

THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR AND THE INTRICASES OF USSR INVOLVEMENT

1967-1970

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by OGOMI TESTIMONY ELOZINO with matriculation number ART2100634 in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, under my supervision.

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Date

Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for his infinite grace and mercy upon my life, his loving kindness, protection and grace throughout my course of study. I also dedicate this work to my lovely family.

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This project is not just the result of my efforts but a testament to the love, strength, and community that surrounded me. I carry each of you in this achievement. This is for everyone who dared to believe in me. I hope I have made you proud!

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Introduction

Over the years, the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1979 and international involvement in the war is one of the events that have drawn much international interest. The civil war was a reign of terror in Nigeria as it resulted to loss of lives and properties. The war which was fought from 2 July, 1967 to January, 1970 was a conflict that resulted from political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions which lead the Eastern region of Nigeria declaring itself independent, an action regarded as an act of secession by the federal government of Nigeria which declare a war to re-unify the country. The war thus attracted international involvement because the war which was thought would end in a day or more catapulted into a full blown civil war. It is to this effect that the role of USSR in the Nigerian Civil war which perhaps, became the most publicized of all the interventionists in the Nigerian Civil war and which happens to be the sole aim of this research will be discussed by the researcher in details.

Nigeria just like any community of humans is a product of some historical forces that are structured, shaped, maintained and sustained in keeping with logic of change and transition and development of the politico-administrative Unit of Nigeria may be compared with the phased maturity of a man. Its birth occurred in 1900 when the British government formally assumed protectorate powers over the southern and Northern Nigeria, thus, the geographical expression "Nigeria" came into existence with Sir Frederick Lugard as the governor general. In 1914 the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria occurred and Nigeria became known as the most populous black nation on earth. Prior to the amalgamation, it should be noted that Nigeria has a history that dates back to more than two thousand years

(2, 000) ago. Its earliest people are contained in myths and legends. Nigeria contained a multiplicity of ethnic groups but also a number of great kingdoms which includes; the Kanem Bornu whose history had been maintained for more than a thousand years, the Sokoto Caliphate which survived for nearly a thousand years before the British defeated and took over it. There were highly developed city states like the Benin and Ife Kingdoms, on the other hand, the Igbo speaking people were known for the famous Igbo Ukwu bronzes and terracotta not to mention the Nupe, Tiv, Urhobo, Jukun and the people of Niger-Delta, in essence, each of these ethnic nationality had tasted nationhood independent of one another yet maintained a socio-economic relationship among themselves.

The amalgamation of these people who are ethnically, religiously, culturally and idiosyncratically different coupled with the fact that the emergent regions which existed before the merging were practically of unequal sizes, unequal population and difference in ethnic nationalism created a historical antagonism and hatred which is pictured as the sole aim of the perpetrators (colonial masters) of the amalgamation. This antagonism leads to an endless strife, crisis and conflicts which manifested in form of ethnicity, tribalism, greed, corruption etc. By 1948, decolonization process started in Nigeria and the regional consciousness which was awoken in this period created an ethnic rivalry as the quest of who would rule. Nigeria after the British dominated the minds of these ethnic groups. By 1951, political parties emerged as the instrument to be used by the regionalized ethnic groups. The three major political parties include the NCNC (The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons), the Action Congress (A.C) and the Northern People's Congress (N.P.C). All these parties were organized in accordance with the laws of the colony, yet the road which led to October 1, 1960 was long and hard.

October 1, 1960 gave birth to a renewed Nigeria, a nation of great diversity and complexity of tremendous promise and wealth its passages to independence was a bloodless

and inspiring experience yet it did not prepare the country's rulers for the reality of running a democratic federal state borne out of formerly autonomous regions. At independence, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe became the Governor general of Nigeria and Sir Tafawa Balewa the prime minister. From the year 1962, it began to rain thunder and brimstones starting from the western region in particular. It is right to say that Nigeria's failure to transform Nigeria's supposed independence all failed due to the fact that Nigeria's nationalist leaders and their methods of fighting for independence was either based on class, ethnicity and tribalism just as Ikemba Ojukwu asserts; "At independence, the true leaders of Nigeria wall chose to remain in their acquired regions, the federal centre was considered a battle field where lieutenants were given subordinate commands and specific orders".

Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Chief Obafemi Awolowo (The Big three) supposed nationalist leaders compounded things through their actions, antics and utterances. They failed to realize that no delicate or easy compromise would survive the politics of ethnic and tribal superiority, quest to dominate, competition to control the centre amidst the politics of bitterness, unfortunately those were the tactics and methods employed by the various political parties to outdo one another. According to Inno Ukaeje: "the government of Tafawa Balewa represents tribal and regional interest against national interest, as the active players were more concerned with the regions than the nation, hence the problem of corruption, patronage, disunity, sectionalization, etc became the order of the day, forcing the military officers to strike in January, 1966".

Conflicts among the major groups, the Hausa and Fulani in the North, the Yorubas in the West and the Ibos in the East as well as conflict between the minorities that dwell in these majority groups continuously threatened Nigeria's unity., The incidents that followed the 1965 election in which struggle for power from the nationalist leaders led to the manipulation of the elections up to the point of rigging. The conduct of the election caused widespread

anger which resulted in so many incidents of arson, murder, rioting and general insecurity. The conflict only came to an end after the assassination of Chief Akintola and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa the prime minister on January 15, 1966 ushering in Nigeria's first ever military coup. Major general Aguiyi Ironsi took over government putting an end to civilian rule. The coup was labeled an Ibo coup due to the fact that most of the perpetrators of the coup were Ibo officers and also because none of the top Ibo heads were assassinated. The coup was perceived by other ethnic groups as a struggle by the Ibos to dominate and take over the government. This action paved way for the counter-coup in July 1966 staged by some Northern officials in which Ironsi was assassinated and on August 7, 1966 lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon, Army Chief of Staff took over as the new leader of the country. The aftermath of the counter coup led to a systematic massacre of the Ibos in the North by the Northern Army element faced with growing tension between northerners and Ibos and the general unrest in the country following the two military coups. Major General Yakubu Gowon called for a constitutional conference to look into Nigeria's future, as the convention continued thousands of Ibos were being massacred causing a massive Ibo flight to the East.

Secessionist aspirations began to arise between the Ibo's and a man of the moment willing to play the role of a savior for his people available in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, the military governor of Eastern region, called for all easterners to return home and thousands of Ibos returned to the East as patriotic and secessionist sentiments were whipped up in the East. After abortive attempts to quench the fire that was already burning tremendously by Nigerian military leaders at Aburi, QJana, Gowon declared a national state of emergency and divided the country into twelve states. The Eastern Nigerian Consultative Assembly under Ojukwu reacted the same day and gave Ojukwu the power to declare the region independent. On May 30, 1967, Ojukwu declared his republic of Biafra. War

eventually broke on the 6th July 1967 between the federal troops and Biafra forces when the federal government announced it was taking action to end the rebellion in Eastern Nigeria.

The war which was thought by many to end in a matter of days catapulted into a bloody war due to the fact that Ojukwu refused to give up and deliberately sought and canvassed for international involvement thereby taking the war out of the territory of Nigeria leaving the federal troops who were short of aid and military facilities to also turn to the outside world for assistance bringing this research to the major aim of its work "USSR involvement in the Nigerian Civil War", which is termed the most publicized of all the interventionists in the Nigerian civil war.

Aim and Objectives

USSR involvement in the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970 as the title of this research work is an account of the positive and negative involvement of Soviet Union to the outcome of the Nigerian Civil war.

The aim of this research work strives to account for the major contributions of USSR to the outcome of the Nigerian Civil War. While the objectives includes;

1. To show the relationship that existed between USSR and Nigerian before the civil war and how Nigeria accepted Soviet Union.
2. To show that the misconception of the USSR does not correspond with her policy which will be proven not only based on her military and political relations but also her economic relations will also be pointed out, this treatment is significant realizing the fact that politics and economics goes pari-pasu, hence each of them can seldom be discussed in isolation.
3. This study sets out on the purpose of investigating and examining the political and military relations that existed between the USSR and Nigeria from 1967-1970.

Having listed the above, one may ask the following questions: How did USSR perceive Nigeria before the civil war and what was the latter response? Secondly, what were the forces responsible for the responses of Nigeria to the USSR from 1967-1970? Thirdly, how did USSR-Nigeria relation turned out after the Civil war? This research topic will certainly provide answers to the above questions.

Scope of the Study

To provide adequate answer to the above questions, the study has found it pertinent to limit its scope to the period of three years, starting from the outbreak of the civil war to the end of it (1967-1970). This is to enable the researcher to deal better in narrating, explaining and putting down the accurate detailed information of the relation between Soviet Union and Nigeria during the Nigerian Civil War. This period is not only to illuminate the attitude of the Soviet Union toward Nigeria and the latter's response during the war, but also to look at the event that necessitated the acceptance of Soviet relationship by Nigeria during the war and the changes that occurred in the aftermath of the civil war. Michael P. Gehien throws much light on Soviet foreign policy by showing how Nigeria started to participate in foreign aid program of that country in 1963.²

Research Methodology

In attempting to give a detailed or explicit explanation, this study has mainly depended on secondary methods. This accounts for the numerous textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines and other materials that are conducted. Textbooks and materials written by both foreign and African authors precisely.

Literature Review

It is not easy to find a text/article that treats Soviet Union involvement in the Nigerian civil war. It is in this understanding that heavy reliance is placed on various texts with

fragmentary information on the Nigerian civil war and Soviet Union involvement in the war. There is diverse views on the topic under review by different authors most of who invested and committed a considerable part of their time and lives to serious research, introspection and exposition of the various factors that shaped the course of events in Nigeria from 1967-1970 most of which include;

Nigeria Since Independence: The civil war years by Tekena N. Tamuno and Samson C. Ukpabi. This book provided valuable insights deeply explained with over forty (40) documents selectively constructed on the origins, the course and events including the consequences of the civil war. It did not fail to bring into the text the major newspapers, magazines, radio, television station throughout the world sought to bring home to their respective readers, listeners and viewers the grim facts of the Nigerian civil war. It did not only made mention of the changing sets of actions and reactions during the civil war in such areas like war and peace, security, citizenship and sovereignty but also reflects on the economies of the civil war, scientific and technological aspect of the war and the roles of international countries in the civil war.³

Also in the opinion of George Obiozor in his book, *uneasy friendship: Nigeria/U.S Relations*. This book will help us understand better not just on the origin of the civil war but also on the roles played by foreign countries in the Nigerian crisis. In chapter 3, the author explained the relationship that existed between Nigeria and Soviet Union before the war. George stated that Soviet Union was never closely associated with Nigeria in any conspicuous way before the civil war due to the strong anti-communist and pro-western foreign policy of the Nigerian civil leaders which made Soviet Union the most unwanted guest in Nigeria. The author also explained the factors that necessitated the change of policy during the civil war and the length of assistance Soviet Union provided to Nigeria during the civil war.⁴

According to W.W Kulski in his book: the Soviet Union in world affairs. He did not only analyze on how Soviet Union contributed immensely to the victorious outcome of the war on the side of the federal government but also pointed out crucial reasons why Soviet Union decided to assist in the Nigerian civil war. According to Kulski: "it is therefore obvious why the Soviet Union rendered assistance to the Nigerian federal government during the civil war Kuiski pointed out that the Soviet did not support Nigeria because she wanted the unity of Nigeria but because the organization for African Unity (OAU) had thrown its weight behind the unity of Nigeria federation. The Soviet Union would have done otherwise if the OAU had favored the secessionists' movement".⁵

Jay Klinghoffer "The Soviet Union and Africa" Roger E. Kanet in the Soviet Union and Developing Nations. He stated: "It is to be noted that though the Soviets assistance to Nigeria during the civil war increased that country's relation with Nigeria, the latter has not change its moderate foreign policy and is still economically linked with both the United States and Great Britain".⁶

Okechukwu C.J. Asuzu the author of thebook "the politics of Being Nigerian". This book help in understanding the causes, strategies that was implored and lesson learnt from the Nigerian civil war but more importantly he outline how both parties in the war sought for international aid which at first wasn't the intention of the federal troops judging from the fact that Nigeria has the capacity to deal with her internal affairs the Eastern region first sought for international aid using all sorts of propaganda living the federal government no choice, he went further to state how Soviet Union presented an opportunity which left the federal government no choice than to accept due to the position and situation of the war.⁷

In John Stremlau; the international politics of the Nigerian civil war 1967-1970: He explained how Nigerian's pro-western and anti-Soviet stances came to an end following the

sharp reversal in Nigerian foreign relations in 1967 at the outbreak of the civil war. He enumerated the role played by prominent politicians like Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe in trying to proffer solutions to the cause of the civil war, he defined Gowon as veritable independent actor who was guided solely by objective requirements of the national interest had no other option but to welcome Soviet relations during the war. Furthermore, he gave an explicit explanation on the role Soviet Union played militarily and economically in the Nigerian civil war and also did not fail to acknowledge the observation made by Douglas Anglin: "Nigeria-Soviet relations are determined by the images which each country has of the other".⁸

An European Scientific Journal on Nigeria-Russia Relations after and now by Edgar Agubamah: explicitly discussed the relations between Nigeria and Soviet Union and how it reached its highest crescendo during the Nigerian civil war. The author explained the great support given to Nigeria during the civil war by the Soviet Union through supplying military aids to the Nigerian armed force and how it opened the door to a great deal of opportunities for developing a long-lasting, broad relationship in the security, political, economic and socio-cultural spheres.⁹

In an article written by Abimbola Damilola titled Russia-Nigeria Diplomatic ties: Abimbola explained that the diplomatic ties between Nigeria and Soviet Union started over fifty five (55) years ago when it opened an embassy in Lagos in 1961 with Ambassador Feodo, Parlonch Doya as the head of the mission, Nigeria then reciprocated in 1962 in Moscow with Ambassador C.O Ifeagwu as the head. He explained further how Soviet Union offered to assist the federal government in the Nigerian Civil war and how the demands of the crisis forced the federal troops to court Soviet Union. The article gave a clear picture of how Soviet Union militarily and diplomatically supported in the civil war to defeat the successionist.¹⁰

Also, a book titled Nigeria: The Birth of Africa's greatest country, 7 volume two, from the pages of Drum which consists of different articles, magazines and newspapers on the causes, manifestation, international involvement and outcome of the civil war and also lessons, impact of the war, will be found clearly explained in this text.

Michael P. Gehlen in his book: the politics of Coexistence, Soviet Methods and Motives: throws much light on Soviet Foreign Policy by showing how Nigeria started to participate in foreign aid program of that country in 1963. This goes a long way to prove that Nigeria at independence had not been engaged in any "aid relation with the Soviet Union as shall be explicitly discussed in chapter two of this research work.

Also articles on newspapers and magazines e.g Philips, Jr quotes from the house of representative debates, Nov. session 1960 pp 61 and also lectures I attended will be distinctly reviewed in the course of this study.

Chapterization

This research topic will be divided into five chapters by the researcher so as to enable the researcher do an explicit and clean research to make this project topic an accurate one.

Chapter One: The first of these chapters is the introductory aspect. The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint the reader with the general ideas of the study. Which includes: Background to Study, Aim and Objectives of the Study, Scope of Work, Method of Data Collection, Literature Review and its Chapterization, to be concluded with endnotes.

Chapter Two: This chapter deals with the historical background: to examine the relationship that existed between Soviet Union and Nigeria from pre-independence, if there was any it

shall be briefly discussed. It shall also discuss Nigeria's post-independence relationship with Soviet Union from 1960-1966 before the civil war years.

Chapter Three: This chapter deals with an overview of the Nigerian civil war, cause, the nature of the war and how it came to involve international powers.

Chapter Four: This chapter explicitly explores the involvement of USSR in the Nigerian Civil war from 1967-1970.

Chapter Five: Chapter five deals with the summary, conclusion.

Endnotes

1. A book titled: 'Nigeria' The Birth of Africa's greatest country, 7 volume two, from the pages of Drum Magazine compiled and edited by Sally Dyson: Spectrum Books Limited Ibadan. R.A. Bailey 1998 first published in South Africa in 1993 by Bailey's African photo Archives.
2. Michael P. Genlen: Qualities of Coexistence Soviet Methods & Motives: West Port Connecticut, 1967.pp 180-184
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7. The Politics of Being Nigeria by Okechukwu Jones Asuzu'published in North Carolina 2006, U.S.A by Lulu Enterprises, 860 Aviation Parkway, Suite 300, Morrville, NC 27 560, printed in Nigeria 2007.
8. John Stremlau; the International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970: Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1977.
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CHAPTER TWO

PREVIEW OF NIGERIA-USSR RELATION 1960-1966

In Nigeria, the Soviet Union has often been wrongly perceived, from one time to another, the country has constantly been viewed with not only suspicion but also with contempt as a result of the myth of "Soviet abhorrence of peace." This myth has been planted in minds of both the Nigerian leaders and the society at large, mainly the educated ones by the departed colonial powers. This has been possible because of the country's relationship with the west whom was opposed to their former colonies having cordial relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Soviet Union has often been regarded as a threat to the existence of world peace in that she aids liberation movements in various countries. A large number of Nigerian citizens especially, Nigerian leaders never pondered on the authenticity of this myth against the Soviet Union.

At independence, the Soviet perceived Nigeria as a surrogate of British imperialism, however, Nigeria's independence was seen as contributing to the disintegration of imperialism and thus the Soviet Union had the hope that Nigeria would shortly change her position, for she would welcome communism due to its opposition to colonialism. There was however, a great disappointment in that upon independence in 1960 Nigeria proclaimed itself to be "non-aligned" in the cold war conflict and equidistant between the two super powers and the two blocs they led. The reality however was different as the Nigerian leader preferred to be west oriented and did not want to see eye-to-eye with the eastern bloc.¹

The first indication of Nigeria's western orientation was the Anglo-Nigeria Defense pact which Nigeria's leaders had signed in 1958 under colonial tutelage and which was retained after independence. The pact stated that Nigeria would acquire modern weapons, training and technical assistance in return for Britain maintaining military facilities in Lagos

and Kano. The pact also allowed both countries "complete and unrestricted rights over each other's air space". How Nigeria would have put into practice this privilege was any one's guess as it lacked both an air force at the time and a strategic need to project power over Northern Europe even if had one. But then realizing the conservatism of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), one will not be surprised for this finitude it is recalled that the Nigerian government from the period of independence till the army take over in January, 1966 was controlled by the party in coalition with the NCNC under the leadership of Dr. Michael Okpara. The coalition was necessitated by the fact that though NPC won the general elections of 1959, the party was not able to obtain the majority needed to form the government. It is worth pointing out that forming a government in 1959 required a party to control more than half of the 312 seats in the house of representative i.e. $(312 \div 2)^+1 = 157$ seats). In essence, not less than 157 seats had to be obtained by the party that was to form the government. The coalition government was headed by Sir Tafawa Balewa (Deputy President of NPC) while the AG under the leadership of Chief O. Awolowo was in opposition. It should be noted that initially there was no ideological difference between the above named parties not only were all of them ethnic oriented -NPC belonged to the Hausa, while NCNC was for the Igbo and A.G, Yoruba but also capitalist oriented considering the personalities that constituted these parties. AG which had advocated capitalism and an intimate friendship with the west before independence later switched over to "democratic socialism", NCNC's "Pragmatism socialism" could highly be equated with the "welfare state" which did not go beyond the provision of free education, free health and full employment.

The foregoing attests to the party's claim that "pragmatic socialism" was not the same with communism and did not imply that relations should not be established with the eastern bloc. Now fully aware from the above that the conservative NPC was the senior partner in the coalition government between the party and NCNC, it will be pertinent to look at the Nigerian

foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union from 1960-1966, the attitudes of the political leaders during the period are worth treating for a clear picture of relations that ensued. The period 14-29 Nov, 1960 witnessed the first parliamentary meeting after independence. It was during this period that the Anglo-Nigerian defense pact was presented at the house of Rep for approval by Aihaji Ahmadu Ribadu, the Minister of Defense. Although, the pact had been signed in 1958 by all the political parties' leaders, Chief Awolowo later opposed it on the ground that the sovereignty of the country would be in jeopardy. When he was challenged as to why he previously signed the Defense pact, he defended himself by saying that "the four of US were bundled to No 10 Downing Street and were asked to initial this document on the understanding that unless this document was initialed it would not be possible for her majesty's government to make a declaration fixing the date for our independence. There is no doubt in my opinion that Awolowo previously signed this pact so that Nigeria might be given her independence in 1960. In spite of the resolution passed in the house of representative in favor of the defense pact, stiff opposition came from the Nigerian students and other interest groups. The opposition posed by various interest groups led to the abrogation of the defense pact in January, 1962.

The issue of diplomatic recognition and opening of embassies was another indicator of Nigeria's unequivocal western choice during this period. In spite of leaning towards the west and the abhorrence of communism by the Nigeria Government from 1960-1966, Soviet Union was still interested in Nigeria becoming a socialist state. It is not surprising therefore that "ideological struggle became more pronounced in the Nigeria political scene" when the socialist workers and farmers party (SWAFP) was formed in 1963 it is worth mentioning here that a communist party had been formed in 1961 but was stifled into political oblivion by the ethnically based parties NPC, NCNC, and AG. The adoption by SWAFP of the ideology of "Scientific socialism" must have goaded the Soviet to favor its formation. No sooner was the

party formed than it established relations with the communist party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The Nigerian Trade Congress (NTUC) and the Nigeria Youth Congress (NYC) became identified with SWAFP. As a communist party SWAFP was looked up with scorn by the two alliances.² United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and Nigeria National Alliance (NNA) comprising of A.G, NCNC, and their allies, and NPC and its allies respectively, that emerged on the eve of the 1964 federal elections.

Soon after independence Soviet officials keen to cultivate ties and expand contacts in Africa, approached Nigerian officials with a view to establishing diplomatic relations. The advance was rebuffed. However, A.G ostensibly pressed vigorously for the establishment of relations with not only the USSR but also with the establishment of relations with not only the USSR but also with the Eastern countries. The NYC and other interest groups were not left out of these pressures for they also leveled criticisms for the non-establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR. It will be recalled that apart from refusing to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR, the Nigerian government deprived the citizens of their rights and choice of studying in that country. In addition, the banning of Soviet Literature was "humdrum" during the Balewa's regime. Vocal domestic opposition and the need to maintain an image of non-alignment eventually made the government reconsider its decision. The Soviet Union was finally granted permission to open its Lagos Embassy in May, 1961 five months after independence. Nigeria reciprocated a year later and opened its Moscow Embassy in 1962. "An institute of Army Education Study on-Nigeria's Foreign Policy, 1960-1976", describes the restrictions that were placed on the Soviet Mission after the embassy was opened. "when the Soviet embassy was established in Lagos in 1961, the number of its diplomatic staff was limited to ten whereas no such restrictions was placed on the diplomatic missions of West European countries or the United States of America, the Soviet Embassy was allocated a paltry figure of five diplomatic car plates whereas Britain and the United

States of America were entitled to one hundred each. It can therefore be asserted that even the opening of the Soviet embassy was grudgingly conceded: a camouflage to the outside world that Nigeria was non-aligned.³

Also, Eghosa Osaghae, a scholar of Nigeria's political history, reflecting on Nigeria's foreign policy in the First Republic (1960-1966), said: 'relations with Britain and the West were conducted in a manner that sometimes cast doubts on the country's independence'.⁴ Even when a diplomatic mission had been opened, an Ambassador was never granted /appointed until 1963. Nigeria accredited her first Ambassador, Dr. C.O. Ifeagwu to the Soviet Union on October 7, 1963. Prior to this period, the Nigerian embassy was under a charge d' Affairs. It will not be an over-estimation to conclude that Nigeria was not fair to the Soviet Union in the accreditation of ambassadors when it is realize that ambassadors had been given to the United Kingdom, U.S.A and Western Germany before the Soviet Union was given attention.

With respect to trade, though Nigeria granted licenses to businessmen to import from the Soviet Union shortly after independence, it was not until 1963 that a trade agreement was signed between the two countries. In spite of this agreement, Nigeria did not increase her trade with the USSR, it might interest us to know that while foreign investments and aid were sought and attracted from Washington (and of course London), the Balewa government refused to accept aid from the western powers" this must have contributed to why Dr. B.U. Nzeribe challenged the Minister of Finance Sir. F. Okotie Eboh in the house of Rep in April, 1964-for the federal government's failure to make effort to receive economic aid from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries.⁵

Educationally, the Soviet Union had wanted to exert its influence in the country by granting scholarships to Nigerian students to study in that country. In spite of the already

established relations between the two countries, the bottlenecks placed in the way of Nigerian students wishing to study in the USSR were still imminent. This is borne out by the fact in 1963, the Soviet Union awarded 45 scholarships to Nigeria, but the reluctance of the Nigeria government was evident by its receiving only 11 out of these scholarships. From this, one is justified to conclude that though the Soviet Union Endeavour to foster relations with the country by making various gestures to the Nigerian government, the latter's lukewarm and non-challant attitude to the former prevented the expansion of the scope of cooperation between the two countries.

One may at this junction want to know why Nigerian government at independence till the military takeover in 1966 looked at the Soviet Union not only with suspicion but also with naked hatred. The reason for this is not far-fetched, four factors best explain Nigeria's strong pro-western orientation and cold relations with the Soviet Union during this period.

The hostility of Nigeria's ruling elites towards communism and its atheist ethos led to the pervasive suspicion of the Soviet Union. The Nigerian's ruling party in the first Republic, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), was led by the most conservative part of the Nigerian establishment-the North's aristocratic class. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, was said to harbor a deep seated fear of communism, 70 Northern Nigeria's ruling class, expanding ties with the Soviet Union beyond what was minimally necessary was perceived as a threat to the country's religious and social order. As noted earlier, diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union were only established following pressure from domestic opposition. Aid and bilateral agreements from the Eastern Bloc were rejected. According to Eghosa Osaghae; "Nigeria pursued a policy that bordered on hostility towards the USSR and other members of the Eastern Block-this was partly informed by Balewa's personal fear of the dangers of communism. The Nigerian government placed restrictions on travel to the Eastern Bloc countries and communist literature. Anti-communist sentiments went beyond the Northern

establishment. In a tour of the United States a week before independence, Jaja Wachukwu, speaker of the then House of Representatives and an influential South-Eastern politician, confidently declared to his American hosts: "Communism does not exist in Nigeria and cannot expect to exist".⁶

The secondly, was the deep sentimental affection which the ruling elite at the time still felt for the former colonial power, Britain. Ibrahim Gambari, one of Nigeria's most respected diplomats and a foreign affairs minister in 1984-1985, explaining why the Nigerian leaders retained the Anglo-Nigeria Defense Pact after independence, said: "The Political climate and attitude of Nigerian leaders just before independence were such that any apparently reasonable British demand would be agreed to, it seemed therefore that the defense agreement was another dimension of the generally warm, though uneven relations between Nigeria and Britain. A survey of the attitudes of the country's political leaders conducted in the 1960's underscores Nigeria's pro-western orientation during this period. 100 federal legislators, selected through random sampling, were asked how Nigeria should position itself in the cold war conflict. 50% said the country should be neutral, 41% said the country should be aligned with the west, whereas a meager 2% expressed preference for an alignment with the Soviet Union.

British colonialism had helped to fully incorporate Nigeria into the international capitalist order"—therefore as recently decolonized, less developed country on the margins of the western capitalist system, Nigeria's economic and technological underdevelopment inevitably placed it in a relationship of dependence on the west for its social and economic development. Britain's imperial departure from Nigeria had been a negotiated exit which removed the empires political presence but kept the economic umbilical cords connecting the former colony to its metropolis firmly in place. Consequently, Nigeria's foreign investment and trade patterns continued to be dominated by Britain. Banks such as Barclays

and Lyoyds dominated Nigerian finance. Two British companies-John Holt and United Africa Company (UAC)-had a near monopoly on the trading, import-export, manufacturing and distribution sectors. The UAC for e.g. controlled 41.3% of the country's import and export trade. Similarly, the first National Development Plan (1962-1968), heavily depended on western finance to realize its goals. The NDP was the government's master plan to place the country on the path to economic development and industrialization. 50% of its funding, however, was to be sourced from western countries and western led international financial institutions (IFI) such as IMF and the World Bank.⁷

The cold war tension provides the fourth lens through which to view Nigeria's inability to build enduring ties with the Soviet Union during this period. Europe's imperial powers, weakened by the devastations of WWII and unable to reverse the growing tide of nationalism in their colonies, sought instead to replace direct imperial control with loose spheres of influence. This they felt would not only preserve their privileged access to natural resources in the newly independent states, but also enable them to maintain the pretense of great power status in a world now unquestionably dominated by two super powers. The denouncement of Europe's empires in the 1950s and 1960s however also coincided with the period when cold war tensions reached their peak; the Korean war of 1950-53, the beginning of the breakdown of the Sino-Soviet alliance in the mid-1950's, the victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the Berlin crisis of 1958-1961, and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, all profoundly destabilized super power relations between the United States and the Soviet.

For Nigeria therefore, the highly adversarial cold war environment of the early 1960's and the country's dependence on the West for its economic development sharply curtailed its freedom of action on the global stage. An "identity of interests, values and ideological orientation between the Nigerian ruling elite and their western counterparts" further placed distance between Nigeria and the Soviet Union during this period.⁸

In this chapter, we realize that the scope of cooperation between the Soviet Union and Nigeria was at a very low ebb from 1960-1966, the forces which were responsible for the establishment of the limited relations that existed are elucidated, it was also stated that the disappointment felt by the Soviet Union had not promoted her to abandon the country. Her continued interest made her persist to maintain cordial relations with the Nigeria government. The latter we have observed, was however uncooperative, the reasons which have been analyzed in this chapter. I shall now focus my attention on the next chapter which deals with the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE INTRICASES OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR 1967-1970

Most great nations of the world have at one time or another experienced some crises. Some like the United States of America had gone through civil wars in the course of their convincing efforts at nation building. The experience of United States bears semblance to that of Nigeria. America like Nigeria was a colony of Britain. It is a multinational and multiethnic society with a huge human and material endowment.

The Nigerian civil war serves as a reminder to every Nigerian of the country's fair share of crises in its bid to achieve national unity. Since her independence from Britain on 1 October, 1960, no single event has shaken the new Nigerian nation to its very foundation as much as the civil war of July, 1967 to January, 1970. The war was the climax of the various political circumstances in which the nation strategically found itself before and especially immediately following independence even though the circumstances that could engender conflicts and crises had never been lacking in pre and post-independence Nigeria few people envisaged that the country would so easily drift into a civil war. This is because in every society conflict is endemic and can in most cases, be resolved without resorting to violence or war.

Although, politics in itself is supposed to be an instrument of conflict resolution but the mere fact that politics is defined in terms of who gets what, how and why point to its inherent problems which could result to clash of interest therefore were there are no adequate structures and commitment to regulate politics and to ensure a peaceful resolution of conflicts, clashes of interests might take the centre stage thereby leading to brinkmanship and threatening the peace and stability and the very survival of the entire system. This is why the great Prussian General, Carl von Clausewitz defines war essentially as... a mere continuation

of policy by other means" not just merely a political act, but also a real political instrument. This simply means that war takes over from the point politics reaches a dead end and vice versa. It is instructive to note that by January, 1966 politics in Nigeria whether by design or default, had been taken to a dead end. Even after the coup d'etat of January 15, 1966 and what has come to be known as the revenge coup of 29 July, 1966 combined to cause a drift of the nation since independence, particularly from 1963, into a state of war and, ultimately, the civil war.

A fragile polity which needed to be managed with skill and dexterity, the Nigerian nation was plunged into crisis in January, 1966 by elements regarded by some as revolutionaries, idealistic by others and ethnic adventurers by many. The effect of the January, 1966 coup no doubt marked the beginning of the disaster and tragedy which befell Nigeria's fragile polity in the form of civil war from 1967 to 1970. It is instructive at this point to highlight the fact that the Nigerian civil war was never a war of attrition (as miscalculated by many judging from the propaganda implored by Ojukwu directed both at the Biafran enclave and the outside world) rather it was one embarked upon to unite the Nigerian nation particularly after drift towards the war in 1966, whereas the Federal Government under General Yakubu Gowon sought to employ what it termed a police action to compel the erstwhile government of Eastern Region to rescind its declaration of secession from Nigeria, Odumegwu Ojukwu was set to enforce by all means the self-declared sovereignty of Eastern region as the "Republic of Biafra". In order to understand the background and setting against which this crisis and subsequent war developed, it will be necessary to classify the developments before the war in terms of specific turning points; Pre-January, 1966 and Post-January, 1966

It contains the various historical and socio-political foundations of the events of January, 1966 and beyond. It contains the historical origins of the Nigerian crisis, the

problems that led to the 15th of January, 1966 coup and other subsequent event, the answer lies right back at the beginning. One point that is often forgotten is that Nigeria was simply not sufficiently united for the great plunge. It was a country with the largest population in all Africa countries-56million areas, Nigeria was one of the largest of African countries covering everything from sandy deserts in the North to tropical rain forest in the South, what is more, it contained more than 200 different ethnic groups. After year of political wrangling, Nigeria was created by Britain and built on compromise, dependent on playing the game by rules as complicated and gentlemanly as cricket the extraordinary thing was that between 1960-64 the game with so much at stake actually worked. True and big politicians drove their sleek Mercedes and spent money with buccaneering bravado. True, big foreign contractors lined the pockets of many other ministers with bribes. True unemployment remained high, trade union weak and social injustice lived on but politically and economically things worked people voted democratically. The old leaders of Zik, Balewa and Awolowo could still draw the cheering crowds. They represented widely different groups but they couldstill work together with democratic give and take. The Nigerian press wasfree and outspoken. Foreign businessmen poured in with their money to see Nigeria through the first stages of Africa's greatest industrial revolution.

After independence, Nigeria adopted and followed the British system of parliamentary and democratic politics at both federal and regional levels. At first it was smooth-sailing but because the foundation for discord had been laid when the regions were given too much autonomy to the detriment of the centre, a number of problems soon emerged. Apart from structural imbalance, three other complementary factors combined to institutionalize crisis and division in Nigeria prior to independence and beyond. These were the conflict of values between the North and South, the colonial policy of separate

development between the two geographical zones and the disunity among the politicians from all three regions.

First, the North had an established political, administrative and judicial system which it inherited from the nineteenth century Islamic revolution (Jihad) modeled on Islam, its codified judicial fiscal and administrative systems made the region suspicious of an alien system which espoused different types of values. The lukewarm attitude of the region towards western education can be understood in this context. The South, on the other hand was receptive to the western value system of which education formed an integral aspect. The south therefore, took an early lead in western education and the associated cultures and administrations and commerce.

The second issue was the ethnicization of politics very early in Nigeria's political history. Kunle Amuwo (1992), explains it thus: the formal infiltration of ethnicity into Nigerian body politics is traceable to the crisis which rocked the Nigerian youth movement (NYM) in 1934 over the replacement of Kofo Abayomi in the legislative council. The movement was divided over the candidacy of Ernest Ikoli and Samuel Akinsanya.² In the end, Akinsanya got the mandate but Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe felt that Ikoli, an Ijaw man and a founding member of the movement had been short-changed. He consequently pulled out of the NYM with a number of other Igbo members as well as the Ijebu Yoruba and formed the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons in 1941 (NCNC). Soon, the NCNC assumed an Igbo character and by 1959 it had become largely an eastern party. In the west, Chief Awolowo had established a Yoruba Cultural Association, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa which metamorphosed into the Action Group (A.G) majorly dominated by the Yorubas and lastly in the North another cultural association, Jamiya mutanen Arewa (Association of Northern people) was transformed into a political party, the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC). This completed the formation of political parties that were regional in outlook. These parties that

were regional in outlook subsequently formed the basis of the politics and the intense rivalry that characterized relations between the various components of the federation in later years.

After the 1959 elections the NPC won a majority of the seats, in alliance with the NCNC, the NPC formed the post-independence national government. Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa remained the prime minister. The A.G however, chose to be in the opposition. This set the stage for the events that were to follow in the western region. Awolowo who vacated that the position of premier of western Region to oppose the winning party still lost the election and failed to gain majority seats in the parliament, he at the same time sought to control the government of western region which was handed over to Akintola when he Awolowo vacated his position, Akintola refused to this arrangement and crises rocked the party leading to the expulsion of Akintola from the party in 1962, the crisis led the federal declare a state of emergency in the Western region due to the fact that the disagreement between supporters of Awolowo and those of Akintola grew to the stage that it seriously threatened the security of the western region and to some extent the stability of the whole country not until the federal government intervened and declared a state of emergency in the region, restriction orders were served on most of the leading politicians in the region and the regional government was suspended on the ground that it had exceeded its constitutional powers. Chief Awolowo and 27 others were arrested on charges of treasonable felony and after a trial which lasted about eight months, a Lagos High Court presided over by Justice Sowe-wimo found Chief Awolowo guilty and served him ten years imprisonment. At the end the state of emergency was lifted and Chief Akintola returned to head a reconstituted government of the Western region.

Also, the 1963 census was a problem in Nigeria owing to disagreements over the figures. The results published in 1964 gave Nigeria at that time the tenth largest population. In Northern region as 29.8 million, the Eastern region as 12.4million and the west including Lagos at 12.4 million. Since representation in the federal house of representative at that time

was based on population. The effect of this was to ensure permanent overall majority for the Northern Region, a situation which was not viewed with pleasure from the Eastern and western regions and was responsible for much of the political controversy of that period.³

In 1964, four years after independence, Nigeria experienced its first major and more serious political upheaval with the federal elections of December 30th. From many accounts the elections were neither free nor fair. Major malpractices were reported from different parts of the country and 1965 started with a major national crisis as a result of these elections. Basically major upheavals were avoided because power lay in the hands of an uneasy alliance between the traditional Fulani Hausas of the North NPC and the Ibo dominated NCNC of the East as long as these groups remained united, the federal government was secure. But to cut the long story short, the North was not content merely with the arrangement, not happy with its more radical eastern allies and hoped to gain allies also in the Yoruba west. Besides, the minorities were beginning to demand self-determination.

Having survived yet another national crisis, Nigeria continued precariously in its search for peace and national unity, unfortunately peace was not easy to find and another major national crisis soon erupted to inflict a fatal blow to the country's dying parliamentary democracy of the first republic. The complications of the western politics which resulted to every possible electoral malpractice, kidnapping, riots, disturbances, killing and popular unrest in the west. Sir Abubakar Balewa (Nigerian Prime Minister) was either unwilling or unable to intervene and quell the violence. Underneath the surface, the real trouble was that the old power balance with the North and its eastern allies on the one side and the west on the other hand had been destroyed. Therefore, the seeds of regional and ethnic rivalries, bitterness, communal interplay, intra-party and electoral struggles that characterized Nigeria's immediate post-independence period ushered in the first Nigerian coup d'etat on January 15, 1966 to put an end to the political logjam that had afflicted Nigeria in the immediate past.⁴

15th January, 1966 marked the beginning of military intervention in Nigerian politics and the transformation of organized (military) force into an instrument for pursuing political objectives. In a way, it marked the drift of Nigeria into the civil war of 1967-70. The military intervened to clean up the political mess into which the country had been thrown. The coup was carried out under the leadership of major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu and it took place in five different centers almost simultaneously -Lagos, Benin, Ibadan, Enugu and Kaduna. The coup was successful in Ibadan and Kaduna as majorly the Northern politicians were killed namely the Nigerian Prime Minister Sir. Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the premier of the North Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Chief Si. Akintola and some senior officers. The coup was unsuccessful in Benin and Enugu and in Lagos it became foiled halfway through the event.

In his book *A COMADANT IN GOVERNMENT* BRIGADIER DAVID JEMIBEWON, military governor of the western and later Oyo State of Nigeria from 1975-1978, gave five reasons for the intervention of the military in politics in Africa and other third world regime. The inability of the civilian regimes to govern, the corruption of the political leaders, The absence of peaceful change of government, the tendency on the part of army officers to emulate their colleague who have staged military coup in other countries, the personal and political ambition on the part of the officer corps.⁵

As regards the January, 1966 coup, the last two reasons obviously did not apply to the leaders of that coup, although the first three were conspicuously present. From the picture already pointed of the political and social problems facing the country during the first five years of independence the stage and obviously been set for military intervention, there were a number of unpopular government decisions, corruption was the order of the day, tribalism in its worst form was a permanent way of life and above all the whole democratic process had been destroyed or seriously threatened by election malpractices and this resulted in a general

lack of confidence in the government. The January coup which came to be known as the coup of the five majors was very well received by Nigerians from different parts of Nigeria who felt that the revolution would lead to emergence of a new Nigeria free from all political and social injustice that prevailed in the country's body politic. But with time, people started questioning the motives of the coup, the pattern of killings and the ethnic origin of the majority of the coup leaders in the execution of the coup, the killings and the ethnic origin of the majority of the coup leaders in the execution of the coup, the killings were generally one sided and bloody and the Northern region suffered the greatest casualties both in military and political terms, also the fact that Aguiyi Ironsi assumed office instead of the coup plotters raised eastern sentiments among the North.

Finally, Northern feelings erupted in the riots of May, 29 in which an estimated 3000 Ibos residents in the Northern were massacred, two months later came Nigerian's second coup in which general Aguiyi Ironsi and most of the Ibo officers outside their own eastern region were killed. This led to massive exodus of the Ibos not just those who had fled the North but others who felt that the same thing might happen in Lagos, they fled with hatred of the North and lack of confidence in the federal government it was under these difficult and unsettling circumstances that Lieutenant Colonel Gowon assumed office so as to settle the problems.

Firstly, he set up in the regions consultative conferences for constitutional review. These conferences were to come up with proposals on a political structure for the nation. At this point Odumegwu-Ojukwu who refused to recognize the authority of Gowon as Head of State on the basis that Gowon by rank is not meant to be the head of state, Ojukwu in the conference pointed out the need to reorganize the federation in view of what the Igbo had suffered and also for the right to secede, the Midwest was of the view that the federation continued as one with a correction of past injustices and resolution of basic conflict with the assurance of civil liberties of the people. In the end, the mid-west views were endorsed by all

except the east. Soon after this conference another riot broke out in the North following reports that Northerners were being attacked and killed in the east. The remaining Ibos became the victims, of massive attacks this fact reinforced Odumegwu Ojukwu's intransigence and provided greater justification for his viewpoint that this was as planned "genocide" against the Igbo.

The federal government at this time had deployed all its resources to stop the carnage. It also voted large sums of money to assist displaced Igbo in the east. The lump sum of E500,000.00 was in the opinion of some people used by Odumegwu-Ojukwu to purchase the first set of arms. Following these second series of massacre, those easterners in the North who survived the killings had to find their way back to the eastern region. It is estimated that about one million easterners, returned to their villages in the east, the result was that many of the returnee had to become refugees in their own country. Ojukwu's government was faced with the task of setting these refugees who had no relation or family to lean on. Faced with this gigantic refugee problem, the eastern regional government ordered that non-easterners must leave the east for their own safety and also to solve some of the refugee problem. Colonel Ojukwu also declared that he would no longer attend any further meetings in Lagos until his personal safety was assured. At this point, all the representatives of the government of Eastern Nigeria attending the ad hoc constitutional conference in Lagos were withdrawn leading to the adjournment of the meeting indefinitely without any desired objectives achieved. Once again, Nigeria lost another opportunity of achieving a peaceful settlement of this major national crisis.

Another effort was undertaken by the Head of State of Ghana, General Ankrah at Aburi Ghana beginning from 4th January, 1967 in a bid to help arrest Nigeria's further drift. Most Nigerians on hearing that Gowon, Ojukwu and all other military leaders were in Ghana attending a meeting of the Nigerian Supreme military council which would probably settle

the political crises were surprise and at the same time happy that once again peace and stability would be returned, the proceedings of the meeting were reasonably cordial unfortunately subsequent events proved the opposite as the two delegations ie the Nigerian federal delegation led by Gowon, and the Eastern Nigerian delegation led by Ojukwu, went back and reported different versions or interpretations to the decisions taken at Aburi Supreme military council meeting. Ojukwu had maintained that the substance of the agreement reached in Aburi was to the effect that the regions should "move slightly apart that it is only by moving apart that the regions can co-exist. He contended that Nigerians did not want unity, but a loose association.

Gowon on the other hand maintained that to accept Ojukwu's interpretation of the Aburi decision would result in the final destruction of Nigeria as one political entity. Please note that the records of the Aburi meeting saw to the agreement to create a kind of confederation in which each region would be almost autonomous as had been advocated by most delegations at the beginning of the Gowon 1966 adhoc constitutional conference, but on a second thought Gowon and his team decided to repudiate the agreement in Aburi. Several actions were taken in an effort to reconcile the different views held by the military leaders on the Aburi accord, series of meetings were held especially in Benin on the 9th and 10th March, 1967 to make a rearrangement on the Aburi agreements although it was held but was not attended by Ojukwu.

The Federal Government under Gowon published a decree enforcing its own version of the Aburi accord. This decree was rejected by Ojukwu and from then on relations between the federal and eastern Nigeria military governments deteriorated considerably. At the end of March, Ojukwu announced his government's edict which stipulated that with effect from April 7, "all revenue due from any source whatsoever in Eastern Nigeria collected for and on behalf of the federal government shall be paid to the government of Eastern Nigeria". Under

the same edict, the Eastern Nigeria Government also took over all Federal Government Departments and statutory corporations situated in the region. The federal government did not take kindly to this action by Ojukwu. It immediately declared the action illegal and unconstitutional and advised all those indebted to the federal government to meet their obligations in the usual way and to ignore the order issued by the Eastern Nigerian government in this respect.

On May 20th, 1967, a two day meeting of the Eastern Nigerian Consultative Assembly was held in Enugu and was addressed by Lt. Col. Ojukwu as he then was. At the end of its deliberations the committee mandates Ojukwu to declare "At the earliest practicable date Eastern Nigerian a free sovereign and independent state by the name and title of the Republic of Biafra". On the same day, Gowon also decided to implement an earliest supreme military council decision on creation of more states. Accordingly, on 27 May, 1967 a decree was promulgated creating twelve states, three of them in the former Eastern Region, East Central State, South Eastern State and Rivers State, Odumegwu Ojukwu was then appointed military Governor of the East Central State.⁶

On 30th May, 1967 Ojukwu declared the long expected secession of Eastern Region from the Federal Republic of Nigeria, proclaiming in a radio broadcast that "the territory and region known and called Eastern Nigeria together with our continental shelf and territorial waters shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state by the name and title of Republic of Biafra". By this act the stage was set and the battle lines drawn leading to the eventual outbreak of the civil war in July of the same year.

Although, the war commenced effectively on July 6, both sides had spent the period between May 30 and July 6 either preparing for war or in mobilizing international support for its cause. This research topic does not pretend to give a detailed account of all aspects of the

Nigerian civil war. The main concern here is merely to spotlight some of the more important features of the war and to indicate how the war attracted international intervention. On the Biafran side, military buildup had started taking place soon after the departure of non-easterners from 1st Battalion, Enugu. About 240 soldiers of Eastern origin had been left at 7 Battalion and this later formed the nucleus of the Biafran Army. These were reinforced by Igbo officers and soldiers returning to the east as well as civilians who were badly hurt by their treatment in parts of the North and who were therefore willing to join the Army to obtain redress. That by the outbreak of the war in July 1967, Ojukwu had created four additional Battalions grouped into two Brigades, namely: 51 comprising 7 and 14 Battalions and 52 Brigade comprising 8 and 9 Battalions respectively under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Madiebo and Eze.

When Gowon realized that Ojukwu cannot be stopped by making concessions, he finally forecloses any talks and set the stage for the civil war. Nigeria had to, at this state and almost belatedly started military preparations for war. These preparations were frantically carried out from June, 1967 when the entire government machinery and native authorities in the North had to be involved in mobilizing ex-service men and Native Authority policemen into the Army. At the start of the conflict the Nigerian Army underrated the Biafran soldiers and never thought that they would possess the capacity to fight any war given the fact that most of the soldiers and never thought that they would possess the capacity to fight any war given the fact that most of the soldiers that left the Nigerian Army for home were non-combatant technicians, besides they never contemplated that war would be the end result to the crises.⁷

After Odumegwu declared Biafra, Gowon on 5th July, 1967 declared "police action" to crush Odumegwu-Ojukwu's rebellion. All preparations were therefore geared towards such police action. In mobilizing Nigerians for the "police action" when later became a full-blown

civil war, the federal government adopted the acronym "GOWON" defined as "Go on with One Nigeria". However, it was only in the North that such mobilization had much impact as indeed it was from the North that the first push towards quashing the rebellion started. The war was considered by the western region as mainly between the Hausa and the Igbo at this stage. As the lieutenant of the Midwest maintained that the region would not be used for the "police action". He maintained that the Midwest would not be used for battleground and chooses instead to play the role of a mediator but as history would have it, the mid-west later turned into a battle ground in the course of the civil war.

The first shot of the Nigerian civil war was fired on July 6, 1967, as stated by General Obasanjo in his book "My Command"⁸ The federal command headquarters, 7 Area Command. "Issued its operational order for OP UNCORD, the code name of the police action" against the rebels. Offensives were to be launched on two fronts. The command was divided into two Brigades with the battalions in each brigade. 1 brigade was to advance and clear Ogugu, Nsukka, Ogurugu and explore South of Nsukka. 2 Brigade was to capture Gakem, Obudu and Ogoja. By 5 am on the 6th July, 1967 the troops of Area command crossed the start line and by sunrise contact had been established and fire exchanged on all fronts. When the war started on July 6, 1966, it was generally believed that it would not last for very long, in fact it was believed that the operation would be over in a matter of days. Gowon had described it as a "police action", which would soon be over without much damage. As it turned out, the war was more than a police action, and probably one of the worst civil wars in modern African history and the most expensive both in monetary terms and in human waste. The war lasted exactly two years and seven months and about one million men, women and children must have died from shells, bombs, gunshots and in many cases from malnutrition and the deadly kwashiorkor. Throughout the war, the federal troops had the upper hand although the Biafran troops fought desperately and gallantly in some of

the war fronts and inflicted very serious and heavy damages on the federal forces thereby offering enough resistance to delay the crushing of the rebellion.

Internationally, Nigerian government enjoyed international recognition and support being the only legally recognized sovereign. It therefore had no difficulty in obtaining the necessary weapons to fight the war. Although, at the beginning of the war, Odumegwu Ojukwu sought to internationalize the war by involving issues and claims of genocide, survival, religious, imperialism, independence and self-determination. His intention was to appeal to the divergent sentiments within the international community so that whatever Biafra was deficient in terms of local capabilities it could get through international support starting with the African continent, Odumegwu Ojukwu faced enormous difficulties because the OAU took position in support of the Federal Government in spite of strong pro-Biafra agitations. The international support for Biafra was based on a tripod involving France and Portugal on one hand and the African group made up of Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gambia and to a lesser extent Equatorial Guinea and Dahomey completed the tripod. By 1969, the level of support, particularly from France and Portugal had increased, France not only facilitated supply of aircraft, armored vehicles and heavy arms to Biafra, it also encouraged its satellite states in Africa through its protégé the Ivorian leaders, Felix Houphoet Boigny, to mobilize African support for the rebellion. But for the persistence of France and Portugal which also facilitated the use of its colony, Sao Tome for the so-called relief operations, Biafra resistance would not have lasted for so long. Towards the end of the war France and the remaining tripod suspended their support by stopping the flight facilities it previously granted to Biafra.⁹

On the other hand, the international support which Nigeria enjoyed during the war was clearly not decisive enough, at the beginning of the war, the international community particularly the west was confused, first, there was the moral issues highlighted by Ojukwu and secondly, there was the issue of control over oil in which the west, including the United

States, had a stake. Gradually, however, the west largely maintained tacit support for the federal government while it left open the option to deal with Ojukwu in the event of Biafra's success in its secessionist bid. This may have accounted for the agreement signed between Odumegwu Ojukwu and shell BP on oil royalties, an agreement which was not honored because of the federal government's success in swiftly taking over most of the oil platform areas soon after the war started. While Britain clearly supported the federal side throughout the war, even though it showed some ambivalence in supplying much needed arms, particularly aircraft to the federal side the United States declared and maintained her neutrality. It was the refusal of Britain to supply aircraft and the United State proclaimed neutrality that forced Nigeria to go to Soviet Union to obtain the mug aircraft and later small and heavily arms and weaponries. Because of the position taken by United States it was convenient for the federal government to play the old war game in order to obtain Soviet assistance even though most of the arms it procured from the Soviet Union were on cash and carry basis.

It was the support given to the federal troops that gave them the upper hand over Biafrans, such that it was only once that the Biafrans had a chance of victory. This was in August 1967, when a battalion of about 1, 000 Biafran soldiers in assorted lorries, cars, vans and motorcycles successfully invaded the Midwest and took over Agbor, Benin and ore and were advancing towards Lagos and Ibadan when the military expedition came to an end due to some disagreements that arose between Biafra forces it caused delays and stopped the troops from further advancing it was in the midst of these confusions that the federal troops caught up with them at Ore and chased them out of the Midwest. Thereafter the disparity in the volume of supplies and other human and material resources between the Biafrans and the federal forces becamne more obvious. The Biafrans lacked food, and there were no medical care above all they had limited weapons to fight the vibrant, ever ready and fully loaded

federal troops. By 1968 with the Biafran enclave shrinking daily it became clear that Biafra could not possibly win the war, in a military sense, but the struggle nevertheless continued. Every hope of resolving the war by African leaders proved unsuccessful especially from the part of Odumegwu Ojukwu.¹⁰

By 1969, which was the most difficult year of the war for the Biafrans, by May 1969, Biafra had lost about 80% of its territory; people were dying in large numbers daily from hunger and disease. By October, it was evident that the war would soon end. The federal forces were now equipped and ready for the final push which was to give victory that had eluded them for well over two years; another peace talk was fixed that year and by December many Nigerians and African leaders who had hoped the war would end at the conference table in Ethiopia were naturally disappointed when the December 1969 peace move ended without even taking off. As soon as it became known that this last peace initiative had failed, the federal forces launched a desperate and determined attack on what was left of Biafra territory. Soon after Christmas everyone in and around the war knew that the war was now at its final stages and to the surprise of many Odumegwu Ojukwu escaped on the 10th January, 1970 with his family and close associates to Ivory Coast on the excuse that he is going to get more aid. Two days later his second in command, Lt. Col. Philip Effiong made a broadcast announcing the surrender of Biafra and with this the war came to an end.¹¹

It could be deduced that the international support given to Nigeria from the part of Soviet Union got her on the road to victory, this would be discussed in full details in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER FOUR

USSR INVOLVEMENT IN THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR 1967-1970

In chapter two, I made it clear that right from independence in 1960; Nigeria never wanted to have anything to do with Soviet Union. It was clear from her relation with the western bloc. Soviet Union was wrongly perceived and with not only suspicion but also contempt as a result of the myth of "Soviet abhorrence of peace". Nigeria just like her colonial masters cancelled everything that will bring them in contact with Soviet Union and even though Nigeria later loosened up a bit to accommodate Soviet Union, that grace was limited to some extent till 1966, and so till the time the civil war started raging, Nigeria never built a strong and solid relation with Soviet Union just like her western counterparts. As Eghosa Osaghae, a scholar of Nigeria's political history, reflecting on Nigeria's foreign policy in the first republic (1960-1966) rightly pointed out; "Relations with Britain and the west were conducted in a manner that sometimes cast doubts on the country's independence".¹

It is important to note that the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 to a large extent revealed the fact that was stated by American former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger that: "There are no permanent friends or enemies in politics, but what is constant is permanent interest".² At first Nigeria felt that her relationship with Britain guarantee her easy access to war arsenal whenever she places the request, but Britain's calculating response to arming the federal government shed Nigerian officials of their rose tinted view of relations with the west. As the clouds of war gathered, on 2 July, Gowon sent "identical wires to US President (Lyndon) Johnson and British Prime Ministers Harold Wilson requesting the immediate sale of twelve fighter bombers, six (patrol) boats, and twenty-four anti air craft guns with deliveries to begin within forty-eight hours". The response of Nigeria's western partners was disappointing to say the least. The U.S weighed down by its mounting troubles from the

outset of the war had expressed a policy of neutrality in the Nigerian conflict; this is because she believed that the conflict fell within Britain's spheres of influence. Thus, it was a British rather than an American problem. Quoting Dean Rusk, US secretary of State, West Africa (27/07/1967) reported that: "The U.S government regarded the situation as the primary responsibility of Britain and America was sure that Britain would be equal to the task of contributing to maintain western influence in Nigeria".³

No wonder that the few days after the outbreak of the war, the US announced that it would neither sell nor supply arms to either side, in order not to deepen the conflict. Other reasons accounted for this posture it must be noted that the costly and controversial involvement in the Vietnam War which had created some internal difficulties coupled with the memory of American involvement in the Congo made the U.S more hesitant about another foreign involvement. In the light of this, one can understand the U.S governments' statements reiterating support for the Nigerian government while hoping that the internal conflict would be settled peacefully. Even when the Soviet Union declared support for Lagos and began to effectively arm the federal side, the U.S did not make a reversal of her initial policy partly because it believed that Britain's commitment to the federal cause would check if not neutralize Russia's efforts and partly because it had reached the conclusion that since Gowon was hardly a socialist the extent to which he could flirt with the Russians was greatly limited.

Britain, with substantial investments in Nigeria, couldn't afford to be so detached. The anti-aircrafts guns, patrol boats, and much more besides, were supplied, but to the intense disappointment of Nigerian officials, the fighter-bombers were "ruled out". The decision to sell Nigeria any arms at all had in fact only been taken after extensive discussions within white hall that bore not a trace of sentimental attachment to colonial Nigeria about how best to protect British oil interests in the now Rebel held Eastern region. Soon after the war broke

out, British High Commissioner in Lagos labeled the foreign office in London: In the new circumstances it must clearly; "In the new circumstances it must clearly be a principle object of British policy to avoid doing anything which could seriously antagonize the state of Biafra in case it is successful in vindicating its independence. Our interest, particularly in oil is so great that they must override any lingering regret that we may feel for the disintegration of British made Nigeria".⁴

Britain's calculating response to arming the Federal Government and the U.S arms embargo finally shed Nigerian officials of their rose tinted view of relations with the west. In contrast, the Soviet Union's swift response to arming the federal forces powerful demonstrated the value of enlarging diplomatic contacts with Moscow, and of diversifying the country's relationship more generally. Soviet Union provided about 40% of arms imported by the federal side. The truer value of the Soviet arms contribution was in the caliber of weapons it provided particularly jet aircrafts and bombers which Britain and the U.S refused to supply.

As indicated earlier, Nigeria external relations with Russia up to 1966 were not very cordial but the relations began to improve from 1967 and reached its apogee at the end of the war. To support this fact, the permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance, Abdul Aziz Atta announced on 6th January 1967 that Nigeria was prepared to sign a loan agreement with Russia, the first of its kind since 1960. An agreement to promote cultural cooperation was also signed by the two countries on March 28, 1967, through this agreement Nigerians were permitted to visit Russia and students were emboldened to take Soviet scholarships, again, at the end of 1967 Soviet Union that had earlier been allowed to open an embassy was now allowed to increase the numbers of staff in that embassy and to open other information agencies in the state capitals.

It is worthy of note also that by the time relations between Nigeria and Soviet were improving, Russia's relations with other west African states were shrinking to a very low ebb as she lost a friend with the overthrow of Nkrumah in Ghana, Guinea also became unreliable. Her influence was also sagging in the East Africa as a result of Sino-Soviet rivalry. Thus, support for Federal Military Government provided her a golden opportunity to consolidate her rising influence. For Nigerian officials it cleared the way for a thaw in relations with the Soviet Union. The Civil war saw a marked improvement in the previously distant relationship. Let down by the U.S and Britain's response to its plea for aircrafts, Nigeria looked elsewhere and found the Soviet Union "waiting in the wings" this new Soviet pragmatic foreign policy enabled them to take the side of the Federal Government of Nigeria when Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu in May 30, 1967 proclaimed secession of the Eastern Region of the country to 6, 1967, the demands of the Civil war forced the Federal Government of Nigeria to court USSR.⁵

When the civil war raged, Col. Gowon sent a special envoy to Kremlin to explain government's position on the unraveling crisis and to inform the Soviet leadership his administration's desire to maintain and develop the friendly relation with the USSR during the visit, a practical discussions based on increased trade between the two countries were made. Such mutual trust and respect between the two administrations during these periods yielded a remarkable improvement in relationship of the two countries. On August 2, 1967, a Nigerian delegation led by Chief Anthony Enahoro, the then Minister of Information and Labor, signed an arms deal, under the cover of a cultural agreement with Soviet officials in Moscow. A week later, 9th August, two jet fighters were delivered to Nigeria, By mid-August, (15/08/1967) apparently, the first shipment included twenty (20) MIG- 15 fighter trainers, six (6) Czech L- 29 Delphin jet fighters, together with some two hundred (200) Soviet technicians who left Nigeria on completing the assembly and testing of the aircraft.

Soviet support for federal government of Nigeria became official in October 1967 when premier Kosygin sent a letter to Gowon expressing Soviet's support for Gowon's endeavors to maintain the Unity of Nigeria. He reiterated what he called "Soviet desire to ensure the necessary safeguards of developing countries from imperialist forces". Not surprisingly henceforth, Soviet increased arms supply to Federal Government and intensified her activities among labour leaders. For instance, Soviet subsidized the Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC) at the rate of about E30, 000 (pound) yearly. From the political view Soviet's Union's support for Nigeria involved no risk at all, since even if the Biafran secession were successful, the government (Nigeria) would still continue to exist. The influential "West Africa Pilot) summed up popular sentiment when in an editorial on the 25th of October in favor of establishing diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union, it stated; "The people of Nigeria have nothing against the Soviet Union. Some of us may hate or abhor communism but that does not mean that we have nothing to learn from a country that sent its rocket to the moon.... we want a Soviet diplomatic mission in Lagos".⁶ But what was enigmatic about Soviet policy was that from 1967 to 1969, the Russians did not bother about the ideological orientation of the Gowon's regime, which was by no means socially inclined. The Nigerian reapproachment with Soviet Union was instigated by the need to procure arms. This view could be backed by some actions taken by the Gowon regime.

Firstly, in May 1968, Gowon issued Decree 21 which ordered all disputes to be submitted to arbitration. Strikes were also outlawed by this decree until such arbitration failed. Also, Wahab Goodluck (General-Secretary of the Union Trading Company, African Workers Union) was arrested when he wanted to go to Khartoun to attend a conference of world liberation movements. Again Dr. Tunji Otegbeye was arrested on his return from Moscow where he attended an international workers meeting on January, 1969. Throughout the war, General Gowon even stated quite explicitly that "Nigerian development could be attained only by

remaining in the system of world capitalism". Kudravnitsky's (1968), has argued that Soviet Union intervened in the war because of her intention to protect Nigeria from imperialist machination (or to aid the anti-imperialist struggles against the western powers.

However, this justification of Soviet policy suggests a groundless altruism. The anti-imperialist stance was neutralized by the fact that Soviet support for federal military government was based on increasing Soviet trade and cultural agreements with Nigeria rather than the ideological orientation of the Gowon's government. With more Cocoa exports to Moscow the sum total of which stood at £6.8m (pounds) in 1969, more Soviet military assistance to Nigeria rose to £19million (pounds) worth of material that included ammunition, naval equipment, boats, howitzers, Illyushin and MiG (West Africa 22/2, 1970). The Soviet policy on the Nigerian conflict was also outlined in an article called "Test of African's Maturity" published in Izvestia on 11th October, 1968 which states that: "The principle of the right to self-determination for nationalities to the point of secession is not an absolute one, and it is wrong to believe that it should be applied in all conditions. No, it is subordinate to the tasks of class struggle and social liberation".⁷

The above view can be buttressed by the fact that had long changed from the path of exclusive commitment to world revolution. What was more primary to Russia was the advancement of the Soviet state's interest before the question of anti-imperialism. No wonder then that the idea of world revolution has greatly waned after the death of Lenin and the survival of the Soviet state had dominated Sovereign foreign policy from Stalin to Khrushchev even up to the contemporary times. It is in support of this argument that Northedge has declared that Soviet policy was governed by the pursuit of national interest. While Soviet therefore realized that Nigeria was undoubtedly in the capitalist camp, it conveniently

ignored this and armed the federalists.⁸ Thus, Soviet Union involvement in the Nigerian civil war provides a good case material for understanding the contemporary dominance of pragmatism over ideology when foreign policy interests came first and ideological enthusiasms second rather than being in the reverse. As pointed out earlier, almost all other intervening countries either stopped or banned arms sale by June 1968, only Russia and Britain persisted. In 1969, after supplying only air weapons for the preceding two years, the Soviet Union scaled up its material support by adding ground weapons -including artillery and a "considerable" number of rifles.

Some scholars suggest Soviet supplied artillery "played a crucial part in the final determination of the conflict" off the back of civil war cooperation, trade picked up between the two countries. Though much of the increase was due to the arms sales, Nigeria's economic engagement with the Soviet Union nevertheless broadened during the war years. Soviet manufactured and consumer goods-passenger cars, cement, fabric, welding machines etc made their first appearance in Nigeria and the Soviet Union imported, amongst other things, cocoa, beans, palm oil products and timber from Nigeria.⁹

The intensity of contact similarly increased. A highly publicized goodwill visit to Moscow in mid-1968 was undertaken by Nigeria's foreign minister, underscoring the warming ties between the two countries. The final communiqué from the trip became "the first ever document signed between Nigeria and the Soviet Union". The restrictions that had previously been placed on the Soviet embassy were relaxed, and the Soviet Union was allowed to open a new embassy chancery and host cultural activities. The Federal Government also finally consented to the arrival of a Soviet military attaché where only Britain and the U.S had enjoyed such diplomatic privileges. The deepening and broadening of contacts during the Nigerian civil war, whilst placing bilateral relations on a more positive trajectory in retrospect marked the zenith of Nigeria-Soviet cooperation. Soviet Union would

hold a special place in the hearts most Nigerians as the country that supported Nigeria during its bitter civil war, the Soviet Union continued to feature prominently in Nigeria's diplomacy. The relationship progressed further following the return of civilian rule to Nigeria in May, 1999.¹⁰

In conclusion, from the above, it is quite clear that it was the attitude melted out on Nigerian by her western allies and equally the demands of the civil war that pushed Nigeria into the waiting arms of Soviet Union and thus changed the ideological belief that Nigeria had towards Soviet Union, till the end of the war that Nigeria had towards Soviet Union,, till the end of the war Soviet Union proved itself a friend in need and a friend indeed to te extent that even when other countries stopped supplying arms to Nigeria union did not relent," she sacrificed both militarily and otherwise to the outcome of the war. The Soviet Union provided most of the major artillery used in the civil war, and Soviet Union's intervention in the Nigerian civil war forced Britain out of her shell, to assist Nigeria in the war, which she did not protect her interest. Therefore from the above, it could be ascertained that the involvement of Soviet Union in the Nigerian Civil war of 1967-1970 playeda crucial part in the final determination of the conflict.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Over the years, the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 and the role of international powers in the Nigerian civil war is one of the events that have drawn much interest. Many authors on the Nigerian civil war and the role of international powers in the war had most times failed to give a clear and vivid explanation on the enormous role Soviet Union played during the war, it is important to note that Soviet enormous and encouraging role in the Nigerian civil war set the Federal Government of Nigeria on the path of success during the war through providing military and economical aid that the federal government of Nigeria needed in the course of the war. Set the federal government of Nigeria on the path of success during the war.

In the course of this research, with the aid of secondary sources which include textbooks, journals, newspapers, magazines and other materials which help to give a detailed and explicit explanation on this research topic. It is clearly outlined in this project that Soviet-Nigeria relations prior to the Nigerian civil war was stained and unfriendly because Nigeria wanted nothing to do with Soviet Union after independence due to fact that Soviet Union was wrongly perceived with only suspicion but also contempt as a result of the myth of "Soviet abhorrence of peace", Nigeria maintained her foreign policy of neutrality towards Soviet Union even though she was pro-west in nature. Nigeria played strict in observing her policy of neutrality towards Soviet Union, politically, economically, socially and otherwise. The Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 became a turning point in the Nigerian foreign policy in her relationship with Soviet Union because Soviet union during the war proved to be a friend in need and a friend indeed in the sense that she provided military arsenal and endured with Nigeria till the end of the war, thus it could be ascertained that the involvement of Soviet

Union in the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 played a crucial part in the final determination of the conflict. The war which attracted foreign powers like France, United States, Britain and Soviet Union, saw Soviet Union at the lead or better still at the top of the game. It is important to note that it was the amount of help rendered to Nigeria by Soviet Union and the momentum at which Soviet Union backed that made Britain and U.S.A to reluctantly give in to assisting the federal government of Nigeria with arsenal for the war. Although, the war was declared "No victory, No vanquished, "the federal government of Nigeria clearly won the war.

In the course of the research work I was able to show that the misconception of the Soviet Union by Nigeria does not correspond with her policy, this could be seen in the military and political relations she later established with Nigeria and also the economic relations that was built after the Nigerian civil war. In the course of this research topic, many questions that might arise in the mind of the reader have been clearly and explicitly answered. It is quite clear that after the Nigerian civil war, the once tight relationship that existed between Nigeria and Soviet Union started fading, of course there were high hopes that after the civil war cooperation would now deepen. Despite this optimism however, bilateral ties between Nigeria and Soviet Union never moved beyond what Maxim Matusevich a scholar on Nigeria-Russia relations, describes as an "elusive friendship.... Nigeria-Soviet relations after the war withered and stagnated because Nigeria turned back to those she considered her enemies during the war (i.e) Britain, U.S and France in the bid for her policy of reconstruction and revitalization. Once again embraced the west and turned her back towards Soviet Union once more. Looking back at the trajectory of Nigeria-Russia bilateral relations since independence in 1960, this research topic can offer useful lessons on the opportunities and limits of a Nigeria-Russia reapproachment. It will also allow for a more realistic

assessment of how this potentially important and valuable partnership can be strengthened and made more durable.

This research topic assessed the state of the relationship between Nigeria and Soviet Union from the 1960s to 70s and to recommend how bilateral relations can move from elusive friendship to a more realistic and enduring partnership. For Nigeria to permanently maintain relations with Soviet Union, the following recommendations must be strictly adhered to: First, the fundamental issue of Nigeria foreign policy which is pro-west in nature must be fully addressed, Nigeria must learn to widen her coast, eliminate any hatred or sentiment towards any country and maintain her relation with any country it choose to without stagnating by the way. Secondly, looking at the cordial relationship that existed between Nigeria and Soviet Union in the 70's, and how it stagnated and withered along the way, Nigerian policy makers should re-consider the mistakes and those facts that were neglected which lead to a bed-ridden relation among the two countries, Nigeria must learn to straighten up things with Soviet Union and revitalize her relations with Soviet Union. Thirdly, Nigeria should learn that in politics there is no permanent friends or foes but permanent interest. Form the lesson, Nigeria learnt during the Nigerian civil war in which her western friends deserted her in time of need. Nigeria must learn not to depend on any country for survival and security, but politically and economically expand her relation with other countries especially Soviet Union, as a saying goes, a friend in need is a friend indeed and finally, the Nigerian state and those involved in national security policy making should study and thoroughly understand the major needs of the country and consider her relations with Soviet Union politically and economically and come to terms that would help secure the country.

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