

THE ROLE OF SOVIET UNION IN NIGERIA'S CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the project was carried out by **NDIDIAMAKA RAKIYA
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty

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My sincere thanks to God almighty for bringing this program in the department of history and international studies of the University of Benin to a successful end and for His love and protection during the past years.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Most African states got independence in the period of superpower (United State and the Soviet Union) rivalry for world dominance and fortunately, some post-colonial states in Africa experience civil or internal war during this same period. The civil wars witness huge consequences such as lose of life and property as well as involvement of superpowers for various reasons. In the case of Nigeria, between 1967-1970 the Soviet Union weapons played a key role in the Federal government of Nigeria fight for “one Nigeria”.¹ Thus, this long essay will examine the involvement of the superpowers in the Nigeria civil war, 1967-1970. The study will focus specifically on the Soviet Union involvements in Nigeria before the war and during the civil war. It will also examine the motive or reasons for the Soviet Union involvement in the fight for one Nigeria.

One of the central challenges of Africa since the post-colonial dispensation has been the endemic and protracted political conflicts within the continent. Since the attainment of political independence, many African countries have been confronted with a variety of upheavals of differing magnitudes.² In its immediate post-independence period, Nigeria became enmeshed in a civil war that almost brought the country to the blink of near disintegration.³ The war was a culmination of an uneasy peace and stability that had plagued the Nigerian state from independence in 1960 to the military coup of 1966.³ The two and half year war (July 6th, 1967 – 14th January, 1970) began when the

Eastern region declared an independent state of Republic of Biafra, under the leadership of late Lt. General Ojukwu (rtd.) in “accordance with the wishes of the Igbo people”.⁴

Upon this declaration the Federal government moved to stop the disintegration of the country through secession resulted in an all-out war. To the Igbos it was a war of liberation and the questions of the right to self-determination, and indeed some African states recognition of the Biafra struggle perceived it this way. But to the federal government of Nigeria, the war was a bid to stop the secession of the Eastern Region from the federation and to preserve the peace and unity of the country. The war witnessed massive conscription of personnel military and the deployment of foreign military hardware by the two opposing sides. The Federal government of Nigeria depended a lot on the Soviet Union military hardware in order to win the war. The study examines the role of the Soviet Union in the Nigeria civil war.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examines the role of the Soviet Union in Nigeria’s civil war, 1967-1970, while the objectives of the study includes to;

1. to examines the emergence of the Nigerian state,
2. to examine the events leading to the civil war,
3. to examine the nature of Nigeria relation with Soviet Union before the civil war, and
4. to attempt a historical analysis of the Soviet Union involvement in the Nigerian civil war and their interest in the war.

Scope of the Study

This study covers the role of the Soviet Union in Nigeria's civil war, 1967-1970. The study also examines the relations between Nigeria and the Soviet Union in the period leading to the civil war. In this regard, the study begins with the period of 1967, since it was that year that Nigeria civil war was formally declared. The study will terminate in 1970 as it was in that year that the war was halted.

Methodology

This study will adopt historical approach. It is therefore theoretical and analytical in nature. As regard to its sources of data, they will be mainly secondary source. The secondary source include written materials such as text books, article in journals, thesis, dissertation, private record, biography, auto-biography and unpublished documents.

Literature Review

A study of this kind will be impossible without extant literature. It is therefore importance here to review some of these literatures. The first category of literature dealt on the historical background and emergence of Nigerian state that is Nigeria before the civil war, while the others focus on the civil war and the foreign states involvement the war.

Adewale Ademoyega in his book titled, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigeria Coup*,⁵ reviews the socio-political and economic organisation and lopsided military structure in Nigeria that led to the military coup of January 1966. It explains why and how the coup was conceived and planned together by three majors: Chukwuma

Kaduna Nzeogwu, Effiong Ifeajuna and Adewale Ademoyega. It discusses also the ideological motivations that anchored on the realization of a Nigeria where eradication of corruption in the army, a pluralist Nigerian society where both soldiers and civilians would transform the country to embrace equality rather than Hausa-Fulani dominance and self-asserted belief to be in control of Nigeria's leadership against other region. The book relevance to the current study lies in examination of the emergence of Nigerian state and some of the events and motivation that led to the civil war, which will be useful for us in chapter two of this study. However, since the book was not written with foreign intervention in mind, the role of the Soviet Union was not comprehensively examine, hence the need for this study to examine that vacuum.

The book titled, *The Nigerian Revolution and The Biafran War*,⁶ by Alexander A. Madiebo attempted to clarify certain events that led up to the civil war from January 1966 to January 1970 when the war ended. The book objectively recounted the resilience of the Biafran people who for thirty months resisted the brutal onslaught and total blockade by the Nigerian armed forces with little more than their will to survive a civil war against Nigeria. The relevance of book lies in examination of the events leading to the civil war and the prosecution of the war. However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the Nigeria civil war, hence the need for this study to examines it.

Furthermore, in *Half of the Yellow Sun*, by Chimamanda Adichie⁷, discusses the ravage of the Nigeria-Biafra war, its impact and brutalities on peasant and intellects alike. It also discusses how the war affected women and children and revealed the ethnic and

mass starvation in a Biafra territory. The book provides us with insight to the level of destruction caused by the weapons of the Soviet Union and others. However, the book did not examine the role of the Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap.

Chinua Achebe in his book titled, *There was a Country*,⁸ describes the effect of the Nigeria-Biafra war and the various massacres in Asaba, Calabar and blood loss of the Nigerian soldiers. The author dealt vividly on the atrocities, rapes, looting committed on the Biafrans by the Nigerian government, the economic blockade and starvation meted on the Biafrans were also discussed. However, the book did not examine the role of the Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap.

David M. Malome and Heiko Nitzchke's work titled, "Economic Agendas in Civil Wars",⁹ discusses the political economy of Nigerian civil wars. The work provides understanding of the complex dynamics of civil war economics and has also identified areas for a good policy development necessary for improved conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict peace building. This work shows how economic dynamics can influence the onset, character and duration of armed conflicts. The book's relevance lies in examination of the possible causes of war and thus provides us with useful insight on the possible causes of the Nigerian civil war. However, the book did not examine the role of the Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap.

Falode Adewumi James' article titled, "The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970: A Revolution in Africa"¹⁰, sees the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 as a revolution. The author explores the theory of revolutions and at the same time carries out a comparative analysis of civil wars that later morphed into revolution within the international political system. The author tries to correct the impression that Nigerian civil war was not a revolution and also established theoretically the line that separates coup d' etat from revolution since the first military coup of 1966 was always refers to a revolution. It referred to the Nigeria civil war as a means to an end. This work is very useful for this present study. However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap

Mac-Antonie Perouse de Montelos' article titled, "Humanitarian Aid and the Biafran War: Lessons not Learned",¹¹ discusses the controversial, impact of aid during the conflict. The author argues that contemporary idea of humanitarian aid gives right to intervention in wars order to save innocents. He give an account of the ravage of the war and how they were able to save the Biafra starving children, with food, clothes, shelter and medical services. The book relevance lies in examination of the some foreign intervention by way of humanitarian aid. However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap

Chukwuma Osakwe and Lawrence Okechukwu Udeagbala's work titled, *Owerri in the Nigeria civil war 1967-1970*¹² emphasizes the role of Owerri in the Nigeria Biafran War. Owerri was seen as one of the deadliest battle ground in the civil war. It was

another stronghold of the Biafrans and therefore fought hard to defend the territory so that they could access Uli Airport. The federal army never considered the town important until Colonel Adekunle saw it as the key that held their victory since they could enter Uli where the Biafran major stronghold control is located. This paper shows the various ways both factions demonstrated their military superiority which led to the change of control of Owerri between the federal and Biafran army up to three times.¹³

The relevance of the article to the current studies lies in examination of the prosecution of the war which will be useful for the current study. However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap.

Philip Ademola Olayoku's "Memorialization Principles, Post-Civil War Reintegration and the Quest for Sustainable Peace in Nigeria"¹³ deals with the history of the Nigeria-Biafra war. It looks at the root causes which were traced to the structure of colonization and the failure of ethnic integration within Nigeria state after independence. This author also looks at memorialization as a policy of reintegration in the post- civil war policy of peace building and peacekeeping. However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap

M.S. Audu Uzoma, S. and Ibrahim Baba Isaac's, paper titled, "Contextualizing the International Dimensions of the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970",¹⁴ Describes the civil war in the country as an offshoot of the myriad of problems, which had confronted the nation in the early 1960s. These crises ranged from census crises, ethnic politics, federal election crises, electoral manipulations to economic and political sleaze. The war resulted

in intervention from outside, this involvement of international actors has an economic and political undertone that played out. The discourse, therefore revisits, re-examines, reflect of the international dimensions to the Nigeria civil war. It also posited that the motives for intervention was dictated by economic neo-imperialism and therefore, Eurocentric. The work provides us with useful information on the nature of Soviet Union role in the war. However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap

Tom Cooper's *Civil War in Nigeria*¹⁵, evaluates the happenings during the period of the Nigerian civil war, he dealt on both sides; the Biafran people and the Nigerian side. It examines the impacts of the war on soldiers, the government, the traders, women and children. The work is a reflection of the war times between 1967 and 1970. The relevance of this article to this study lies in its examination of the impact of the war on women and children, but did not examine role of foreign states involvement the war, hence the need for this study to fill the gap.

Gloria I. Chuku's article titled, "Biafran Women Under Fire: Strategies in Organising Local and Trans-border Trade During the Nigerian Civil War",¹⁶ examines the political economy of Biafra during the war; women in war economy; women in trade. It focuses especially on the strategies women adopted and the problem they encountered in their trading activities; and consequences of the war on women and their society. The article goes further to examines the role of Biafran women in both local and long-distance trades including trans-border trade during the Nigerian civil war, from 1967-1970.

However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap.

Okechchukwu Ibeanu's article, titled, "Child Refugees and the Nigerian Civil War",¹⁷ examine the effects of the war on the Biafra children. The article highlighted the theoretical and political analysis of child refugees and the civil war. The relevance of this article to our study lies in how the author deals on the socio-political and economic impact of the war on the children.

John de St. Jorre's book titled, *The Nigerian Civil War*,¹⁸ examines the factors that led to the war, the environmental outlook in Nigeria before the war. The book also attempt to put the record on the Nigeria-Biafra straight, it attempt to clarify the cause and course of the war while highlighting rights and wrongs. The relevance of the literature lies in providing the background to this study. However, the book did not examine the role of Soviet Union in the war, hence the need for this study to examine that gap.

M.S. Audu Uzoma, S. and Ibrahim Baba Isaac's, paper titled, "Contextualizing the International Dimensions of the Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970",¹⁹ Describes the civil war in the country as an offshoot of the myriad of problems, which had confronted the nation in the early 1960s. These crises ranged from census crises, ethnic politics, federal election crises, electoral manipulations to economic and political sleaze. The war resulted in intervention by other states. This involvement of international actors has an economic and political undertone that played out. The discourse, therefore revisits, re-examines, reflect of the international dimensions to the Nigeria civil war. It also posited that the

motives for intervention was dictated by economic neo-imperialism and therefore, Eurocentric, this work was to state that the problems of Nigeria is from within and it can only be solved within through devoted leaders rather than leader who enslave themselves to the west.

Chapterization

Chapter One: Background to the Study

This chapter gave a brief introduction of the topic of discourse. It contains the aims and objectives, scope of the study, methodology, literature review and chapterization.

Chapter Two: A History of Nigeria's Emergence in 1960

This attempts an examination of the emergence in the year 1960 and also looks into the factors that led to the war. That will provide us with useful information on the advent or the origin of the foreign intervention in the Nigerian civil war. It examine Soviet Union relation with Nigeria before the war.

Chapter Three: The Nigerian Civil War

This chapter attempts a brief history of the Nigerian civil war.

Chapter Four: Role of the Soviet Union in the Nigerian Civil War

This will attempt a historical analysis of the Soviet Union intervention in the Nigerian civil war and their interest in the war.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This chapter marks the end of the discourse. It does an overview of the research work, re-stating and re-affirming all that has been said in the previous chapters and then their relevant in modern Nigerian society.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

A HISTORY OF NIGERIA'S EMERGENCE IN 1960

This attempts an examination of the emergence of Nigerian state in the year 1960 and her relations with the Soviet Union. It also looks into the factors that led to the war. That will provide us with useful information on the advent or the origin of the foreign intervention in the Nigerian civil war. It examines Soviet Union relation with Nigeria before the war.

Lagos Colony and the protectorate of southern Nigeria were merged in 1906 by Sir Walter Egerton. To be known as the colony and protectorate of the Southern Nigeria. The Protectorate of the Northern Nigeria and the protectorate of the Southern Nigeria were merge and amalgamated by Lord Frederick Lugard in 1914 and thus emerged the colony and protectorate of Nigeria and the beginning of the modern Nigeria State.³ So much significance has been attached to the 1914 amalgamation, so that we can assert not only that the year 1914 marked a turning point in the evolution of the Nigerian state, but also that Nigeria as a political and geographical entity was created in that year.⁴ That is the emergence of Nigeria and the Nigerian state⁵.

In practice, however, British administrative procedures under indirect rule involved constant interaction between colonial authorities and local rulers the system was

modified to fit the needs of each region. In the north, for instance, legislation took the form of a decree consigned by the governor and the emir, while in the south, the governor sought the approval of the Legislative Council. Hausa was recognized as an official language in the north, and knowledge of it was expected of colonial officers serving there, whereas only English had official status in the south. Regional administrations also varied widely in the quality of local personnel and in the scope of the operations they were willing to undertake. British staffs in each region continued to operate according to procedures developed before unification.

Economic links among the regions increased, but indirect rule tended to discourage political interchange. There was virtually no pressure for fuller unity⁶. In the north, appeals to Islamic legitimacy upheld the rule of the emirs, so that nationalist sentiments were decidedly anti-Western. Modern nationalists in the south, whose thinking was shaped by European ideas, opposed indirect rule, which had entrenched what was considered to be an anachronistic ruling class in power and shut out the Westernized elite.⁷

By the 1920s, there were several types of associations that were ostensibly nonpolitical. One group consisted of professional and business associations, such as the Nigerian Union of Teachers, which provided trained leadership for political groups; the Nigerian Law Association, which brought together lawyers, many of whom had been educated in Britain; and the Nigerian Produce Traders' Association, led by

ObafemiAwolowo. Ethnic and kinship organizations that often took the form of a tribal union also emerged in the 1920s.

By the mid-1940s, the major ethnic groups had formed such associations as the Igbo Federal Union and the EgbeOmoOduduwa (Society of the Descendants of Oduduwa), a Yoruba cultural movement, in which Awolowo played a leading role. The third type of organization that was more pointedly political was the youth or student group, which became the vehicle of intellectuals and professionals. The opportunity afforded by the 1922 constitution to elect a handful of representatives to the Legislative Council gave politically conscious Nigerians something concrete to work on. The principal figure in the political activity that ensued was Herbert Macauley, often referred to as the father of Nigerian nationalism. Significantly, NNDP remained almost entirely a Lagos party, popular only in the area with experience in elective politics.

The NYM first used nationalist rhetoric to agitate for improvements in education. The leaders includes H.O. Davies and Nnamdi Azikiwe.⁸ By 1938 the NYM was agitating for dominion status within the British Commonwealth of Nations, so that Nigeria would have the same status as Canada and Australia. In elections that year, the NYM ended the domination of the NNDP in the Legislative Council and moved to establish a genuinely national network of affiliates. This promising start was stopped short three years later by internal divisions in which ethnic loyalties emerged triumphant. The departure of Azikiwe and other Igbo members of the NYM left the organization in

Yoruba hands; during World War II, it was reorganized into a predominantly Yoruba political party, the Action Group, by Awolowo.⁹

After the demise of the NYM, the nationalist movement splintered into the Hausa- and Fulani- backed Northern People's Congress (NPC), the Yoruba-supported Action Group, and the Igbo-dominated National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC, later the National Council of Nigerian Citizens). These parties negotiated with the British government over constitutional changes.¹⁰Nigeria's first political party to have nationwide appeal was the NCNC, founded in 1944 when Azikiwe encouraged activists in the National Youth Movement to call a conference in Lagos of all major Nigerian organizations to "weld the heterogeneous masses of Nigeria into one solid bloc." The aged Macauley was elected president of the new group, and Azikiwe became its secretary general. The party platform renewed the National Youth Movement's appeal for Nigerian self-government within the Commonwealth under a democratic constitution. At its inception, party membership was based on affiliated organizations that included labor unions, social groups, political clubs, professional associations, and more than 100 ethnic organizations.

The Action Group arose in 1951 as a response to Igbo control of the NCNC and as a vehicle for Yoruba regionalism that resisted the concept of unitary government. The party was structured democratically and benefited from political spadework done by the NCNC in the Western Region in the late 1940s. As a movement designed essentially to exploit the federal arrangement to attain regional power, however, the Action Group

became the NCNC's competitor for votes in the south at the national level and at the local level in the Western Region. The Action Group was largely the creation of Awolowo, general secretary of Egbe Omo Oduduwa and leader of the Nigerian Produce Traders' Association. The Action Group was thus the heir of a generation of flourishing cultural consciousness among the Yoruba and also had valuable connections with commercial interests that were representative of the comparative economic advancement of the Western Region. Awolowo had little difficulty in appealing to broad segments of the Yoruba population, but he strove to prevent the Action Group from being stigmatized as a "tribal" group. Despite his somewhat successful efforts to enlist non-Yoruba support, the regionalist sentiment that had stimulated the party initially could hardly be concealed.

The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was organized in the late 1940s by a small group of Western-educated northern Muslims who obtained the assent of the emirs to form a political party capable of counterbalancing the activities of the southern-based parties. It represented a substantial element of reformism in the Muslim north. The most powerful figure in the party was Ahmadu Bello, the *Sardauna* (war leader) of Sokoto, a controversial figure who aspired to become the sultan of Sokoto, still the most important political and religious position in the north. Often described by opponents as a "feudal" conservative, Bello had a consuming interest in the protection of northern social and political institutions from southern influence.

The NPC platform emphasized the integrity of the north, its traditions, religion, and social order. Support for broad Nigerian concerns occupied a clear second place. A

lack of interest in extending the NPC beyond the Northern Region corresponded to this strictly regional orientation. Its activist membership was drawn from local government and emirate officials who had access to means of communication and to repressive traditional authority that could keep the opposition in lines. The small contingent of northerners who had been educated abroad that included AbubakarTafawaBalewa and Aminu Kano was allied with British-backed efforts to introduce gradual change to the emirates.¹¹

In 1945 Aminu Kano, who had been instrumental in founding the NPC, broke away to form another party, the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), in protest against the NPC's limited objectives and what he regarded as a vain hope that traditional rulers would accept modernization. NEPU formed a parliamentary alliance with the NCNC. The NPC continued to represent the interests of the traditional order in the pre-independence deliberations. After the defection of Kano, the only significant disagreement within the NPC related to the awareness of moderates, such as Balewa, that only by overcoming political and economic backwardness could the NPC protect the foundations of traditional northern authority against the influence of the more advanced south. In all three regions, minority parties represented the special interests of ethnic groups, especially as they were affected by the majority. The size of their legislative delegations, when successful in electing anyone to the regional assemblies, was never large enough to be effective, but they served as a means of public expression for minority concerns. They received attention from major parties before elections, at which time

either a dominant party from another region or the opposition party in their region sought their alliance¹²

As the political parties jockeyed for positions of power in anticipation of the independence of Nigeria, three constitutions were enacted from 1946 to 1954. In 1946 a new constitution was approved by the British Parliament and promulgated in Nigeria. Although it reserved effective power in the hands of the governor and his appointed executive council, the so-called Richards Constitution (after Governor Arthur Richards, who was responsible for its formulation) provided for an expanded Legislative Council empowered to deliberate on matters affecting the whole country. Separate legislative bodies, the houses of assembly, were established in each of the three regions to consider local questions and to advise the lieutenant governors. The Richards Constitution undoubtedly intensified regionalism as an alternative to political unification.¹³

The pace of constitutional change accelerated after the promulgation of the Richards Constitution, which was suspended in 1950. The call for greater autonomy resulted in an inter-parliamentary conference at Ibadan in 1950, when the terms of a new constitution were drafted. The so-called Macpherson Constitution, after the incumbent governor, went into effect the following year. The most important innovations in the new charter reinforced the dual course of constitutional evolution, allowing for both regional autonomy and federal union. By extending the elective principle and by providing for a central government with a Council of Ministers, the Macpherson Constitution gave renewed impetus to party activity and to political participation at the national level.

Subsequent revisions contained in a new constitution the Lyttleton Constitution, enacted in 1954, firmly established the federal principle and paved the way for independence.¹⁴

So, in 1957 the Western and the Eastern regions became formally self-governing under the parliamentary system. Similar status was acquired by the Northern Region two years later. The election of the House of Representatives after the adoption of the 1954 constitution gave the NPC a total of seventy-nine seats, all from the Northern Region. Among the other major parties, the NCNC took fifty-six seats, winning a majority in both the Eastern and the Western regions, while the Action Group captured only twenty-seven seats. The NPC was called on to form a government, but the NCNC received six of the ten ministerial posts. Three of these posts were assigned to representatives from each region, and one was reserved for a delegate from the Northern Cameroons.

A further step toward independence, the governor's Executive Council was merged with the Council of Ministers in 1957 to form the all-Nigerian Federal Executive Council. NPC federal parliamentary leader Balewa was appointed prime minister. Balewa formed a coalition government that included the Action Group as well as the NCNC to prepare the country for the final British withdrawal. His government guided the country for the next three years, operating with almost complete autonomy in internal affairs¹⁵.

The preparation of a new federal constitution for an independent Nigeria was carried out at conferences held at Lancaster House in London in 1957 and 1958 and presided over by the British colonial secretary. Nigerian delegates were selected to represent each region and to reflect various shades of opinion. The delegation was led by

Balewa of the NPC and included party leaders Awolowo of the Action Group, Azikiwe of the NCNC, and Bello of the NPC; they were also the premiers of the Western, Eastern, and Northern regions, respectively. Independence was achieved on October 1, 1960.¹⁶

Elections were held for a new and greatly enlarged House of Representatives in 1959; 174 of the 312 seats were allocated to the Northern Region on the basis of its larger population. The NPC, entering candidates only in the Northern Region, confined campaigning largely to local issues but opposed the addition of new regimes. The NCNC backed creation of a Midwest state and proposed federal control of education and health services. The Action Group, which staged a lively campaign, favored stronger government and the establishment of three new states, while advocating creation of a West Africa Federation that would unite Nigeria with Ghana and Sierra Leone. The NPC captured 142 seats in the new legislature. Balewa was called on to head a NPC-NCNC coalition government, and Awolowo became official leader of the opposition¹⁷

The making and creation of as a sovereign in 1960 was a tortuous journey. The political state known as Nigeria was born in 1914 and gained independence from Britain in 1960. Before that 1914, there was no country in the world known by the name Nigeria. Miss Flora Shaw (whom later became Lord Frederick Lugard wife) coined the name in 1897 in the article, she wrote in January 1897. That was three years before Lugard joined British's Royal Niger Company in 1894. Flora Shaw saw the destination of the states or areas that make up the south of the present day Nigeria as Royal Niger Company territories cumbersome. Thoughtfully, she came up with a simple word, Nigeria which

encompassed the whole area. Probably she may have derived it from two words Niger (from the river Niger) and Area, the two meaning Niger-area, compressed in to one word Nigeria, a term which applied only to the present day southern Nigeria, known then as southern protectorate occupied predominantly by the Yoruba, Igbo, Edo speaking ethnic groups and others. Thus, the entity today call Nigeria is an amalgam of varied ethnic groups and nationalities, prominent among these were Oyo, Kanem-Borno, Hausa/Fulani and Edo empires – by the British.

It could be said that although the British amalgamation of the area in 1914 was a turning point in the emergence of Nigeria state, but the attempt by these four empire to integrate large entities into their domain before British arrival was a starting point. It must be noted that the expansionist policy of these great empires were not just military adventures but an attempt to unify diverse people under one central of administration or a “partial Federation”. This chapter examined Nigeria before the civil war. It examined the politics that led to the Nigeria independence in 1960 and the politics that took place between 1960 when Nigeria got independence and how the country entered civil war.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

This chapter attempts a brief history of the Nigerian civil war. The chapter examines some of the contradictions in Nigerian politics, including the interventions of the military, gave way to what stood out as one of the most brutal civil wars in Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. The politicization of the relief operations during the war caused serious humanitarian challenges and heightened the human suffering in Biafra. The triangular politics between the humanitarian organizations, the Federal Military Government (FMG) of Nigeria, and the Biafran authorities impacted the most vulnerable, the women, children and the elderly in Biafra, who were neither considered nor consulted in the war. It led to hunger, starvation and death that otherwise could possibly have been avoided.

Nigeria-Biafra Civil War 1967-1970

From the ancient times war has been one of the activities of man and its consequences such as starvation and death are succinctly clear to all combatants. Still absolute avoidance of war has been impossible both in developed and in developing countries. War therefore has become a form of relationship between and as well as among people. In the case of Nigeria, due to the coup of January 15, and the counter coup of July, 29 1966 and the reactions that followed them, the only form of relationship

which the people of Eastern Nigeria wanted to have with other Nigerians within that period, especially the Northern Nigerians was war and vice versa.

The table below shows a list of major military installations in Nigeria and their locations before the January 1966 coup¹:

S/N	MILITARY INSTALLATIONS	STATES/LOCATION	REGION
1.	3rd Battalion (Bn)	Kaduna	North
2	5th Bn	Kano	North
3	1 Field Battery (Arty)	Kaduna	North
4	1 Field Squadron (Engrs)	"	North
5	88 Transport Regt	"	North
6	Nigerian Defense Academy	"	North
7	Ordinance Depot	"	North
8	44 Military Hospital	"	North
9	Nigeria Military Training College	"	North
10	Recon Squadron & Regt	"	North
11	Nigerian Air Force	"	North
12	Ammunition Factory	"	North
13	Recruit Training Depot	Zaria	North
14	Nigerian Military School	"	North
15	4th Bn	Ibadan	West

16	2 Field Battery (Army)	Abeokuta	West
17	2 Recon Squadron	"	West
18	1st Bn	Enugu	East
19	There were no military units in the Mid - Western Nigeria		

It must be noted that preparations for war had already been set in motion on the Nigeria side as at May 1967. All the soldiers of Northern, Western, and Mid - Western regions had been withdrawn from the East and redeployed. Four of the regular infantry battalions of the Army were placed under the command of 1 Brigade and redesignated 1 Area Command. Mobilization of ex-service men was ordered by the Commander - in - Chief. Out of those called up, about seven thousand in number, four other battalions were formed. Increased recruitment from the personnel of the Nigerian Police Force was embarked upon.²

In mobilizing the people of Nigeria, the Federal Government had to make the war look like a just cause to stop the disintegration of the country and in doing this a slogan was invented "To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done." To create a favourable environment for the easy capture of Enugu, the Federal government came up with what she called operation UNICORD (a code name for the police action) which was a war plans to capture Obudu, Ogoja, Garkem and Nsukka. Even the letters of the Head of the Federal Government, Gowon, was coined to read; "Go On With One Nigeria" and that became a very strong propaganda.³ Delivery of arms and equipment for the Nigerian

Army were hastened. Nigerian Army Headquarters (NAHQ), operations plan envisaged a war that will be waged in four phases and that will be over within a month with the capture of Enugu, the capital and nerve center of Eastern Region.⁴ The four phases were (1) Capture of Nsukka, (2) Capture of Ogoja, (3) Capture of Abakaliki, (4) Capture of Enugu. 1 Area Command was to be the fighting force, 2 Area Command in Ibadan, Western Region, was earmarked for the defense of Mid - West and border protection while the Lagos Garrison Organization was earmarked for the defense of Lagos, the Federal capital.⁵

The NAHQ assessment of the rebels in terms of men under arms and equipment did not give the NAHQ much concern. The total mobilization and the will of the people of the Eastern Nigeria to fight against severe odds were however under estimated. Nigeria knew that the survival of Biafra depended on importation of material from abroad to sustain her war efforts and the only route was through the Atlantic Ocean. As part of strategic planning, the Nigerian Navy (NN) was to blockade the region from the sea thereby preventing shipment of arms, equipment, food and other war materiel and services into the East. At the same time all flights to the region were cancelled and the international community were informed that no flight to the region would be accepted without clearance from Lagos. The NAHQ did not pay any particular attention to strategic intelligence of the Eastern Region. In planning and concept the war was intended to be fought by the troops located in the North and to be supplied mainly from Kaduna.⁶

As soon as the declaration was made by the Biafra, Nigeria sent her war ships to blockade and secures all sea routes into the region. Thus, for the Nigerian Navy, the war started in May 1967 when the Federal Military Government imposed economic sanctions by way of a littoral blockade on Eastern Region (Biafra), and the navy was charged with the responsibility of implementing the sanctions on the Atlantic coast.⁷ While the navy was technically the first arm of the force that was charged for a show down against Biafra, when the shooting war came in July, the navy appeared to be less prepared for the military action. The Navy, along with the soldiers of the Third Marine Commando Division (3MCDO) was the last force that got involved in the war against Biafra. Therefore, the navy military operation was a combined operation between the army and the Nigerian navy against the Biafran army and the Biafran navy.⁸

The navy and the soldiers of the 3MCDO amphibiously landed in Bonny on the 25th of July 1967 to the surprise of the Biafran armed forces. Because the Biafran military authority probably due to the sabotage on the ships of the Nigerian navy, among other reasons, inconsiderately supposed that the Nigerian navy was quite incompetent or rather incapable of carrying out amphibious operations on Biafra.

The Nigerian Air Force was tasked to ensure the control of the air space over the entire country. The offensive was to be a two prong attack, a combined arms mechanized infantry divisional attack from the north and an amphibious operation by another division from the south with the aim of crushing the Biafran army in between. The operation was to be supported by the Air Force and the Navy.⁹ A third and fourth fronts were introduced

later in the war. The government in Lagos continued to represent the entire country in the international organizations where a very strong propaganda was mounted to continue to portray the war as one to re-unite the country. This made it possible to win the support of the super-powers and to continue to discredit Biafra. Through this support, Nigeria was able to import more arms and equipment from all over the world to prosecute the war. However, in order to show that she was prepared for a peaceful solution to the conflict, Nigeria continued to participate in peace talks organized by the international community.¹⁰

The Biafran Army, realizing the odds against them decided to go into defensive. Taking the advantage of fighting on their own ground, they constructed fortified pill boxes, most likely avenues of approach, the major highways connecting the Eastern Region with the rest of the country. The Biafran army had gathered a lot of information on the disposition of the Nigerian army and made contingency plans to meet any incursion into their territory. They conducted training exercise code named "Exercise Checkmate" which was on the line Biafra Army hoped to fight. This exercise was so realistic that when the Nigerian military started their offensive, they reacted exactly the way Biafra expected them to. Biafra deployed her troops as follows:

1. Northern Sector - 51st Brigade made up of three infantry Battalions
2. Central Zone and Garrison Command - 11th Infantry Battalion
3. Southern Zone - 52nd Brigade made up of three battalions.¹¹

The Biafran Air Force carried out strategic bombings of major towns, military installations and the Defense industry. This had a devastating effect on civilian population and further helped the Nigerian propaganda which resulted in making more people to join the Nigeria military to crush the rebellion. The Biafran Navy also carried out some attack on the Nigerian ships with little effect. Mercenaries were hired to train the troops and took part in the fighting.¹²

Events Leading to the Civil War

After independence, the 1964 federal election was heavily filled with malpractices and violence, leading to political crisis with no end in sight. With political crisis rearing its head and the fear of Islamization holding the people of the South hostage, the military officers began to nurture involvement in politics, perhaps to restore order from the top. So, on 15 January 1966, a group of young military officers, mostly within the rank of major, hatched a coup d'état which, as they claimed, was to flush out all corrupt leaders, both civilian and military, in the country. Some of the persons killed included: Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister of the Federation, Alhaji Amadu Bello, Premier of Northern Nigeria and wife, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Premier of Western Nigeria, Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, Federal Minister of Finance, Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari, Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun and wife, Colonel Ralph Shodeinde and wife, Colonel Kur Mohammed, Lt-Colonel Abogo Largema, Lt-Colonel James Pam, and Lt-Colonel Arthur Unegbe, Quartermaster-General of the Nigerian Army.¹³

A breakdown show that those killed in the abortive putsch included six Northerners (including a wife), four Yoruba (including wives) and one Igbo. Often times some of the officials' wives killed in the coup are discounted from the list of the coup's dead victims. The mist reaction created ethnic configuration and mindset, it was believe among a cross-section of Nigerians from the north and west that it was an "Igbo conspiracy" and an "Igbo coup". This is due to the numeric configuration of its planners and the outcome of the death as well as the atmosphere before the coup. Four out of five major planners were ethnic Igbo. However a significant pact to note was the primary intention of that coup: to liquidate the de facto corrupt leadership of the First Republic, release Chief Obafemi Awolowo (a Yoruba) from prison and install him as Prime Ministers.¹⁹ This last intention has unfortunately been underreported, grossly understated and widely unknown to most Nigerian and international community.

To make matters worse, the 15th January coup failed, it produced an Igbo Head of State for the country (Major General Thomas UmunnatweAguiyi- Ironsi) due to the existing seniority in the army. This further generated more controversy and buttress camp of the "Igbo coup" allegation. Without a doubt, the coup was a bad blood among many Nigerians and divided the Nigeria more than ever. This ill-feeling triggered off some even uglier reactions which further deepened the national crises, drawing the country closer to the abyss – civil war. Ironsi, in order to balance the uneven political structure and satisfied the yearning for the creation of more regions, divided Nigeria into twelve

states with a unitary system of government. These further heighten the political situation of the Igbos or Easterners quest to control the North by bracken there political power.

Unhappy with the handling of the 15 January coup matters, creation of twelve regions and the enacting of an unpopular unitary system of government for Nigeria, young military officers from the North in collaboration with officers from the West, hatched a counter-coup on 29 July 1966, with the code-name, “Araba” meaning secession. The coup was led by Lt. Colonel Murtala Muhammed but produced Colonel Yakubu Gowon (a compromise candidate) as head of state and chief of the country.¹⁴

Before the 29th July 1966 coup, the secession of the north was the only idea contemplated by the coup plotters. The concept of one Nigeria, however, eventually triumphed only after the British High Commissioner and American Ambassador persuaded Northern political and military officers otherwise, arguing that the move would have damaging effects on the economy of the North. This marked the beginning of direct foreign intervention in Nigeria affairs. Especially as the prospect of oil connection and exploration was on the horizon of the civil war comes in. In actual fact, it was because of the prospects of the oil that prompted that advice, which had been discovered in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta of Southeastern region, that the north was persuaded out of its initial secession bid.

This discovery of vast oil reserves had especially tempted the Nigerian Federal Government to annex the Southeastern region and not to let Biafra go. Prior to the discovery of oil, Nigeria’s wealth derived from agricultural products (cocoa and palm oil

respectively) from the Southwest and Southeast, and groundnuts from the North. The North, up until around 1965, had had low-level demands to secede from Nigeria and retain its wealth for Northerners. These demands seemed to cease when it became clear that oil in the Southeast would become a major revenue source. Thus, the greed over control of the oil further fuelled the crisis. This fact was recently given some vent by President Olusegun Obasanjo, while admonishing Niger Delta youth over their restive activities.¹⁵

On this aspects, efforts have also been made to blame the civil war on the Northern desire to control the oil revenue of the region: the Eastern Nigeria leaders were pushed into secession in order to control the oil wealth alone and thus the Federal Government was pushed into fighting secession in order not to lose control of the oil wealth. Former President Nnamdi Azikiwe also once made mention of the attraction of the oil revenue, and more recently former President Obasanjo alluded to the struggle for control of the resource of the Niger Delta as being at the heart of the civil war. Perhaps the desire for oil wealth made the federal government insist on fighting rather than let the Easterners go. That same desire perhaps also gave the thought to Igbo leadership a sense of security in their drive for independence. However, the Igbo population who put pressure on Col. Ojukwu was not thinking of oil, they were thinking of the security of their lives and property and the end of needless deprivations.¹⁶

In the 29th July 1966 counter-coup, only officers and men of the military of Igbo stock were deliberately targeted and killed. In this process about 214 Igbo officers and

men of the armed forces, including Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi, were killed. Most times in very crude and dehumanizing manner. Lt. Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi the host of General Aguiyi-Ironsi, was equally killed in the bloody coup. The Hausa/Fulani *Igbo cleansing* project was soon followed by a protracted civilian version, now popularly dubbed the *Igbo pogroms*. In the civilian version, though only the Igbo seemed to have been deliberately targeted with a few others from neighbouring ethnic groups in the South-East caught up in the process.¹⁷

What followed the 29 July coup were series of attacks on the larger civilian society. From July 29 through October 1966 there was repeated and unrestrained massacre of civilians of Southern origin, but especially of Igbo extraction, all over the Northern part of the country. About thirty thousand Igbo civilian men, women and children were brutally cut down with the connivance or even abatement of the law enforcement agents. And as these innocent civilians were attacked, their property was being destroyed in tandem. One of the tragic consequences of this large scale attack on Igbo life and property was a fleeing to the Eastern region of some two million refugees. This basis of Igbo alienation was graphically captured by Ralph Uwechue thus:

For me, the principal point at issue on which I disagreed with the Federal Government was its inability, some say its unwillingness to provide effective protection for Ibo civilians during the gruesome massacres of 1966 and its unsatisfactory handling of the question of compensation and rehabilitation of the families and dependents of the victims of these unfortunate events.¹⁸

The massacre of Igbo civilian population was clearly unprovoked. These civilian victims were not officers or soldiers, and they were not politicians, either. The only justification for that massive attack was that it was a product of naked hatred and hostility. The victims of such an unprovoked aggression have a right to protect themselves. And there are only two ways to do this; either they fought back or retreated into their own sovereignty. They chose to retreat but war was forced on them by the very conquistadors they tried to run away from. This is how the massacres fed into the civil war.

With established insecurity and threat to lives and property, there was no reasonable solution in sight, thus the crisis in the country further deepened and signs were clear that a civil war was in the offing. On 30 May 1967, Colonel Chukuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu proclaimed the secession of the Southeastern Region from Nigeria. The new nation state was named the Republic of Biafra. Immediately, several individuals and countries set in motion some diplomatic efforts at resolving the ensuing conflicts.¹⁹

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CHAPTER FOUR

ROLE OF THE SOVIET UNION IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

This chapter will attempt a historical analysis of the Soviet Union involvement in the Nigerian civil war and their interest in the war. Historically, upon gaining independence, Nigeria proclaimed non-alignment in her foreign policy in the sense that it would not be tied to either of the then existing ideological divides – communism ('East') or capitalism ('West'). During the early years of Nigeria's independence, from 1960-1966, the ruling elites were openly pro-west. Even after diplomatic relations were established, Nigeria limited the size of the Soviet mission and was reluctant to accept aid. It took two years after the official establishment of diplomatic relations for Nigeria to open her Embassy in Moscow. Nigerian ruling elites were mostly anti-Soviets; nevertheless, there were some political and organised labour elites who agitated for a closer tie with Russians. Communist literatures were banned and no Nigerian students were permitted to study in Moscow (though some Nigerian students still found their ways to Soviet Union by passing through other Nigeria's neighbouring countries).¹

Despite all these frustrations and cold-shoulder of the ruling elite of Nigeria of those years under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, USSR continued to maintain its limited contacts and encourage the development of a neutralist foreign policy. USSR reacted cautiously to the series of political crises which plagued Nigeria during its

early years of independence. In 1965 the country was on the verge of anarchy and disintegration as a result of the violence and general strike ensuing from the 1964 general elections crisis. Russia did not utilize an obvious revolutionary situation then to promote chaos and communism. Between 1964 and 1965, Russia trade with Nigeria was valued at about \$5 million. The cautious and suspicious relationship with Soviet Union continued even under the military regime of General Aguiyi Ironsi (January 15, 1966 – July 30, 1966). The relations remained circumspect and cool till the end of the regime. Then on August 1, 1966 came a counter-coup, with General Yakubu Gowon emerging as the new Nigerian leader.²

Although, cautiously the Soviet Union welcomed the new regime, especially when it released from prison Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who was serving a prison term for treason. Chief O. Awolowo and his Action Group party had been sympathetic to a closer pragmatic tie with the Soviet Union. Moscow also fancied the stance of the new Gowon regime on federal structure of the Nigerian state. The new stance of Russia on Nigeria and Africa in general was not however, unconnected with the exit of Comrade Nikiti Krushchev from the helm of affairs in Russia in 1964. The Soviet quickly denounced his policy approach to foreign affairs. A more balanced and less ideological approach was promulgated. Towards the late 1960s, the Soviet leadership became less interested in revolution in African states and more interested in the political support of those states in their struggle to find their space in the international affairs and in the

economic benefits of mutual cooperation irrespective of the nature of their internal regimes.

This new Soviet pragmatic foreign policy enabled them to take the side of the Federal government of Nigeria when General Odumegwu Ojukwu in May 30 1967 proclaimed secession of the Eastern Region of the country to form a sovereign Republic of Biafra, and civil war ensued in July 6, 1967. The exigencies of the civil war forced the Federal Government of Nigeria to court USSR.³ The months preceding the civil war General Gowon sent a special envoy to Moscow to explain the Nigerian government's position on the unravelling crisis and to communicate to the Soviet new leadership his (Gowon's) administration desire to maintain and develop the friendly relation with the USSR. Following this visit, a more practical discussions centered on increased trade between the two countries were made. Such rapport between Gowon's administration and the Soviet Union during these periods yielded a remarkable improvement in relationship of the two countries. Agreement on air services and on student exchanges and cultural affairs were negotiated and signed.

Soviet Union Role in Nigeria Civil War

Nigeria has maintained close ties with the western powers, most especially the British from independence in 1960 and the emergence of Sir Tafawa Balewa as the first Prime Minister of Nigeria. .Nigeria's foreign policy under his government had always been pro-west, but during the course of the Nigerian civil war, there was a shift in the Nigerian-British relations. This shift marked the first major foreign policy rethinking

during the military government of Gen. Yakubu Gowon. With the outbreak of the civil war in July 1967, the federal government hoped to get the backing of the British government since she was her former colonizer and had always been a close friend.⁴ The Nigerian government solicited for military aid from her traditional friends to prosecute the war against the secessionist forces, but Britain and the United states refused to sell arms to Nigeria, but the British government later came to the aid of the Nigerian government, but not at the initial stage.⁵

The inflow of arms and ammunition was rather erratic. The British government refused to supply ammunition to the level of the federal requirement. They refused to get involved at the initial stage because she wanted to protect her economic and political interest by playing neutral. British seemed to be at the time anxious to limit the scale of the conflict, and far more important to safe guard its own commercial and political interest in the country.⁶ The United States on its part stayed aloof from the conflict, maintaining that the conflict was meant for the British government to intervene. The United States, unlike Britain, had clearly pointed out, right from the start of the Nigerian civil war that it intended to stay aloof from the start of the whole affair, as the conflict was within British's sphere of Influence, it was a British rather than an American problem.⁷

As the war progressed the United States government announced that it would neither sell nor supply arms to any the party, in a bid not to deepen her crisis. Although some reasons were adduced for the United States neutral posture, her involvement in the

Vietnam and Congo crisis was responsible for her neutral posture. In a bid to prosecute the war, the federal government sought for a country or power ready to supply weapons in return for cash's.⁸

During this period, Nigerian foreign policy makers sought an urgent ground, new alternatives they sought for a new prospect in bid to realize the federal government's war efforts against the secessionist group. Nigerian missions went to Moscow negotiated arms and cultural agreements and by August 1967, broke the tradition by importing massive military equipment from the USSR and Eastern Europe, the USSR came to the rescue of the federalist, by August 1967, some Soviet combat plane arrived Nigeria, arms supply was increased and soviet newspaper, journals, television and radio began to broadcast soviet support for the government. She became Nigeria's best friend with the supply of weapons. The pro-western concept began to give way to pro-eastern foreign policy.⁹ Going to Moscow for arms was of course a sharp reversal of the pre-war Nigeria government's Anti-soviet bloc. The shift from the pro-west to pro-east in Nigeria's foreign policy as a result of the civil war was well received by the Soviet government because it offered the soviet union the chance of securing political economics and diplomatic relations they have long hope to secure. They made desirable efforts to support the federal course in then supply of arms, M.G. 17 fighters, ilyushin bombers, heavy artillery vehicles and small arms, Russian technicians accompanied all deliveries and often stayed on to train Nigerian's . Apart from their Anxiety to open consulates in

all states, they were reported to have adopted a tough line on becoming the sole supplier of arms in quantities that would ensure a quick federal victory.¹⁰

It has been asserted that the Soviet aids and arms assistance was a vital instrument 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 final analysis, Russian support was responsible for the federal victory more than any other put together.¹¹The Nigerian civil war completely relegated the United Kingdom from the dominating position she had maintained in Nigeria's foreign policy from inception, and replaced it with a new emphasis on Africa. The Gowon foreign policy marked the beginning of Nigeria's role in African affairs. This was affirmed by Gowon himself in 1972 when he declared that African is the cornerstone of Nigerian's foreign policy. British support for Nigeria had been at its weakest in the early part of the war when Nigeria needed it most and at its firmest when Lagos needed it least in the latter stages of the conflict British thus became secondary in Nigeria's foreign policy decision making process.¹²

News friends were made, but despite the shift occasioned by civil war there was no drastic break with the old tradition, the war was fought by the federal government to keep the country unified and in a bid to do the Nigerian foreign policy sought friendship with the Eastern bloc as a result of British refusal to support at the initial stage. It was perceived by some countries that Nigeria has fallen into the Soviet Union's orbit or would do so if she had not, this perception was refuted by Gen. Gowon when he stated

Nigeria's only buy during the civil war, chief Anthony Enahoro, who was the federal commissioner for labour, was even more blunt when he explained, in an interview with a leading Soviet journalist, why in his view, the Soviet examples is almost irrelevant to Nigeria:

our main problem is to create a unified country, but we cannot use your experience at the present time, you had a civil war on a class basis, we had a war on another basis. You established the community of your country over centuries; we have only existed for a half century. Your association of nations was established historically, while ours was established by conquerors. You have a communist party as a unified force. We have another system, politics is based on a tribal foundation: you have an idea which all supported, the socialist idea. We have no such unifying idea.¹³

The above statement proved that despite the pro-east relational occasioned by the war, Nigeria is still conscious of her capitalist ideology. When the Soviet realized that Nigeria was basically in the capitalist camp, it continently ignored this, and armed the federal government. In fact, soviet policy in the civil war provides an excellent example of the now Farryliar dominance of Pragmatism over ideology. When foreign policy interest, come first and ideology second, rather than the other way round. National interest's Conquered Ideology.¹⁴

The Soviet Union being anti-apartheid and anti-colonialist was realistic to enlist their support to pursuit of Nigeria's African of decolonization. It was sensible to keep contact with the Soviet Union. During the Nigeria civil war, the Soviet Union and Nigeria had signed an agreement authorizing the USSR to establish Nigeria's iron and steel

industry. The agreement provided for a Soviet loan of \$120 million for the project. At about eight years after the agreement, the daily Nigerian newspapers announced the Nigeria and Soviet technical experts has began meeting on the implementation of the nations iron and steel complex.¹⁵ It was not until General Gowon overthrown by General Murtala Mohammed in a military coup in July 1975 that the issues of the unification of trade unions as well as the iron and steel received an added impetus.

Aside from trade links the Murtala regime shared a measure of common ground with the Kremlin leaders on certain international issues. Because of the radical posture of the Murtala's administration, Soviet and Nigerian policies had actually tallied on some of the major African issues, suggesting a common stance against the West. The Angolan issue provides a good example. Both Moscow and Lagos firmly backed the MPLA to the Gitt USSR's involvement in Angola was greatly facilitated by the ease and speed with which Moscow found a close working ally in Fidel Castro's Cuba. Once Havana had let it be known that it would provide troops to fight side by side with MPLA forces, the way was left clear for the Soviet to pump arms and ammunition, on a massive and unprecedented scale to Luanda. The Soviet justifies their support of Luanda by pointing to the FNLA-UNITA's use of mercenaries and for a while, the presence of the Chinese advisers with the FNLA.¹⁶

Nigeria, on the other hand dilly-dallied for some time, 'studiously avoiding backing any particular movement. Indeed, Nigeria initially called for a union government of the three groups, but when it became clear that Pretoria had waded into the conflict by

teaming with the FNLA-UNITA, so adding a new dimension to whole affairs, Lagos descended from its fence-sitting posture. The Federal Government given its military Africa policy quickly declared its support for the MPLA and gave total material and diplomatic support. Nigeria under the Murtala Mohammed regime campaigned for and energetically worked towards securing OAU support for the MPLA. Lagos gave \$20 million as a cash grant and \$80 million in military and economic aid¹⁰. Taking the Murtala Mohammed and Olusegun Obasanjo regimes 1975 to 1979 on a comparative basis, both stood out as two good trade years.¹⁷

The Olusegun Obasanjo's government and Moscow showed a common posture on the issue of decolonization. In essence, both Nigeria and the USSR were committed to the transfer of power from the white minority regimes to the black majorities in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. With the advent of Jimmy Carter in the White House, this broadly progressive African policy had narrowed down the division between Lagos and Washington on some key African issues.¹⁸ The issue of apartheid in South Africa still constituted a chasm between Nigeria and the Americans. To that degree, the margin of difference in policy remained a point of convergence of interest in Nigeria-Soviet relations. Consequently, when Carter visited Nigeria in March, 1978, he was subjected to strong pressure from his hosts over US. Policy towards Southern Africa Obasanjo firmly but politely declined the president's request to the effect that Nigeria leader should join him in recording a joint condemnation of the Soviet-Cuban involvement in Africa.¹⁹

In the case of the iron and steel project, the Obasanjo regime's determination to build on the foundation established by previous administration on the iron and steel complex was further demonstrated in June 1977, when the permanent secretary of the Federal Ministry of Industries, Mallam Ahmed Joda, led a delegation to Moscow to discuss the issue. The delegation include the project manager of the Nigeria Steel Development Authority, Dr. Adegboye, familiarized itself with the design of the iron and steel complex and with the method and organization of production in the own iron and steel plants, thus resolving some of the preliminary difficulties. Connected with establishing the complex in Nigeria.²⁰ The apparent convergence of Lagos and Moscow interests on some key African issues did not necessarily make General Obasanjo an uncritical observer of Soviet policies. Indeed, when in the wake of the second shaba crisis, the problem of external intervention dominated the agenda of OAU summit in July 1978, he miss no words in asking the USSR not to overstay its welcome in the continent.²¹

General Obasanjo, in his statement, welcomed the soviet involvement in Africa (in apparent response to western reactions) but cautioned as well that the soviet-should not overstay their welcome in Africa. Granted, the Assembly had passed a compromise resolution neo-colonialism and foreign military intervention. But the role of the Nigeria leader was important in getting the OAU not to only condemned the policy of force in Africa, regardless of its source, but also to reaffirm the right of every African people to choose the political system it deemed best.²²

Endnotes

1. Raph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian War: Facing the Future*, (New York: Africana Publishing Cooperation, 1971), xxi.
2. J. Abdulmumin, *Obasanjo And The New Face Of Nigeria's Foreign Policy*, (Kaduna: M.O.D Press and Publishers, 2004), 30.
3. J. J. Oluleye, *Militarily Leadership in Nigeria 1966-1979*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1985), 64.
4. O. Ogunbadejo, "Nigeria and the Great Powers, the Impact of the War on Nigerian Foreign Relations", *African Affairs*, Vol. 75, 1979, 14.
5. Ibid., 18.
6. R. Ofoegbu, *Nigerian Foreign Policy*, (Enugu: Star Printer and Publishing Company Ltd, 1978), 28.
7. Ibid.
8. Ogunbadajo, "Nigeria and the Great Power: the Impact of the Civil War on Nigerian Foreign Relation", 24.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., 25.
11. Abdulmumin, *Obasanjo and the New Face of the Nigeria Foreign Policy*, 30.
12. John J. Jorre, "The Nigerian Civil War", in R. Ofoegbu, *Nigerian Foreign Policy*, (Enugu: Star Printer and Publishing Company Ltd, 1978), 28.
13. Q.A.D. Abiola, "From Abubakar to Abubakar" *40 Years of Nigeria's Foreign Policy*, (Abuja: News Break Communications, 1989), 95
14. Ibid., 97.

15. Ibid.
16. Joe N. Garba, *Diplomatic Soldering: The Conduct of Nigerian Foreign Policy, 1975-1979*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1991), 164,
17. Ibid., 165.
18. Q.A.D. Abiola, “From Abubakar to Abubakar”, 98
19. Ibid., 99.
20. Olayinwola Abegunrin, *Nigerian Foreign Policy under Military Rule, 1966-1999* (Westport: Froneger Publishers, 2003), 70.
21. Oye Ogunbadejo, “Nigerian and Soviet Union, 1960-1985”, in G.O. Olusawa and R.A. Akindele (eds.) *Nigeria’s External Relations: The First Twenty-Five Years*, (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1986), 258.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

From the discussion, the Soviet Union is wrongly perceived as the power behind the crises in the relations between Nigeria and the West, or it is concluded hastily that Soviet Union was the principal beneficiary of these breaches in relations. Neither perception is correct. Historically, upon gaining independence, Nigeria proclaimed non-alignment in her foreign policy in the sense that it would not be tied to either of the then existing ideological divides – communism ('East') or capitalism ('West'). In reality, however, the stance of the country was far from being truly independent of the influence of the ideological blocs; Nigeria was openly, though with some little liberties, pro-west. This is understandable given her past colonial relationship with Great Britain.

During the early years of Nigeria's independence, from 1960-1966, the ruling elites were openly pro-west. Even after diplomatic relations were established, Nigeria limited the size of the Soviet mission and was reluctant to accept aid. It took two years after the official establishment of diplomatic relations for Nigeria to open her Embassy in Moscow. Nigerian ruling elites were mostly anti-Soviets; nevertheless, there were some political and organised labour elites who agitated for a closer tie with Russians. Communist literatures were banned and no Nigerian students were permitted to study in Moscow (though some Nigerian students still found their ways to Soviet Union by passing through other Nigeria's neighbouring countries).

Despite all these frustrations and cold-shoulder of the ruling elite of Nigeria of those years, under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, USSR continued to

maintain its limited contacts and encourage the development of a neutralist foreign policy. USSR reacted cautiously to the series of political crises which plagued Nigeria during its early years of independence. In 1965 the country was on the verge of anarchy and disintegration as a result of the violence and general strike ensuing from the 1964 general elections crisis.

Russia did not utilize an obvious revolutionary situation then to promote chaos and communism. Between 1964 and 1965, Russia trade with Nigeria was valued at about \$5 million. The cautious and suspicious relationship with Soviet Union continued even under the military regime of General Aguiyi Ironsi (January 15, 1966 – July 30, 1966). The relations remained circumspect and cool till the end of the regime. Then on August 1 1966 came a counter-coup, with General Yakubu Gowon emerging as the new Nigerian leader. Although, cautiously the Soviet Union welcomed the new regime, especially when it released from prison Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who was serving a prison term for treason. Chief Awolowo and his Action Group party had been sympathetic to a closer pragmatic tie with the Soviet Union. Moscow also fancied the stance of the new Gowon regime on federal structure of the Nigerian state.

The new stance of Russia on Nigeria and Africa in general was not however, unconnected with the exit of Comrade Nikiti Krushchev from the helm of affairs in Russia in 1964. The Soviet quickly denounced his policy approach to foreign affairs. A more balanced and less ideological approach was promulgated. Towards the late 1960s, the Soviet leadership became less interested in revolution in African states and more

interested in the political support of those states in their struggle to find their space in the international affairs and in the economic benefits of mutual cooperation irrespective of the nature of their internal regimes.

This new Soviet pragmatic foreign policy enabled them to take the side of the Federal government of Nigeria when General Odumegwu Ojukwu in May 30 1967 proclaimed secession of the Eastern Region of the country to form a sovereign Republic of Biafra, and civil war ensued in July 6, 1967. The exigencies of the civil war forced the Federal Government of Nigeria to court USSR. The months preceding the civil war General Gowon sent a special envoy to Moscow to explain the Nigerian government's position on the unravelling crisis and to communicate to the Soviet new leadership his (Gowon's) administration desire to maintain and develop the friendly relation with the USSR. Following this visit, a more practical discussions centered on increased trade between the two countries were made. Such rapport between Gowon's administration and the Soviet Union during these periods yielded a remarkable improvement in relationship of the two countries. Agreement on air services and on student exchanges and cultural affairs were negotiated and signed.

Subsequently, when civil war finally broke up in this offered Moscow an opportunity to become a principal arms supplier to the federalists throughout the conflict. Nigeria needed Russia's diplomatic and military support in its war efforts to defeat Biafra. Soviet involvement, on the side of the Federalists, introduced another dimension to the conflict; it enabled Nigeria to cultivate and broaden diplomatic links with the Eastern

bloc, thereby given more substance to its non-alignment foreign policy. During the civil war France and China sided with the Biafra, while Britain and USSR backed the Federal side; meanwhile United States assumed cautious neutrality.

Even though the political dividends that accrued to Soviet Union as a result of siding with the Federal side could not be compared with those gained from similar roles in some of the other major conflicts in Africa, certainly there was a new impulse in Russian-Nigerian relationships. In this context, Nigeria's relations with the USSR, particularly after the end of the civil war in 1970, were clearly based on pragmatism. After the civil war, political and economic relations with USSR became more promising. Many Soviets made machines (e.g. Lada Car, agricultural equipments and tools, etc) and home appliances found their market in Nigeria. Aeroflot Airlines started to operate regular commercial flight to Lagos. Russians became respectable people in Nigeria, most especially for their scientific achievements, which earned them successes in space

Since then several joint documents have been signed between Nigeria and Soviet (Russia). These documents include Agreements on an air communication (1967), Agreement on economic and scientific and technical cooperation (1968), Agreement on cultural and scientific cooperation and exchanges (1970), Protocol on the equivalence of scientific degrees, diplomas and certificates issued and awarded by the educational institutions of the parties (1973), Agreement on economic and technical cooperation in the construction of a new metallurgical enterprise in Nigeria (1976), Trade agreement (1987), Agreement on the establishment of intergovernmental commission on trade,

economic and scientific and technical cooperation (1989), Protocol on political consultations (1990), and Agreement on cooperation against illegal drugs and Psychotropic substances (1999). Thus, the Nigeria- Soviet relations was given impetus by the civil war, before then Nigeria has no properly constituted basic for Soviet relation. In 1968 the Soviet Union and Nigeria signed an Agreement authorizing the USSR to established Nigeria Iron and steel industry. The agreement also provided for a Soviet loan of N120 million for the project.

These agreements have led to different degrees of Soviet (Russian) involvement in Nigeria's metallurgy, petroleum industry, geological prospecting, public health services and personnel training. Two systems of oil pipelines of 920 km with total output of 18.7 million tons per year were constructed by the USSR in 1977 - 1982 on conditions of general contract in Nigeria. Russian technical assistance in the geological prospecting works on metallurgical raw material (iron ore, coal, non-metallic raw material) were carried out in 1971 - 1983. A metallurgical complex including technical school for 652 pupils and Technical Training College for an iron and steel industry for 1325 pupils was established in 1975 in Nigerian town of Warri. In various cities of the country groups of Russian doctors worked during 1971-1980. Russia has contributed a lot to the educational development of Nigeria. More than 10 thousand Nigerians have received education in USSR/Russian educational institutions since 1960s. A metallurgical plant was established in Ajaokuta to boost the industrial base of Nigerian economy (unfortunately, this goal

was not fully realized before the collapse of USSR in 1991). Bilateral trade reached its peak in 1988 at a sum of about 184 million US Dollars

The Murtal/Obasanjo made strenuous efforts to explain that they would not impose an ideology on the people of Nigeria and would not adopt socialism as their working philosophy even for the interim period of the 1976-9¹³. Economic and fiscal measure taken by this government seemed, as it were to reassure capitalists of the predominating role in the Nigerian economy. There were also government measure which emasculated the \working class as a political, social and economic force and movement in Nigeria, and as a force independent of a government that refused to embrace Marxism. There was open hostility towards Russia in parts of Nigeria which accused it of favouring the ‘quick kill’ rather than ‘peace talks’ policy during the civil war, particularly as there was no ideological explanation for its actions in Nigeria. Russia’s role in Angola was ignored Nigeria because Nigeria concentrated on what Angolans were doing and what Nigeria did to help Angola. Nigeria made no efforts to explain Russia’s role in Angola and to present Russia as a friend of Africa. Furthermore, on Angola, and recently on the issue of Shaba province and Ethiopia-Somalia war the USSR avoided contact and collaboration with Nigeria in spite of Nigeria’s effort to effect some link-up and to influence major power roles in these essentially African problems

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