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## AN ASSESSMENT OF FAILED DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS IN AVERTING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

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### Abstract

The Nigerian Civil War, which lasted between 1967 and 1970, was a collective human tragedy of sobering proportions. It brought the country to the brink of disintegration and left a trail of reckless destruction of human beings and material in the areas that were its theatre. However, before the outbreak of the war, several diplomatic efforts were made to avert its outbreak. Some of the diplomatic methods adopted included private talks, persuasion, negotiation, bargaining, exchange of correspondences, threat, etc., It is discovered that apart from efforts made by some concerned Nigerian elite, leaders of some countries particularly, Britain, United States of America and Ghana showed tremendous concern as the war cloud gathered and also got involved in the diplomatic moves to avert its outbreak. One of the outcomes of their efforts was the meeting held at Aburi, Ghana which was attended by the leaders of the Federal Military Government, led by Yakubu Gowon and those of the Eastern Region, led by Emeka Ojukwu. At the end of the negotiations, both sides interpreted Aburi decisions, which constituted the hallmark of pre-civil war preventive diplomacy, using different spectacles; hence, the decisions could not be implemented. Unfortunately, the accord, rather than serve the envisaged diplomatic purpose, became the Achilles heels that quickened the outbreak of the war. In contemporary Nigeria, the agitation for restructuring to incorporate resource control requires proper handling to avert a re-occurrence of another civil war. The paper adopted a historical analytical methodology.

*Keywords: Nigeria, Diplomacy, Civil War, Aburi Accord.*

## Introduction

In its very ordinary sense, the term diplomacy indicates the art and processes involved in the management of relationships with the fundamental objectives to sustain such relationships so long as benefits are sustainably derived. The art of diplomacy has, overtime, evolved theoretically, contextually and conceptually and has continued to provoke new trends and dimensions arising from the dictates of dynamic realities of an ever-changing world system and the changing patterns of human societal values. This notion suggests that the art and practice of diplomacy has been part of the human society and shall continue to exist and assume new forms as long as human relations subsist. Scholars like Claviere and Nasimento, cited in Orngu (2017), are consensual on further strengthening the notion when they insist that diplomacy must have evolved since when human beings of different backgrounds began to make contacts and seek common grounds, and this, according to them, will continue till the earth comes to an end. The concept of diplomacy was used by Edmund Burke in 1796 with reference to skillful or successful conduct of international intercourse or negotiations. The definition clearly situates diplomacy within the context of the dexterity and outcomes in the management of international relations. However, Akpan (2012) opines that socially and at any level whatsoever, diplomacy is the ordered conduct of relations between one group of human beings and another group whose goals are mutually incompatible. From this submission, it becomes apparent that the attempts initiated by concerned stake holders to avert the Nigerian Civil War, even though they failed to yield the desired intent, can be regarded as diplomatic. This is also instructive since war is regarded as the failure of diplomacy (Ehie and Ambe-uva, 2010).

Diplomacy is often expressed in terms of negotiation and or bargaining. It is for this reason that Thompson and Macridis, cited in Akpan (2012) opine that "for diplomats, the first rule has always been that negotiations are essential when national interests are in conflict." Such negotiations serve specific purposes. There are four categories in which the purposes of diplomacy can be achieved. These are: resolving a conflict of interest peacefully; preventing a clear and immediate danger of violent solution (or a risk of yielding to rival pressures); restoring peace after a clash of national interests had led to violence; and establishing an atmosphere, framework, system or permanent organization for peaceful solution of

potential future conflicts (Cited in Akpan, 2012). Indeed, the cloud of war began to gather, especially after the first counter coup d'etat of the 29th of July 1966, which led to the death of the Military Head of State, Major General Aguyi Ironsi. In addition, many Easterners, particularly the Igbo were killed in the Northern part of the country. From this period, diplomatic efforts were stepped up to avert the carnage. Some of the efforts included the meeting of the representatives of the Military Governors in Lagos in August 1966, the ad-hoc constitutional conference in September 1966, the meeting of the Supreme Military Council at Aburi, Ghana in January 1967 etc. Unfortunately, all these efforts failed to avert the war. The diplomatic measures failed to yield the desired result as a result of personal character and idiosyncrasies of the leaders, particularly the Military Governor of the Eastern Region, who was bent on establishing a republic to perpetrate ethnic hegemony.

### **Prelude to the Nigerian Civil War**

The seeds of the crisis that led to the war were sown by the Richard's Constitution of 1945, which created three regions. The regions created in the Northern, Eastern and Western parts of the country coincided largely with the three major ethnic nationalities that dominated the Nigerian political scene: the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Igbo in the East and the Yoruba in the West. Clearly, the colonial government did not work against ethnicism in Nigeria's national life. Rather, ethnic chauvinism was apparently encouraged as the regions competed among themselves for offices and dominant positions in government, the civil service, etc (Undiyaundeye, 2008). Because the causes of the Nigerian Civil war are known historical events, what is attempted here is only a summary of the events that culminated in the war. The events include the Action Group (AG) political crisis of 1962, the 1962/1963 population census crisis, the 1964 federal elections crisis, and the 1965 Western Regional elections crisis (Undiyaundeye, 2008). These events in addition to the prevalent corruption perpetuated by the ruling elite, triggered the incursion of the military into the Nigerian political landscape on the 15th of January 1966, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu and four others. Four of the five Majors, including Nzeogwu were Igbo.

The coup claimed the lives of Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Northern Region and Chief

Samuel Akintola, Premier of the Western Region, as well as that of Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh, Federal Minister of Finance, and nine senior military officers of whom only one was an Igbo man. The coup did not take place in the Eastern Region and no Igbo politician was killed in the process (Ademoyega, 1981). It should be noted that the military government that emerged at the end of the coup was headed by Major-General Johnson Aguyi-Ironsi (an Igbo), who at that time was the only Major-General in the army. When Major-General Aguyi-Ironsi assumed power, he appointed a military Governor for each of the four regions. In the Eastern Region, he appointed Lt. Col. Chukwumeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, who at that time was junior to six senior military officers of Eastern Nigerian origin, among whom were: Col. Wellington U. Bassey, Lt. Col. U. O. Imo, Lt. Col. G.U. Kurubo and Lt. Col. H.M. Njokwu. This was a capital blunder because it smacked to "tribalism" and favouritism. Bassey was an (Ibibio), Kurubo, (Ijaw), Imo and Njokwu (Igbo) (Azikiwe, 1971).

According to Azikiwe (1971), on assuming office, Major-General Aguyi-Ironsi promised that he would not amend the Nigerian constitution without formally consulting the people of Nigeria. He appointed a Constitutional Study Group to make recommendations. Without formally consulting Nigerians and without waiting for the submission of the report of the Study Group, Major-General Aguyi-Ironsi, acting contrary to the advice of the majority of members of the Supreme Military Council, together with that of the Sultan of Sokoto, influenced by the advice of four Igbo experts, promulgated Decree No. 34 (Unification Decree), in May 1966, abolishing the federal system of government and introducing the unitary system. In the meantime, some Igbo elements who were domiciled in Northern Nigeria taunted Northerners by defaming their leaders through the means of songs or pictures. They also published pamphlets and postcards which displayed a peculiar representation of certain Northerners, living or dead, in a manner likely to provoke disaffection. Indeed, the nation became tensed. In May 1966, some Easterners residing in the North were massacred by the Northerners. The Supreme Commander, Major-General Aguyi-Ironsi, was now confronted with serious national crisis. A meeting of traditional rulers was convened to take place in Ibadan on the 29th of July 1966 and he planned to use the occasion to explain and expiate for his monocratic act. Unfortunately, he was abducted and murdered by some soldiers of Northern extraction. Leading officers of Igbo and non-Igbo origin from Eastern Nigeria were

murdered also. The riots in the North were followed by the pogrom. The accurate figure of the Southern casualties may never be obtained (Azikiwe, 1970; Undiyaundeye, 2008). Following the demise of Major-General Aguyi-Ironsi, Lt. Col. Gowon, a Northern minority Christian, who was the Chief of Army Staff, assumed the leadership of the country as the Head of State. Because Lt. Col. Gowon was junior to Lt. Col. Ojukwu, Ojukwu refused to acknowledge him as the new Supreme Commander (Ademoyega, 1981).

### **Highlights of the Diplomatic Efforts Aimed at Averting the Outbreak of the Civil War**

After the counter coup in July 1966, Governor Ojukwu demanded the removal of Northern soldiers from Enugu and the return of Eastern Nigerian soldiers to military formations in the Eastern Region. In the month of August 1966, a meeting of the representatives of the Military Governors was held in Lagos to "discuss and advise on what to do immediately in order to stop further bloodshed and reduce tension". Akpan (1976) recalls that, delegates from the East were given detailed points to be included in the agenda by the Governor. The points were: (i) repeal of Decree No. 34 and return to regional autonomy (ii) the Central Executive Council should be enlarged to include wider shade of opinion (iii) armed units in each area should consist of people drawn mainly from the inhabitants of the area (iv) all Northern soldiers in the East to be removed with immediate effect (v) rights of equality of all Nigerians (vi) review of the constitutional system as begun by the review panel (vii) meeting at a place unanimously accepted by all the members (of the Supreme Military Council, but meeting not yet necessary until preliminary agreements are implemented) (viii) what has happened to the Supreme Commander, Lt. Col. Fajuyi and Brigadier Ogundipe? (ix) names of casualties (of the July and subsequent disturbances) to be listed (x) immediate compensation for the families of those killed in recent disturbances (xi) the continuation of the "Northern enquiry" and venue should be Lagos and not Kaduna (xii) find a way of giving Regions the right to make arrangements for internal security (xiii) autonomy of Regions in police and security measures (xiv) National Government to give money for resettlement of refugees and compensation (xv) military inquiry into reasons for the disturbances (xvi) release of detainees of January 15th disturbances (xvii) road blocks and train searches to be

stopped (xviii) there should be a standing committee of elders, leaders, chiefs to be called upon for advice and when necessary both in the regions and in the centre (xvix) exchange of Eastern personnel working for the Federal Government (xx) make Lagos a free area with free port facilities (21) compensation for all escapees (xxi) no change (in boundaries of) Regions (Akpan, 1976: 38).

The delegates were as follows: North: Sir Kashim Ibrahim, Alhaji Usman Sarki, Etsu Nupe, Alhaji Baba Ardo – Attorney-General, Alhaji Mohammed Tukur Emir of Yakuri, A.A.Okpabi Oci'Idoma Ochi Idoma, Alhaji Yusuf Gobir, Mr. S.B. Awoniyi. West: Prof. Akin Mabogunje, Dr. F.A. Ajayi – Solicitor-General Mid-West : Chief T.E.A. Salubi, Dr. Christopher Okojie, Mr. D.P. Lawani. East: Mr. C.C. Mojekwu, Prof. Eni Njoku, Mr. N.U. Akpan. After two days of deliberations and arguments, the meeting approved the following recommendations: (i) immediate steps should be taken by the Supreme Commander to post military personnel to barracks within their respective regions of origin; (ii) having regard to its peculiar positions, the question of maintenance of peace and security in Lagos should be left to the Supreme Commander in consultation with Military Governors; (iii) a meeting of this committee or an enlarged one should take place in a week's time to recommend in broad outlines the form of political association which the country should adopt in future; (iv) immediate steps should be taken to nullify or modify any provisions of any decree which assume extreme centralization; (v) the Supreme Commander should make conditions suitable for an urgent meeting of the Supreme Military Council as a further means of lowering tension (this last recommendation was made even though everyone realised that no Military Governor would be willing to attend a meeting of the Supreme Military Council in Lagos at that time. The Eastern delegation had been insisting, in accordance with their mandate, on a meeting "at a place' unanimously accepted by all the members of that council).

#### **Ad-hoc Constitutional Conference**

The meeting was held on the 12th of September 1966 in Lagos. The delegation from the Eastern Region comprised 13 persons drawn from different parts of the Region, accompanied by two officials. The team was led by Prof. Eni Njoku and his deputy, Mr. C.C. Mojekwu.. At the meeting, the Supreme Commander, then Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon categorically ruled

out any idea of breaking up the country and noted that the government was left with three alternatives: (i) federation with a strong central government; (ii) a federation with a weak central government; (iii) a confederation. According to Akpan (1976), Governor Ojukwu directed that the Eastern delegates should insist on the following points: (i) a loose association of autonomous regions; (ii) the existence of a central authority, consisting of representations from the component parts of the country, that exercises delegated functions by the regions as specified by the constitution; a provision for secession and automatic review of the constitution after a specific period, there should be no federal or public service commission. Rather, the respective regions will expand their civil service having in mind the need to contribute their quotas to the central service; (iv) the East rejected the existence of Federal Public Service Commission. The respective regions to expand their civil services having in mind the need to contribute their quotas for the central service; (v) the question of central banking and coinage to be carefully examined. The East was worried by the news that the Federal Government, because of shortage of funds for its services, had authorised the printing of a large quantity of un-backed notes for circulation; (vi) the maintenance of existing railways should remain the responsibility of the central authority.

The East did not need to commit itself about new railways, which may be opened in the future. (vii) existing ports should belong to the regions, but other regions will have free use and access; (viii) national shipping line should remain with the central authority, but not shipping generally; (ix) navigation on the Niger, Benue and Chad to be national and controlled by the central authority; (x) territorial waters should remain the responsibility of the central authority; (xi) aviation safety and maintenance of standards should be regional responsibilities; (xii) the North should keep the Niger dams; (xiii) foreign trade and external publicity should be regional responsibilities; (xiv) the armed forces (including the navy), must be regionalised, with commands remaining with the regions; (xv) the Eastern government regarded Lagos as belonging to the West. But this issue was not to be declared too soon. Lagos to be used as a bargaining bit with the West. Every tactic must prod the West into a position of having to approach the East for a bargain on the matter. (xvi) a proposal for financial assistance to the Mid-West by means of capital grants.



It should be noted that the conference did not make much headway. Some agreements towards a loose association were reported at one stage, but the North later suddenly changed its mind and declared strong support for a central government for the country. The North also expressed the desire for a simultaneous creation of states all over the country, and in spite of the fact that their original memorandum had provided for secession clause. Following the reoccurrence of fresh killings of Easterners in the North on the 29th of September, 1966, the conference was adjourned until the 23rd of October. However, the other delegates did not show up. They demanded that the Northern troops still stationed in the West be removed to the North, as recommended by the representatives of the Military Governors on the 9th of August, before they would return to Lagos for the meeting. Alternatively, they insisted that the conference should be held outside of Nigeria (Akpan, 1976). All subsequent persuasions, promises and overtures failed to make the East change the position. The conference again adjourned until the 17th of November. On the 16th of November, it was absolutely clear that the Eastern delegates would not return to Lagos for the meeting unless its conditions were accepted. With the Federal Government's unwillingness to accede to the conditions, the Head of State adjourned the conference indefinitely.

#### **The Prelude to Aburi Conference**

Akpan (1976) observes that with the failure of the Ad-Hoc Constitutional Conference, the prospects of peace and unity for Nigeria seriously deteriorated. Many people, both in Nigeria and abroad, were alarmed by the increasing possibility that the East might secede from the rest of the Federation. It was this alarm and fear which forced the British High Commissioner in Nigeria, Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce and the American Ambassador to Nigeria, Mr. Elbert Matthews, to pay a diplomatic visit to Enugu from Lagos to persuade the Military Governor to work for a peaceful solution and unity of Nigeria. They also issued a mild warning, in diplomatic fashion, against secession. The Military Governor gave them every assurance that the East had no intention whatever of seceding, unless forced to do so. But these experienced diplomats viewed the matter more deeply than the Governor thought, because after the meeting, the British High Commissioner, on behalf of himself and the American Ambassador, wrote to the Governor an account of what they had understood from him, and what they had said to him, and reminded him at the same time of undertaking to publish the exchanges.

As a gesture of goodwill, a delegation of Western Nigeria comprising Obas and Chiefs visited Enugu as well as a delegation of top Federal civil servants, all in attempts to find out what the East wanted in order to cooperate for unity and peace of the country. As a follow-up of the visit by the top British and American diplomats earlier mentioned, the American Consul and the British Deputy High Commissioner in Enugu (Messrs Robert Barnard and Jim Parker respectively) paid many visits to the State House, Enugu, conveying messages from their principals to the Governor. Apart from these, diplomats from other nations also visited Enugu with messages of peace of Nigeria (Akpan, 1976). In November 1966, seeing the dangerous trends in the East, Mr. N.U. Akpan, Secretary to Military Government of the Eastern Region, contacted his counterparts among the Secretaries to Military Government in the North, West, Mid-West and Lagos. Through this effort, a meeting of all the Secretaries of the Military Government was held at Benin to bring peaceful solution to the serious challenge that the nation faced. Immediately after that meeting was that of the Advisers to the respective Military Governors. They too agreed on the urgent need for the military leaders to meet, and accordingly pledged their immense influence to bring about the convening of such a meeting.

Also, the personal efforts of Mr. Malcom Macdonald, the famous veteran of British diplomacy was brought to bear during the period. He visited the Eastern Region more than once, communicating between Lagos and Enugu. He had audience with Governor Ojukwu and his efforts ultimately put the seal to all discussions and secret moves to bring about a meeting of Nigerian military leaders outside the country. Thus, it was the combination of many efforts, involving hard work and seasoned diplomacy, which eventually brought about the famous meeting of the Nigerian military leaders at Aburi, a meeting which already assumed a prominent place in the history of Nigeria (Akpan, 1976). Even though some allies raised fears about the Governor's personal safety in Ghana, the Governor had given his word to Mr. Macdonald and through him, to General Ankrah, the military leader of Ghana, that he would attend the meeting. General Ankrah not only guaranteed the Governor's personal safety and that of his aides, but undertook to send a Ghanaian Air Force plane to carry him from Enugu and take him back afterwards. Governor Ojukwu still ensured that security men from Enugu were sent to Ghana to check on the security arrangements before the Governor's arrival. The Eastern delegation were received at a different time from other delegations and indeed arrived an hour ahead of the other delegation (Akpan, 1976).

## Aburi Accord

The meeting was arranged in Aburi, Ghana, at the instance of Lt. Gen. J.A. Ankrah of Ghana, the meeting was held on the 4th and 5th of January 1967. Present at the Aburi Meeting were: Col. Robert Adebayo - Military Governor, West, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu - Military Governor, East, Lt. Col. David Ejoor - Military Governor, Mid-West, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon - Army Headquarters, Lagos, Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina - Military Governor, North, Commodore J.E. Wey - Head of Nigerian Navy, Major Mobolaji Johnson - Administrator of Lagos, Ahhaji Kam Selem - Inspector-General of Police, Mr. J. Omo-Bare - Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Lt. General J.A. Ankrah, Chairman of the Ghana National Liberation Council was also in attendance. Secretaries were: Mr. S.I. Akenzua, - Permanent Under-Secretary, Federal Cabinet Office, Mr. P.T. Odumosu - Secretary to the Military Government, West, Mr. N.U. Akpan - Secretary to the Military Government, East, Mr. D.P. Lawani - Under-Secretary, Military Governor's Office, Mid-West, Alhaji Ali Akilu - Secretary to the Military Government, North. In his opening remarks, Lt. Gen. J.A. Ankrah said that Nigeria and Ghana have been brothers all the years and as such it was really difficult for either Ghana to be alone or isolated or Nigeria to be isolated from Ghana. He added that he would not dwell rigidly on any point whatever because he felt this was a domestic affair of Nigeria. He reminded the Nigerian military leaders that the whole nation was looking up to them as military men and if there was any failure to bring perfect understanding to the country, the blame would rest on them as military men. He also said:

Whatever the situation, we are soldiers and soldiers are always statesmen and not politicians. They deal with a little bit of politics when the time comes and diplomacy, but they are statesmen. The people first and they themselves fall second...cooperate to think that you are the architects now and you have to go and build Nigeria with its vast population of more than 56 million. I am quite confident that the atmosphere with which you have agreed to come here and seeing the serenity around you, you will have patience to determine the future of Nigeria and you will disagree on all sorts of things but disagree to agree and finally agree on the principles which will lead Nigeria to betterment...the people of Ghana and myself request you to bury all the differences of

the past. The past has gone. The things that one feel sour at, the things that one can remember with torture in his heart, should be left to float into oblivion (*The Verbatim Report of the Proceeding of the Supreme Military Council Meeting, 1967:7-8*).

The meeting started without any officially accepted chairman, but it was obvious that Lt. Col. Gowon (as he then was) took precedence. Governor Ojukwu, however, would not allow this to be taken too far. Akpan (1976) states that before the discussions began, Col. Ojukwu said that there was something preliminary but vital which he would like done before anything else. When he was granted the opportunity, he proposed that as a means of inspiring confidence, they should all do two things: (a) re-affirm their faith in discussions and negotiations as the only peaceful means of resolving the Nigerian crisis; and (b) "renounce the use of force as a means of settling the present crisis in Nigeria and hold ourselves in honour bound by the declaration". It appeared quite innocuous and the meeting saw no objection to the proposals, which was at once accepted without argument. Akpan (1976) adds that:

The discussions proceeded and Governor Ojukwu was clearly the star performer. Everyone wanted to please him and concede to him...on the whole the meeting went on in a most friendly and cordial atmosphere which made us, the non-military observers, develop a genuine respect and admiration for the military men and their sense of comradeship. The meeting continued so smoothly and ended so successfully...I became convinced that the military, among themselves, had their own methods....we (the Eastern Nigerian party) left first...at this one meeting, Governor Ojukwu obtained all that he had wanted to achieve both at the meeting of the representatives of the Military Governors arranged on the 9th of August 1966 and at the abortive Ad-hoc Constitutional Conference of the same year (Akpan, 1976: 52-53).

It was agreed at Aburi that the first statement on the deliberations and its decisions should be issued from the Head of State in Lagos. However, contrary to the agreement, soon after his arrival at Enugu, the Governor called a press conference to disclose the outcome. He disclosed that the

decision of the Aburi meeting was that the Regions would from thenceforth pull further apart than before.

### **Highlights of Aburi Accord**

According to Effiong (2003), the following were the highlights of the decisions reached: (i) the army was to be governed by the Supreme Military Council, the Chairman of which would be known as Commander-in Chief and Head of the Military Government; (ii) there was to be a military headquarters on which the regions would be equally represented and which was to be headed by a Chief of Staff; (iii) in each Region, there was to be an Area Command under an Area Commander corresponding with the then existing Regions; (iv) the Supreme Military Council would deal with all matters of policy, including appointments and promotions of persons in executive posts in the armed forces; (v) certain senior appointments within the foreign office, the armed forces, the police, the civil service and federal corporations were to be made only by the Supreme Military Council; (vi) finally, decisions affecting the whole country were to be determined by the Supreme Military Council. Where a meeting of the Supreme Military Council was not possible, such matters would be referred to the Military Governors for comments and concurrence.

### **Highlights of the Decisions by the Federal Permanent Secretaries and Its Implication on the Aburi Recommendations**

Simple as these decisions would appear to be, they were very far reaching in their implications. The decisions were x-rayed and amplified in a document issued by the Federal Permanent Secretaries soon after the Aburi decisions (Effiong, 2003). The Permanent Secretaries were able to show that: (i) the Office of the Supreme Commander was indirectly abolished by the introduction of the new title of Commander-in Chief with the resultant need for military and political redefinition of responsibility and exercise of power; (ii) regionalisation of the army in the creation of area commands affected the central control of the army to the detriment of effective control for purposes of national security; (iii) it generally exposed the non-workability of the new military government, except within the concept of confederation; (iv) the provision to obtain Governor's concurrence on certain administrative decisions weakened the powers and effectiveness of the Federal Government. Certain other decisions of Aburi

were also perused by the Permanent Secretaries and rejected. Rather, they proposed amendments which fundamentally altered the agreement reached by the military leaders. Effiong (2003) notes that the rejection brought, in their wake, utter confusion and heightened the already existing "crisis of confidence". According to him, probably, if these amendments were not made, the military men would have "muddled through" without the bureaucrats. He adds that:

While one must accept administrative advice and support as part of the machinery of government, the advice and suggestions on the Aburi Accord were seen in the East to have fundamentally altered the agreements reached by the country's highest governing authority in the land. One would wish with hindsight wisdom that the Federal Military Government from Lagos had brought along its administrative advisers to Aburi (Effiong, 2003: 160).

In the event, the above observations notwithstanding, it was Ojukwu's own decision to get all or nothing that resulted in the loss of all the gains he made at Aburi. Some members of the Eastern Executive Council suggested the acceptance of the amended version even though this fell short of what was agreed at Aburi (Effiong, 2003).

#### **Governor Ojukwu and the Aburi Accord/Benin Meeting**

Colonel Ojukwu knew that once the true implications of the Aburi decisions were appreciated in Lagos, his colleagues at the conference might consider themselves duped and so either stall on implementing the proposals, as happened in the case of the decision made on the 9th of August, 1966, about the postings of troops, or even repudiate the decisions, as indeed was virtually to happen in this case. He accordingly wanted to ensure that the others did not have time to have second thoughts on the decisions, and his strategy was to set deadlines for implementing those aspects of the agreements. Ojukwu insisted that the decree implementing the Aburi decisions should be promulgated not later than the 21st of January 1967. The Federal Military Government, however, declined to yield to the deadline. Indeed, when a draft decree came from the Federal Government, it was "out of tune" with the Aburi recommendations. This was because, The Head of State was influenced by the Northern leaders to

retrace his steps on the North's "no basis for unity" stance. The East did not accept it, hence, quarrels broke out and more tension generated (Akpan, 1976; Undiyaundeye, 2008). On the 17th and 18th of February 1967, Secretaries to the Military Government accompanied by legal and financial advisers, met in Benin to advise on how the Aburi decisions should be implemented. Prior to the meeting, there was intense pressure on the Federal Government not to implement the Aburi decisions in order to keep the country together. The outcome of that meeting was Decree No. 8 which, Akpan (1976) believes, faithfully implemented the Aburi decisions. As was the practice, the draft was sent to all the Military Governors of the country.

A meeting of the Supreme Military Council was scheduled for Benin on the 10th of March but Ojukwu declined the invitation to attend the meeting, citing insecurity to his life. Ojukwu was not fair in citing insecurity in the Midwest because 90 percent of military officers in the Midwest were Midwesterners Igbo and there were no Northern troops in Benin City. This was an important meeting for, according to the agenda, the Council was to debate and approve Draft decree No. 8 for the implementation of the Aburi consensus. After a wide range of discussion, the Council approved Decree No. 8, which was promulgated on the 10th of March 1967 and published on the 17th of May, 1967 (Undiyaundeye, 2008).

Governor Ojukwu found sections 70 and 71 of Decree 8 particularly offensive. Section 70 empowered the Supreme Military Council to declare "a state of emergency in Nigeria if the Head of the Federal Military Government and at least three of the Governors agree to do so". Section 71 empowered the Head of the Federal Military Government in agreement with at least three of the Governors "to legislate for any particular Region whenever they deem it fit during a state of emergency, with or without the consent of the Governor of that particular Region". Azikiwe (1971) states that after the Aburi Conference, Lt. Col. Ojukwu deliberately exercised regional executive authority in an illegal and unconstitutional manner, which left no one in doubt that he had decided to withdraw the Eastern Nigeria from the Federation. However, at numerous fora, Ojukwu denied that the Eastern Region would secede. He was quick at each occasion to note that the 'Eastern Region can only be forced out of Nigeria'.

#### **Some of Governor Ojukwu's Pre-Civil War Actions**

On the 21st of February, he promulgated the Law and Order (Maintenance)

Edict, No. 2 of 1967, enabling him to declare any part of Eastern Nigeria to be a "disturbed area", if he satisfied that there was a threat to, or that any disturbance endangered or was likely to endanger law, public order and peace in the area. Offenders were to be tried not by the civil courts but by special tribunals to be set up by warrant at the instance of the Military Government at Enugu. The verdict of such special tribunal was said to be final and no appeal against it shall be entertained by any other tribunal or court; although every decision made by it shall be subject to confirmation by Lt. Col. Ojukwu, who reserved to himself the right to vary, alter or suspend same (Azikiwe, 1971). Three months later, Lt. Col. Ojukwu promulgated the Constitution (Interim Provisions) Decree, No. 5 of 1967. This decree vested legislation and executive powers in the Military Governor, to be exercised in his absolute discretion, by means of any decree made by him. Section 3(3) states that: "a decree may be published by means of a sound or television broadcast, or in writing or in any other manner". Section 4 provided that the validity of any decree shall not be questioned in any court. Section 6 stipulated that Lt. Col Ojukwu may exercise executive power "either directly or through powers or authorities subordinate to him".

In addition to the above, Azikiwe (1971) cites 10 specific instances of violations of the Nigerian constitution by Lt. Col. Ojukwu and his Regional Government: (i) he abrogated the National Provident Fund as far as its application to the Eastern Region was concerned. This was a workable and an existing institution in Nigeria; (ii) he interfered with inter-regional trade by seizing foodstuffs and consumer goods loaded in and transported by lorries which stopped at the Eastern bank of the Niger bridge, bound for Northern Nigeria; (iii) he confiscated one-third of the entire rolling stock of the Nigerian Railways including 115 oil-tankers; (iv) he impounded £206,000 worth of produce in transit from Northern Nigeria via Port Harcourt, awaiting shipment overseas; (v) he obstructed the passage of goods belonging to neighbouring countries, like Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, and expropriated them; (vi) on March 30, 1967, he published the Revenue Collection Edict empowering him to seize all revenues payable in the East to the Federal Government; (vii) on April 5, 1967, he impounded a Nigerian Airways DC3 aircraft at Port Harcourt; (viii) a Nigerian Airways F27 aircraft with 26 passengers on board was sky-jacked at Benin and forced to land at Enugu, where it was detained. This was an act of piracy in the air; (ix) he ordered the confiscation of all Federal institutions in Eastern



Nigeria, including harbours, telephone, radio stations, post offices, telegraph stations, telephone exchanges, railways, coal and electricity undertakings; (x) he converted properties and assets of the following Federal statutory corporations and usurped them in the service of his regional government: Electricity Corporation of Nigeria, Nigeria Airways Corporation, Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, Nigerian Coal Corporation, Nigerian Railway Corporation and Nigerian Ports Authority.

Clearly, the above recitals indicated a positive trend to transform Eastern Nigeria into a separate state. Since October 1966, Lt. Col. Ojukwu illegally sealed off that region from the rest of the country. Non-Easterners were unconstitutionally forced to immigrate to their regions of origin and Easterners were interned. Road blocks were in evidence at all exit points near regional boundaries, while Easterners were welcomed back into the region, they were prohibited from leaving it. The reaction of the Federal Military Government to Lt. Col. Ojukwu's defiance assumed two dimensions: appeasement and containment. In February, 1967, it established a Federal Rehabilitation Board for the care of displaced persons throughout the country and made £461,000 available to the Board, of this sum, £350,000 was allocated to eastern Nigeria. On the 1st of April, 1967, the Federal Government declared the Revenue Collection Edict illegal and unconstitutional. Three days later, it suspended all the flights of Nigeria Airways to the Eastern Region. On the 5th of April, it blocked all foreign exchange transactions in that part of the country. The Nigerian Produce Marketing Company, with support, directed firms and agents, dealing with primary products, to transact business directly with it, instead of doing so through the eastern Nigerian Marketing Board (Azikiwe, 1971).

The Supreme Military Council met in Lagos on the 22nd of April and adopted a comprehensive political and administrative programme of action for preserving the federation. This included the creation of more states as the basis of political stability in Nigeria. The Federal Military Government declared that all savings banks deposits made in the East after the 1st of March, as well as savings stamps certificates and premium bonds sold in that region, would not be recognised by the Federal authorities. The border of Eastern Nigeria and the Cameroon Republic was sealed off. All passports issued to officials and officers of Eastern Nigerian origin were cancelled. In essence, the imposition of economic, diplomatic and military

sanctions was intended as a corrective measure, to warn Eastern Nigeria to desist from its illegalities and unconstitutional behavior.

On the 17th of May, Lt. Col. Ojukwu, in an interview with Reuter, predicted the break-up of the Federation and announced his intention to establish a separate monetary system for Eastern Nigeria. Judging from contemporary happenings, he said that the splitting of the country was imminent. On the same day, the National Reconciliation Committee, based in Lagos, which had tried to placate General Gowon and Lt. Col. Ojukwu, suggested that the sanctions should be lifted and the Revenue Allocation Edict revoked. It recommended also that Northern troops should be withdrawn from Western Nigeria and Lagos, to ease tension. General Gowon accepted all the recommendations of the National Reconciliation Committee and directed all Federal Ministries and establishments to resume normal business with Eastern Nigeria; Lt. Col. Ojukwu on his part refused to co-operate and derided the composition of the national reconciliation Committee (Azikiwe, 1971).

The secession idea was very attractive to its protagonists because of oil revenue. From the humble beginning of production of 1.8 million barrels per day in 1958, by 1967, the production had soared to 109 million barrels per day bringing in approximate revenue of £1.8 million and £124.1 million respectively. It is projected that the secessionist authorities would have been producing between 170,000 barrels per day (1969) and 925,000 barrels per day (1973), on the low side and between 170,000 barrels per day (1969) and £1.3 million (1973) on the high side and earning revenue of between £7 million (1969) and £90 million (1973) on the low side and between £7 million (1969) and £130 million (1973) on the high side. This would have given the secessionist authorities a balance of payment surplus of between £27 million (1969) and £74 million (1973). Nigerian authorities were also facing a foreign exchange constraint and secessionist's gains from petroleum would have been Nigeria losses since secessionists' gains would not be available for redistribution (Undiyaundeye, 2008). Without Eastern Nigeria, Nigeria's oil output revenue would reduce by 45 per cent; the foreign exchange availability would also reduce by 40 per cent and the Gross National Product would plummet by 30 per cent. These grim data provided a strong economic incentive for the leaders of federal Nigeria to wish to maintain a united country on the other hand and the Eastern Nigerian leadership to be equally determined to secede from the federation (Undiyaundeye, 2008).

According to Effiong (2008), on the 5th of May 1967, before the outbreak of hostilities, a private National Conciliation Committee, headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, visited Eastern Nigeria and held talks with Governor Ojukwu. The team consisted of four members. Chief Awolowo addressed the gathering and made the famous pledge that if Eastern Nigeria was forced out of the federation, the West would have no option but to follow suit. Prof. Samuel Aluko also spoke. After the public meeting, Governor Ojukwu and Chief Awolowo retired into the Ojukwu's inner office and held further private talks. When Chief Awolowo returned to Lagos, Governor Ojukwu maintained direct links by telephone on daily basis. On the 27th of May 1967, General Gowon announced the creation of 12 states from the existing four regions. In response, Governor Ojukwu proclaimed the sovereign state of Biafra on the 30th of May, 1967. Between this period and the outbreak of the war on the 6th of July 1967, further diplomatic attempts were made. However, they all failed to yield fruits.

### **Concluding Remarks**

It is probable that the greatest wound that has been inflicted on the Nigeria's corporate existence in its entire history was the Nigerian Civil War. The dreadful war was prosecuted by the Federal Government and the secessionist Biafran Government. Etire and Ajuk (2017) note that the Federal Government of Nigeria fought to keep Nigeria as one indivisible country, the Ojukwu Biafran forces struggled to sustain the independence of the "Republic of Biafra". Simply put, it was a war to keep Nigeria one by the Federal Government and to the Biafrans, it was a war for self determination. The war was triggered by many factors, particularly post-independence era national challenges such as: the Action Group (AG) political crisis of 1962, the 1962/1963 population census crisis, the 1964 federal elections crisis, and the 1965 Western Regional elections crisis. Also the high level of corruption perpetrated by the ruling elite also incensed the "messianic" orientation of the military officers. However, the handling of the first military coup and the counter coup of January and July 1966, respectively brought about the war. It is revealed that when uncertainty began to prevail over national affairs, extensive diplomatic engineering came to fore, aimed at saving the situation. The efforts as already discussed included: the ad hoc political conference at Lagos, the Aburi meeting of the Supreme Military Council, which also failed to produce an acceptable political and military solution, the meeting of army officers in Benin which

broke down without accomplishing anything as well as the National Conciliation Committee, etc. As noted earlier, the failure of diplomacy is usually the outbreak of war. The Nigerian civil war and its consequence could have been avoided if the tenets of diplomacy were closely followed, particularly, if the actors had honoured the decisions of negotiations, bargaining mediation, etc.

Obviously, one of the critical issues that came to the front burner while diplomatic efforts were being made to avert the war was the issue of autonomy for the then existing regions. More than half a decade after the outbreak of the war, the issue of autonomy for the federating units has strongly resurfaced in the mode of "restructuring". The quest becomes more pronounced as each day passes and has the potential of plunging the nation into another senseless war. It therefore becomes pertinent for the leaders to adopt the early warning signal, which is an aspect of diplomacy and negotiate the future of the country to enshrine justice and equity. As noted, ethnicity and personal idiosyncrasies of the leaders contributed to the failure of the diplomatic efforts aimed at averting the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War. The leadership of the country should respond positively to the yearnings for restructuring and serve country from calamity. This is when the lessons of the Nigerian Civil War would have been learnt.

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