, and partly too, innate caution.⁴³

The maintenance of contact between Nigeria and France, and the fact that diplomatic links were never severed, meant that when the civil war ended, it was not necessary to start healing the strained relations from scratch. Ironically, it was the much criticized duality of France's policy in the conflict that also made the relatively speedy

improvement in Franco-Nigerian relations possible. Thus, whereas the Biafran policy was mainly carried out by M. Jacques Foccart's secretariat-General for African affairs, the rapprochement was performed by the Quaid'Orsay, the French foreign ministry, which had been sympathetic to the federal cause throughout.⁴⁴

There was an African connexion too in the rapprochement. One of the affects of the civil war was that it successfully catapulted the primacy of Africa to the top of Nigeria's foreign policy priorities. No matter what may be said nowadays about the gradual easing of France's stranglehold over its former African colonies, the fact remains that any aggressive regional or continental policy by Nigeria must reckon with certain obdurate realities including the special influence of France in most of the francophone states.⁴⁵

Once France and Nigeria began the task of healing strained relations, progress was rapid. In June 1971, eighteen months after the war, the Nigerian Army Chief of Staff, Brigadier Katsina, accepted an invitation from the French Army and visited France.⁴⁶ Another eighteen months later, M. Bettencourt, France's Deputy Minister of foreign affairs, paid an official visit to Lagos. His visit, which was specifically designed to put Franco-Nigerian relations on more secure foundation, proved quite fruitful. Various cultural and economic agreement which were later concluded were discussed with general Gowon.⁴⁷

As evidence of the new era in Franco-Nigerian relations, the reception given by Dr Arikpo at the willon hotel was attended by M. Foccart, who had masterminded the

French support for Biafran secessionists.⁴⁸ Economic relations between France and Nigeria have always fared better than the diplomatic ties. Even at the height of the civil war, Nigeria had in 1969 a 24 million Euro trade supply with France; over the four years 1968-1971, the figure stood at 10 million Euro, which showed that no other country provided Nigeria's balance of exchange with a comparable interest.⁴⁹

This favourable trend has continued through to 1975.⁵⁰ The French export are mostly cars, machinery and sugar products. In return, Nigeria provides crude oil and a few primary products. Thus, the Franco-Nigerian relations was fully restored. It is to be hoped that diplomatic ties links in future will be as strong as the economic ties have been.

Nigeria at the End of the War and Her Foreign Policy towards Her Neighbours

The dominant fact about Nigeria on January 12, 1970 when the guns ceased firing was the emergence of a potentially stronger united federation. Politically, the country had gained in strength. The authority of the central government in Lagos was, and has continued to be accepted without question by all the constituent units of the federation, each of which has now become too small and too weak to threaten or defy it. The effect of this has been to bring the control and direction of foreign policy firmly under the federal government. No longer can regional premiers make important pronouncement on foreign policy and give the country the reputation of speaking with too many voices.⁵¹

Another fact is that the country has become more stable than any time since its independence in 1960. For the war-to keep Nigeria one far more than the struggle for

independence has welded together the diverse ethnic groups, who have come to accept the view that destiny and hopes can be fulfilled only in a stable united Nigeria. Economically, Nigeria has become potentially the richest African country. In spite of the damages and disruption of war, the economy showed a remarkable resilience that surprised even the Nigerian leaders themselves. The war was financed at a cost of about 375 million pounds,⁵² without resorting to borrowing.⁵³

Agriculture expanded so well that it produced more food for the population, so that part of this was exported to other West African countries like Ghana. International confidence in the economy which was shaken as a result of the war, has now been restored, and since the end of the war there has been a steady flow of public and private investment into the country. All these along with the military victory over the forces of secession, have given the country a sense of self-confidence, self-assurance, and optimism. Since the end of the war, and the ending of many restrictions, reserves have shown an upward trend rising to over 62 million pounds at the end of May 1970, but foreign exchange control and import restrictions are still in force.

To repair the financial and economic damage of the war, and to put the economy rapidly on a self-sustaining footing, the federal government realized that it has to rely to some extent on aid from external sources. Thus in July 1970, the government empowered its ministry of finance to raise a loan of 500 million pounds from home and abroad for the purpose of reconstruction, rehabilitation, and development.

Prior to the civil war, Nigeria maintained a good neighbour policy. But its relations with its immediate neighbours were based on the same principles as those with other African countries. The experience of the civil war, however, has changed the Nigerian government attitude. The civil war brought it home to the Nigerian government that the security and freedom of the country depend on the security, and stability, and freedom of its neighbours.⁵⁴

Instead of treating them just as other African countries, the Nigerian government now takes a close interest in the internal development of each of its neighbours to ensure that the friendly relationships are not disrupted by hostile forces. Thus not only did Nigeria watch with keen interest the overthrow of President Zinsou in December 1969, but was also happy that it brought down a government that allowed its territories to be used as a staging post for relief supplies and arms to the rebels.

Similarly, the threat of some Northern leaders in Dahomey to secede following the abortive elections of March 1970, again drew Nigeria's attention to developments in Dahomey. All Nigerian papers came out predictably against secession, which they described as the machination of the imperialist. It is more than an accident that the first friendship treaty to be signed by Nigeria after the end of the war was with Dahomey. Also during the trouble of Equatorial Guinea with Spain in 1969, Nigeria was quick to come to its aid to ensure that a regime which allowed Santa Isabel in Fernando Po to be used as a staging post for arms to the Biafrans, did not replace that of President Macias

Nguema. In spite of the expenses of the war, Nigeria was able to provide Equatorial Guinea with some economic aid and technical assistance.

Likewise, Nigeria has been following closely the troubles in the Chad Republic. General Gowon discussed it with president Tombalbaye during their meeting at Maiduguri Nigeria, towards the end of July 1970. President Tombalbaye told reporters on his return journey that his country would welcome Nigerian troops to replace the French troops.⁵⁵

Another novel idea in Nigeria's relations with its neighbours is that of creating a sub-regional economic community which will comprise Nigeria and its immediate neighbours. It was firmly believed in Lagos that it was the enormous financial difficulties of Dr Zinsou's government that made him give in to the pressure of the international committee of the Red Cross to break Nigeria's blockade, and that as long as these neighbouring countries remain financially depended on France they could easily be manipulated against Nigeria. So the Nigeria government is now committed towards the promotion of the economic development of its neighbours in order to reduce their dependence on any of the great powers.

During the political campaigns in March 1970, one of the principal presidential candidates in Dahomey, M. Migan Apithy, called for the withdrawal of Dahomey from the "Entente" council and its union with Nigeria. Also the open gratitude of President Macias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea to Nigeria for its past economic aid and technical

assistance during his visit to Lagos in August 1970 showed- that the opportunities for closer cooperation between Nigeria and its neighbours will not be missed.⁵⁶

So we can fairly say that the civil war has had some important effects on Nigeria's foreign policy. It has reinforced the policy of non-alignment and the country's earlier policy of commitment to the principles of the OAU charter, it has also made the liberation of Southern African more urgent, it has also served to focus Nigeria's attention on developments within its immediate neighbours. Although this can only be a tentative account, it is not easy to see how the country can depart from these guidelines of policy within the foreseeable future.⁵⁷

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Nigeria is one of the most populous country in Africa, and most of her inhabitant belonged to one of the three major tribes- the Northern Hausa-Fulani, the Western Yorubas, and the Eastern Ibos. Before the imposition of European influence in the 19th century, these tribes shared little common experiences. They were separated geographically. Nigeria was richly blessed with abundant mineral resources, and it was for economic reasons, that European powers decided to colonize Nigeria.

So by 1884/85 when Bismarck called for the Berlin conference, Britain was firmly established in Nigeria. Divisions were made. These divisions were made wholly on the competitive political situation in Europe, and did not take into considerations, the factors in which the nation- states had historically been built. Geographical and cultural influences such as natural boundaries, tribe locations, and tribal differences were totally ignored and thus led to the fusion of three distinctly different populations.

The joining of the three different indigenous people, gave rise to strong regional political differences, few years later when the British granted Nigeria her independence. The inability of the three major tribes to unite, the Census Crisis of 1962, the Federal Election of 1964, and the Coup and Counter Coup of 1966, all led to the civil war that occurred in 1967.

The Nigerian civil war witnessed the use of heavy armed weapons between the armed forces of Nigeria and the secessionists. Not only did the war impact of the foreign

policy of the country, the involvement of the super powers in the civil war, also brought home some lessons for the Nigerian Governments. With the involvement of the super powers the Nigerian leaders were able to draw the line between friends and enemies in the conduct of her affairs.

The civil war also impacted on the country's foreign policy. Post-war conduct of the country's policy, saw the shift of her non-aligned posture where the Nigerian Government had diplomatic ties, as well as economic links with Eastern Europe.

With the end of the war the Nigerian government formulated a policy towards her immediate neighbours. The Nigerian government began to take close interest in the internal affairs of her neighbours, because she had come to realize after the incidents of the war that the security, stability and protection of her country's populations depends largely on the well being, security and stability of her neighbouring countries.

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