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Nigerian Civil War and Britain's Peace Initiative, 1967–1970

*Ayodele Samuel Abolorunde**

The outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War few years after the attainment of independence from Britain further deepened the interest of the latter in Nigeria's existence as a nation. Scholars of disciplines such as history, political science and international relations through their works, have examined the nature and dimensions of Nigeria's relations with Britain as well as the British involvement in the Nigerian Civil War. Foreign policy formulation, colonial legacies, economic ties, are typical examples of the nature of Nigeria's relations with Britain. Similarly, scholars have interrogated the roles of Britain in the Nigerian Civil War through multilateral efforts at the United Nations and Commonwealth of Nations, propaganda, protection of the British economic interests in Nigeria, British military initiative as well as the pressure of the Cold War as the basis for prompt British intervention in the war. However, comprehensive intellectual attention has not been paid to the British peace initiative outside the multilateral conflict resolution structure. It is against this backdrop that this paper interrogates the nature and dimension of British peace initiative strategy which brought an end to the Nigerian Civil War. The paper argues in its conclusion that the failure of the multilateral approach of the British was salvaged by the unilateral British bureaucratic strategy that was enhanced by their colonial legacies in Nigeria.

[Nigeria; Great Britain; Peace; Civil War]

Introduction

War according to Sir Robert Phillimore, is the exercise of the international right of action and a necessary tool of statecraft if waged for specific political objectives.¹ It can be defined as a struggle among political units, within and between states, involving organized fighting

* University of Ibadan, Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Ibadan, Nigeria.
E-mail: ay4real180@yahoo.com.

¹ R. PHILLIMORE, *Commentaries Upon International Law*, Vol. III. Philadelphia 1854, p. 99.

forces, and resulting in a sizeable number.² The concept of war according to von Clausewitz is an unlimited use of violence as well as unrestrained use of force to attain political goal in the service of the state.³ War is a means for achieving a particular end as well as instrument of statecraft, a tool which can be used for different purposes which could either be good or bad while the purposes could be used in uplifting a people and righting the wrongs of the past while creating a new social order that would enable the people involved to live happily.⁴ It can be used to either resist domination or to effect the conquest or domination of others in just and unjust manners.⁵

From the foregoing, war can be defined as an escalation of conflict. It can be seen as fierce contestation for power, influence and space within a state and between two or more sovereign states. It's a process that transmutes from mere conflict between two or more contending powers within and outside a state to armed conflict. War manifests when there is a breakdown of communication channel between or among parties to conflict. Globally, wars had been fought between or among nations regionally and internationally while wars were equally fought in different parts of globe within states. For instance, the Napoleonic Wars of 1799 to 1815 and the Crimean War of 1854 to 1856 were wars fought mainly in Europe as a region among the European powers such as Austria, Great Britain, France, Russia and Prussia. The Austro-Prussian War of 1866, the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1871, the Russo-Turkish War of 1877 and First and Second Balkan Wars of 1911 and 1912 are examples of wars fought between and among nations.⁶

The outbreak of the First and Second World Wars in 1914 and 1939 respectively opened a new vista in the history of warfare globally. It must be stated that the outbreak of wars is not restricted to escalated conflict situations between or among countries of the same region and countries of different regions, wars manifest within countries in different parts of the globe. For example, the American civil war of 1861

² T. A. COULOUMBIS – J. W. WOLFE, *Introduction to International Relations Power and Justice*, New Jersey 1990, p. 181.

³ K. von CLAUSEWITZ, *On War*, New York 1943, pp. 595–596.

⁴ T. ADENIRAN, *Introduction to International Relations*, Lagos 1982, p. 123.

⁵ See: Q. W. MILLS, *The Causes of War Three*, New York 1958.

⁶ See: A. WOODS, *Europe Since 1815*, London 1964. See also: H. L. PEACOCK, *A History of Modern Europe, 1789–1981*, London 1958.

to 1865, the Spanish War of 1936 and the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to 1990.⁷ In Africa, wars were fought to resist foreign domination. A good example of this was the Algerian war against the French in the 1960s before the attainment of independence of the former. Countries such as Angola, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde engaged the Portuguese in armed conflicts that degenerated into war in the 1970s.

After the attainment of independence of most African states in the decades of 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s, internal squabbles and fierce contestation for power among political gladiators of various African states created a situation for political instabilities that snowballed into civil wars. For instance, the civil war which broke out in Liberia in 1989, the civil of 1991 in Somalia, the Algerian civil war of 1992 and the civil war which broke out in Sierra Leone in 1992.⁸ The political instabilities which enveloped Burundi and Rwanda in 1994 and later degenerated into civil wars formed major headlines in the continent and the entire globe due to the historically unprecedented genocide that accompanied these wars, especially that of Rwanda. The sensitivity of civil war makes scholars like Coulobis and Wolfe to assert that civil war develops out of failure of a national political system and its institutions to function effectively. In this condition of institutional collapse according to them, significant sections of the population, including major factions of the elite, no longer accord those in power, or even the regime they represent, a sense of legitimacy.⁹ Thus, literature abounds on the Nigerian civil war in terms of genocide,¹⁰ international politics,¹¹ involvement of European and Asiatic powers,¹² perception

⁷ See also: A. ADEOGUN, *The United States from Colony to Nationhood*, Lagos 2003. See also: N. LOWE, *Mastering Modern World History*, London 1982.

⁸ See also: J. A. S. GREENVILLE, *A History of the World in the Twentieth Century, Vol. II*, Harvard 1997; M. MEREDITH, *The State of Africa. A History of Fifty Years of Independence*, London 2005.

⁹ COULOMBIS – WOLFE, p. 205.

¹⁰ K. E. SMITH, The UK and 'genocide' in Biafra, in: *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16, 2–3, 2014, pp. 247–262; see also: L. HEERTEN, The Nigeria-Biafra War: Post-Colonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide, in: *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16, 2–3, 2014, pp. 169–203.

¹¹ J. J. STREMLAU, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970*, Princeton 1977.

¹² J. O. AKINBI, Exploring the Roles Played by Some European and Asiatic Powers during the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970, in: *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 5, 8, 2015, pp. 151–155.

of international actors,¹³ oil politics,¹⁴ revolution,¹⁵ economic impact on Nigeria,¹⁶ and foreign business interests.¹⁷

This paper focuses on Britain's peace initiative and the Nigerian civil war starting from 1967 when the war broke out to 1970 when the war ended. The study notes that discussions on the history of Nigerian civil war have been centered around the interplay of forces within and outside Nigeria. In this way scholars have paid adequate attention to how various actors within and outside Nigeria protected their interests during the war to the exclusion of the British peace initiative outside the multilateral peace agenda of the international actors. The conventional wisdom on the subject matter of the Nigerian civil war places emphases on oil politics, social disorder, political instability, foreign interests, ethnicity, struggles for superiority within the military hierarchy, impact of the cold war politics and the quest for sustained relations between Nigeria and Britain.¹⁸

However, Oladapo Fafowora, drawing on the strength of British diplomatic intervention in the Nigerian civil war challenged the conventional wisdom by maintaining that Britain chose to intervene in the war through Commonwealth Secretariat in London behind the

¹³ M. S. AUDU – O. UZOMA – I. B. ISSAC, Contextualizing the International Dimensions of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970, in: *American Journal of Contemporary Research*, 3, 8, 2013, pp. 112–117.

¹⁴ Ch. UCHE, Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War, in: *The Journal of African History*, 49, 1, 2008, pp. 111–135.

¹⁵ F. A. JAMES, The Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970: A Revolution?, in: *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 5, 3, 2011, pp. 120–124.

¹⁶ U. P. ONUMONU – P. O. ANUTANWA, Rethinking the Impact of Nigerian Civil War: Commerce in the Post Civil War Nnewi and Its Challenges, 1970–2000, in: *Mgbakoiba Journal of African Studies*, 6, 2, 2017, pp. 155–167.

¹⁷ A. RAJI – T. S. ABEJIDE, Oil and Biafra: An Assessment of Shell BP's Dilemma During the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970, in: *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review*, 2, 11, 2013, pp. 15–32.

¹⁸ UCHE, pp. 111–135. See: K. OMOTOSHO, *Just Before the Dawn*, Ibadan 1988. See also: J. A. S. GREENVILLE, *A History of the World in the Twentieth Century. Vol. II*, Harvard 1997; T. ADENIRAN, Nigeria and Great Britain, in: A. B. AKINYEMI – S. O. AGBI – A. O. OTUBANJO (eds.), *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty Five Years. Vol. X. International Relations*, Ibadan 1989; S. O. AGBI, *The Organization of African Unity and African Diplomacy, 1963–1979*, Ibadan 1986; SMITH. See also: I. OKORO, Ndi Igbo of the South-East: Centenary Glimpses, in: S. U. FWATSHAK – O. AKINWUMI (eds.), *The House that 'Lugard Built' Perspectives on Nigeria's First Centenary: The Pains, the Gains and the Agenda for the Future*, Jos 2014.

scenes.¹⁹ Kaye Whiteman corroborates this evidence by arguing that the initial British reaction to the 1967 Biafran secession, led by Colonel Emeka Ojukwu, was muted by the British leadership.²⁰ In a similar vein, S. O. Agbi notes tangentially that British inability to intervene in the war effectively through the Commonwealth manifested due to rigid positions of both the Nigerian and Biafran governments.²¹ Apart from Fafowora, Whiteman and Agbi's analyses that examine the multilateral approach of the British intervention in the Nigerian civil war, extant studies have not paid adequate attention to the unilateral and comprehensive British peace initiatives outside the multilateral international peace efforts.

This neglect reduces our comprehensive understanding of British intervention in the Nigerian civil war. The main thesis is to demonstrate that British intervention in the war outside the multilateral peace initiative assisted greatly in undermining the intervention of various international actors whose involvement in the war complexified dimensions which the war took. This is because British involvement reduced these complexities as it complemented the international efforts that were initiated through multilateral peace initiatives. It is a contribution to the study of Nigerian civil war and moves discussion in new directions. The study is divided into four sections. The first deals with introduction, Nigeria's post-independence political crises and the outbreak of war, the challenges and success of British peace initiatives in the Nigerian civil war and the conclusion.

Nigeria's Post-Independence Political Crises and the Outbreak of War

The Nigeria's post-independence political crises could be traced to uncontrolled profligacy of the pioneer leaders of Nigeria as a new nation. The unquenchable taste for primitive accumulation necessitated the need for fierce contestation for power in the regions as well as the

¹⁹ O. FAFOWORA, *Pressure Groups and Foreign Policy. A Comparative Study of British Attitudes and Policy towards Secessionist Moves in Congo (1960–1963) and in Nigeria (1966–1969)*, Ibadan 1990, p. 106.

²⁰ K. WHITEMAN, *The Switchback and the fallback Nigeria-Britain Relations*, in: A. ADEBANJO – A. R. MUSTAPHA (eds.), *Gulliver's Troubles Nigeria's Foreign Policy after the Cold War*, KwaZulu-Natal 2008, p. 259.

²¹ S. O. AGBI, *The Organization of African Unity and African Diplomacy, 1963–1979*, Ibadan 1986, p. 63.

central government in Lagos, the country's capital by the three major political parties that is, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and Action Group (AG). These three political parties were formed along ethnic lines without any of them possessing pan-Nigerian outlook.²² The NPC, NCNC and AG were dominant in the North, South Eastern part and South Western part of the country respectively. The dominance of their respective regions was perpetuated by the major ethnic groups as this laid the foundation of contradiction of Nigeria's post-independence political structure.

An additional component of this contradiction was the existence in all the three regions of ethnic minorities which served as a potential nursery for conflict within the regions while the Nigerian leaders did not find it politically expedient to integrate these ethnic minorities into the political structures of their regions.²³ Since three parties represented largely the majority groups of Nigerians, especially Nigerians of Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba ethnic stock, political powers were equally shared by the politicians of these ethnic stocks without considerable sense of belonging to the ethnic minorities. The sustenance of this political dominance meant that these political parties also erected structures of economic dominance through the planting of business interests of politicians in these regions in banks, businesses and financial structures set up by these parties in their respective regions in order to achieve their political objectives.²⁴

By implication, these political parties dominated by major politicians of major ethnic groups in the country moved quickly to amass a fortune from public funds large enough for them to be able to win the next election.²⁵ For example, the Action Group government in Nigeria's Western Region in 1962 invested about £6.5 million in the National Investment and Properties Company, a business which had four party leaders as its directors while one of the directors donated £3.7

²² See: R. L. SKLAR, Contradictions in Nigerian Political System, in: *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3, 2, 1965, pp. 201–213. See also: R. L. SKLAR, *Nigeria Political Parties*, Princeton 1963.

²³ FAFOWORA, p. 18.

²⁴ M. MEREDITH, *The State of Africa. A History of Fifty Years of Independence*, London 2005, p. 174.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

million to the Action Group Party in the form of special donations.²⁶ Northern politicians exhibited similar profligacy as these political gladiators in the North served as the greatest beneficiaries of thirty-nine investments and loan projects of the Northern Nigeria Development Corporation during the First Republic.²⁷ The dominance of the political-economy of the regions by the politicians of the three major groups further heightened tension in these regions as this reverberated at the center through fierce contestation for the control of the central government by the three major parties.

This contestation was further accentuated by the insatiable attitude of the country's political gladiators and their parties in the accumulation of wealth for the purposes of strategic positioning at the center. It was this struggle for strategic positioning at the center, especially between the NPC-NCNC federal government and AG as the opposition party that further worsened the already tensed political atmosphere in the country. These political dialectics between the ruling parties and the AG as the opposition reached their crescendo in the late 1962 and early 1963 when the AG as a party became highly polarized through the struggle for the soul of the party between Chief Obafemi Awolowo the leader of AG and the opposition leader in Federal House of Representatives Lagos and Chief Akintola, the Deputy Leader of AG and Premier of the Western Region.²⁸

The internal division within the AG further made it vulnerable to suppression by the NPC led federal government as Awolowo and his loyalists who were not in the good books of the federal government were convicted for treason in September 1, 1963.²⁹ The year 1964 ushered in crises that accompanied the federal elections of that year. As argued earlier, the three dominant political parties stifled all oppositions in their respective regions. In the Western Region, no opposition political parties were allowed to campaign except that of Premier Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) while NCNC and NPC had no rivals in the eastern and northern regions

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ A. ADEMOYEGA, *Why We Struck. The Story of the First Nigerian Coup*, Ibadan 1981, pp. 12–13.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 15.

respectively.³⁰ The outcome of the federal election further strengthened the position of the ruling NPC and NCNC led government despite nationwide boycott by political parties such as United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) in the North and AG that had become the opposition party due to its dwindling fortunes in West.³¹

More than that, the imbroglia which followed the outcome of the elections of 1964 further legitimized the illegality perpetrated by the ruling NPC-NCNC led government through rigging that did not stop Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, the country's President from forming a coalition government. This unfortunate political scenario has been described by Fafowora as unequal distribution of power at the center and lack of political and economic equilibrium between Northern and Southern Nigeria.³² This lack of political equilibrium prepared the ground for political gloom in the country especially in the Western Region and other parts of the country. The dancing of the country on the brink no doubt necessitated military intervention in politics as this filibustered the country's nascent democracy in January 1966.

With the military intervention in the country's politics in January 1966, uncertainties further enveloped the political atmosphere due to ethnic interpretation given to the coup. Any keen observer of Nigeria's politics would not hesitate to conclude that it was an Igbo dominated coup as the emergence of General Aguiyi Ironsi, the most senior military officer in the Nigerian Army an Igbo further exacerbated the complicated political situation. This feeling of political insecurity of the northern oligarchy necessitated the counter-coup of July 1966 as the Western Region Governor, Col. Adekunle Fajuyi and General Ironsi were gruesomely murdered in coup that was perceived as northern orchestrated coup.

As the coup produced Gen. Yakubu Gowon, a northerner as the Head of State, the political atmosphere in the country became sufficiently charged such that lives and properties of the Igbo people were destroyed while some reprisals took place in the East.³³ In the

³⁰ B. IGE, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria (1940–1970)*, Ibadan 1995, p. 255.

³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 256–257.

³² FAFOWORA, pp. 18–19.

³³ I. OKORO, Ndi Igbo of the South-East: Centenary Glimpses, in: S. U. FWATSHAK – O. AKINWUMI (eds.), *The House that 'Lugard Built' Perspectives on Nigeria's First Centenary: The Pains, the Gains and the Agenda for the Future*. Jos 2014, p. 94.

midst of this political uncertainties, the Eastern Region Governor Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu saw himself as the protector of the rights of the Igbo people throughout the country as he was not too pleased with the deteriorating security situation in the country especially on matters that concerned the Igbo people in the North. The apparent lack of unity in the country in Ojukwu's estimation created a wedge between him and Gowon. The tension between the two leaders was further compounded by the creation of twelve state by Gowon in May 1967 as this left Ojukwu with no choice than to declare the Republic of Biafra as a secessionist region on the May 27, 1967 as these declarations of Gowon and Ojukwu led to the country's civil war.

The Challenges and Success of British Peace Initiatives in the Nigerian Civil War

The outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in July 1967 was given different interpretations by the keen observers, especially outside Nigeria as these interpretations were shaped by the convictions and interests of these observers. The civil war from the perspective of the Muslim nations like Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and Sudan was an affront on the part of the Christian dominated Eastern Nigeria against the federal government of Nigeria led by the Muslim North.³⁴ The outbreak of the war from the perspective of a country like Ethiopia was strictly political as the Ethiopians believed that Biafra secession bid could prepare the ground for the disintegration of the Ethiopian nation that was resisting the Eritrean secessionists.³⁵ The reactions of the keen observers in the international community were diverse depending on where their interests lied. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) for instance, believed that further secessionist movements could create unbearable political instability in the continent. This explains why Ghana a member of OAU, under the leadership of Lieutenant General Ankrah made frantic diplomatic efforts at reconciliation between Ojukwu and Gowon few months before the war broke out.³⁶

It is reasonable to state that the thinking of Ghana as a member of OAU conformed to the quest for peace and security of the African

³⁴ O. AGBI, *The Organization of African Unity and African Diplomacy, 1963–1979*, Ibadan 1986, p. 59.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

³⁶ OMOTOSHO, p. 276.

continent as espoused in the OAU Charter. For the British, allowing their former colony which was the largest colony in Africa as well as the largest black nation in the world after independence to disintegrate could disintegrate their legacies. It must, however, be stated that the British unilateral peace initiative during the war was intrinsically linked to her economic interests in Nigeria since the independence of the later in 1960. By 1965 for instance, the value of British exports to Nigeria was £88m, a third of Nigeria's total imports.³⁷ The neo-colonial nature of the Nigerian economy, especially the private commercial sector was dominated by British-owned enterprises³⁸ while the totality of British investment in Nigeria before the war stood at £200m representing 53 percent of total foreign investments in Nigeria.³⁹

The outbreak of the war in 1967 naturally threatened the British business interests in Nigeria and this necessitated the need for early British intervention in the war. For instance, the failure of the British government to convince General Gowon led federal government not to erect oil blockade against Shell, an imminent blockade which emanated from the latter's readiness to pay £250,000 to Biafra⁴⁰ convinced the British that the disintegration of Nigeria would create economic dilemma for the British investments in Nigeria. This imminent economic uncertainty coupled with the strategic move of Russia towards the federal government in terms of arms supplies spurred Britain into diplomatic action in the Nigerian war.⁴¹ The diplomatic move of the British was strategically designed to achieve two objectives. First, to neutralize Soviet strategic incursion into the economic space of the Nigerian nation. Second, to further consolidate British economic tentacles in Nigeria. The quest for achieving these objectives created anxiety in London. The need to douse this anxiety led to a memo written by the British Parliamentary and Under-Secretary of State in the Commonwealth inquiring about the extent of safety of

³⁷ See: *Commonwealth Trade, 1970*, published by the General Economic Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 1971.

³⁸ See: A. G. FRANK, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York 1969.

³⁹ See: *Economic and Financial Review*, Central Bank of Nigeria, Lagos, July 1965, pp. 8–11.

⁴⁰ FAFOWORA, p. 98.

⁴¹ WHITEMAN, p. 259.

British industries and business interests in Nigeria especially in the Eastern region.⁴²

The British government also inquired about the readiness of the federal government to protect British investments in Nigeria and subsequently got an assurance from the Nigerian government through the Commissioner for External Affairs, Dr. Okoi Arikpo at a meeting held in London with Commonwealth representatives and British businessmen.⁴³ It seems probable to state that the British unwavering diplomatic manoeuvres in Nigeria were largely borne out of the need to shield their economic presence in Nigeria not the quest for the dismantling of communist threat in Nigeria for the overall interests of the capitalist West. This economic objective has been buttressed by Chris Brown when he asserts that the well-being of any government largely depends on the success of its economic management and this success cannot be achieved in isolation without the effective monitoring of economic interests of that nation in the global economic arena.⁴⁴

This effective monitoring is a fundamental policy choice that guarantees the survival⁴⁵ of a nation in global economic environment. The quest for this survival compelled the British to exert pressure on the Nigerian government on the need to proffer political solution to the crisis as this led to the historic meeting of the two sides in Kampala Uganda from May 23–30, 1968.⁴⁶ The Kampala meeting was chaired by the Commonwealth Secretary General Mr. Arnold Smith and Uganda's Foreign Minister, Mr. Sam Okada as they tried vehemently hard to bring the delegates of the two sides together in order to bring the conflict to an end.⁴⁷ This effort however, did not materialize because the delegates from Biafra demanded for a ceasefire before talks while the federal government representatives insisted that some conditions must be laid down before ceasefire.⁴⁸ The rigid stance of both parties led to temporary collapse of the British diplomatic efforts in

⁴² Britain Votes Faith in Federal Government, in: *Daily Times*, April 13, 1968, p. 10.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ch. BROWN, *Understanding International Relations*, New York 1997, p. 141.

⁴⁵ Ch. A. ALADE, *Theories, Concepts and Principles in the Study of International Relations*, Lagos 1997, p. 69.

⁴⁶ FAFOWORA, p. 106.

⁴⁷ Ceasefire Problem Stalemate at Peace Talks, in: *Daily Times*, May 30, 1968, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

Kampala. As the secessionists began to lose territory and access to sea, they intensified one of the most outstanding media campaigns of the 20th century as this further galvanized support for them from Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Gabon, Zambia and Haiti within and outside Africa.⁴⁹

The recognition of the Biafra propaganda carried with it criticisms of the British government as this further intensified the nervousness of Britain while the supplying of arms became a deep trauma.⁵⁰ This dilemma made their support in terms of arms supply to Nigeria ambivalent. The British during their hesitation and perplexity incurred the reaction of the Nigerian government. In one of the interviews granted to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) in London, Nigeria's Federal Commissioner for Information and Labor, Anthony Enahoro admonished the British government on the importance of its support given to Nigeria in terms of arms and that the abandonment of that support could jeopardize British interests in Nigeria when the country looked elsewhere for support.⁵¹ Enahoro's comment attested to the readiness of the Nigerian state likewise other third world country to exploit to the fullest the rivalry between the two ideological blocs of the Cold War in local conflict around the globe as expressed by the American policy makers.⁵² Initially, the British appeared underterred about this subtle threat from Nigeria. This was connected with how the Biafra propaganda had moved world opinions behind the plight of the Ibos and this made the British to thread it softly as far as their arms supply was to Nigeria was concerned. Nigeria on the other hand was not disserved within and outside Africa. For Instance, the unflinching support demonstrated by the Togolese government when it intercepted an aircraft carrying Nigerian notes that were believed to belong to the secessionists who were trying to change these old notes to the new ones introduced by the Nigerian government.⁵³ The federal government under the leadership of Gowon changed these notes

⁴⁹ WHITEMAN, p. 260.

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ UK Arms Ban Will Not Halt War, in: *Daily Times*, June 8, 1968, p. 1.

⁵² NND/969000/. Memorandum from the Director, United States Arms Control and Disarmament, William C. Foster to Mr Benjamin H. Read on *Issues related to United States Stance on Arms Control and Disarmament*, November 22, 1968, p. 2.

⁵³ Rebel Cash Deal Costs Nigeria £700,000, in: *Daily Times*, June 21, 1968, p. 1.

to prevent the secessionists from using the old currency for arms purchase.

Another example was the increase in Nigerian trade with the Soviet Union as the latter supplied arms such as 122-MM guns, Kalashnikovs, 107-MM recoilless rifles and Soviet Cars such as Lada, Moskvitch and Volga.⁵⁴ Soviet's supply of arms confirmed the fear of the British and the Americans about the long term strategy of Russia to exploit every opportunity capable of weakening the West through arms supply to the stronghold of the West during conflict.⁵⁵ The unprecedented economic intercourse necessitated by the British unstable attitude forced London to renew its support for Nigeria through arms supply as well as effective monitoring of peace talks in Ethiopia. Although the peace talk in Ethiopia was initiated by the Consultative Committee of the OAU,⁵⁶ the British monitored the talks with keen interests. In one of the meetings between Anthony Enahoro and Britain's Minister of State for Commonwealth Relations, Lord Shepherd in London, the British inquired from the Nigerian government the state of the Ethiopian peace talks and equally prevailed on Nigeria on the possibility of allowing relief materials to reach the civilian population in Biafra.⁵⁷ The British request appeared as a kind of pressure on Nigeria to reverse its policy on relief supplies.⁵⁸

Though the Addis Ababa peace talks produced a forlorn hope for peace, it would be wrong to assume that it was a dismal failure because it further gave the British the impetus to intervene in the Nigerian civil war on two fronts. First, the supply of arms. Second, the failure of Addis Ababa talks further placed diplomatic responsibilities on the shoulder of the British. These scenarios appear irreconcilable but the British bureaucracy, as a matter of necessity realized the importance of preventing the disintegration of their former colony as this compelled them to sustain their obligation of arms supply on the one hand, while lack of quick diplomatic solution to the war could

⁵⁴ ADENIRAN, *Nigeria and Great Britain*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ NND019006/. Department of State Policy Planning the Further Spread of Nuclear Weapons: Problems of the West, February 1966, p. 7.

⁵⁶ AGBI, p. 64.

⁵⁷ Enahoro Lord Shepherd Discuss Nigeria, in: *Daily Times*, August 20, 1968, p. 12.

⁵⁸ Anthony Enahoro Holds Talks with British Government Officials, in: *Daily Sketch*, August 20, 1968, p. 1.

aggravate the effects of Nigeria's offensive against Biafra. The British anxiety about the effects of their arms supply to Nigeria was further heightened through the statement made by General Gowon in an interview that the federal troops will intensify their offensive against Biafra rebels and that victory was certain in four weeks.⁵⁹

This statement created a feeling of hysteria from the British public towards Nigeria. One of such anti-Nigerian sentiments in Britain was expressed in a letter written by one Mr. Edward Taylor, a Conservative member of the British House of Commons to Commonwealth Secretary, George Thomson demanding that the House of Commons should re-convene to discuss and review British supply of arms to Nigeria.⁶⁰ These anti-Nigerian sentiments appeared to have put the British government on the spot because pressure mounted on the government left it with no choice than to invite Anthony Enahoro, Nigeria's Commissioner for Information through the British Minister of State in the Commonwealth Office, George Thomson about the implication of the statement credited to Gowon.⁶¹ Sensing the importance of the British support to the Nigeria's war effort, the Nigerian government was able to convince the British that the statement credited to the Nigerian Head of States did not in any way violate the laid down conditions of the British government concerning the sales of arms to Nigeria.⁶²

It seems reasonable to argue that the British government was sufficiently convinced based on the response of the Nigerian government. One may equally posit that the unflinching support of the British to Nigeria did not dissuade the British public from mounting pressure on the government to reconsider its position on arms supply to Nigeria. The British government on the other hand appeared to be convinced about its strategic involvement in the Nigerian civil war. A pointer to this scenario was the support given by the American government through its Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Joseph Palmer in October 1968 that the British policy of maintaining her traditional arms supply to Nigeria should not be condemned as that failure to sustain the arms supply to Nigeria would be interpreted

⁵⁹ Enahoro Back with Message for Gowon, in: *Daily Times*, August 29, 1968, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Anthony Enahoro Holds Talks with British Government Officials, in: *Daily Sketch*, August 20, 1968, p. 1.

⁶¹ Enahoro Back with Message for Gowon, in: *Daily Times*, August 29, 1968, p. 12.

⁶² *Ibidem*.

as support for the secessionists.⁶³ Similar positive tone in support of Gowon led federal government was echoed in Nigeria in the editorial of *Morning Post* newspaper on November 11, 1968 as the newspaper vilified some members of the British Parliament who criticized Nigeria's war effort against Biafra.⁶⁴

The paper expressed its displeasure about the call for international peace keeping in Nigeria for effective monitoring of situation and ceasefire by some members of the British parliament as an affront on Nigeria's sovereignty.⁶⁵ The domestic support enjoyed by the Nigerian government through this paper coupled with that of America served as the vindication of British strategy of arms supply and diplomacy. It therefore follows that the reservation of some members of the British Parliament did not represent the overall interests of the British population. This position has been corroborated by Karen Smith when he argues that only 700 people in Britain joined the march against arms supply to Nigeria while only 2,000 of such signed the petition against arms supply to the federal government in 1968.⁶⁶ Since the Parliament in any democratic society represents the citizenry, this argument remains plausible and this explains the reason why the British government refused to be intimidated by the call of these few members of the Parliament to halt arms supply to Nigeria. As the call to halt arms supply continued unabated, the legitimacy which the British government enjoyed further spurred it to sustain its support for Nigeria. This was demonstrated through a letter sent by the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson via a diplomatic channel of the British Embassy headed by Sir David Hunt in Lagos in late November 1968.⁶⁷

The British government in the letter declared its continued support for Nigeria and that the preservation of Nigeria as one indivisible entity remained the cardinal objective of Britain.⁶⁸ As international call for the inspection of genocide as claimed by the propaganda machinery mounted within and outside Britain intensified, the British

⁶³ UK Should Not Stop Arms to Nigeria-Palmer, in: *Morning Post*, October 12, 1968, p. 16.

⁶⁴ International Peace Keeping Force for Nigeria?, in: *Morning Post*, November 11, 1968, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ See: SMITH.

⁶⁷ Wilson Writes Gowon, in: *Morning Post*, December 1, 1968, p. 16.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

government in the face of its arms supply saw the need to further sustain its unilateral diplomatic efforts in Nigeria through the initiative of inspecting the extent of genocidal activities as claimed by Biafra machinery against the Nigerian state. This necessitated the visit of the former British Minister for Commonwealth Affairs, Mr. Arthur Bottomley to Nigeria early December 1968 with the possibility of affirming or debunking the anti-Nigerian sentiments expressed by some sections of the British public.⁶⁹ It would be unreasonable to suggest that the pressure which emanated from some members of the British Parliament did not yield positive result. To an extent, the British government succumbed to this pressure because it realized that its quest for the preservation of one indivisible Nigeria through arms supply against secessionist tendencies can be achieved through diplomatic strategy. It could be argued that this thinking of the British leadership provided the meeting point that reconciled the contradictory disposition of the British decision makers and the Biafra protagonists in the British Parliament.

This meeting point of the decision making machinery of Britain was further demonstrated as the British government sent a powerful delegation that comprised of two members of the British Parliament. The members of the Parliament in this delegation comprised of Lord Fenner Brockway and James Griffiths a former Colonial Secretary for possible ceasefire by December 1968.⁷⁰ The delegation visited both General Gowon and Col. Ojukwu in Lagos and Umuahia while the details of their discussions with both leaders were kept under wraps.⁷¹ The zeal with which the delegation carried out its obligations further attests to the shift in attitude of some members of the British Parliament towards the federal government. They appeared to have toed the line of the executive in London knowing full well that the preservation of Nigeria as one entity will in the long run guaranteed the overall British interests in Nigeria. This line of thinking on the part of the British leadership was further given a boost as the British resolved that the solution to the Nigerian civil war rested largely on the parties to the war and that British government would create the platform for meaningful negotiation.⁷²

⁶⁹ Bottomley Here to Study the Nigerian Crisis, in: *New Nigerian*, December 3, 1968, p. 1.

⁷⁰ UK MPs to See Gowon, in: *Daily Times*, December 20, 1968, p. 16.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*.

The British government through Lord Shepherd, British Minister for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in the House of Lords pilloried the divisive intervention of some European powers such as France and Russia in the war without proffering lasting solution.⁷³ This criticism of the European powers by Shepherd came on the heels of the agreement reached between Soviet representatives under the leadership of Ambassador Dobrynin and United States representatives under the leadership of Presidential Assistant, Henry Kissinger in Washington on February 21, 1969 on the need to find a common ground on where their interests lied in different parts of the globe.⁷⁴ In order to create the platform for peace, the British government ensured a neutralized air strip for the purposes of supplying relief materials for the victims of both sides while negotiation continued.⁷⁵ It may not be out of place to contend that the British were tactical in their submission about the victims of the war. They were not unaware of the excruciating conditions of the Ibos that were far more severe than that of Nigerians. In order to give the strategic approach of the British some semblance of gravitas, the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson proposed a visit to Nigeria by March 1969, but this was initially rejected by Lagos before the Nigerian government succumbed to pressure of allowing Wilson into the country on March 27, 1969.⁷⁶

The visit of the Prime Minister was used as a platform of creating friendly climate for negotiation as Wilson jettisoned the plan to stay on board British naval ship named Fearless for the State House in Marina Lagos.⁷⁷ This was very strategic on the part of the British government as it provided the opportunities for robust diplomatic fraternization that enhanced the British peace initiative. The diplomatic strategy of the British government provided the springboard for Prime Minister Wilson to convince General Gowon when he arrived Lagos as he was able to persuade him on the need to open the channels for

⁷² Shepherd Tells UK House of Lords, in: *Daily Times*, February 26, 1969, p. 12.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ AVP RF, f. 0129. Memorandum of Conversation Between US Presidential Assistant, Henry Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador to the US, Dobrynin on the 21st of February 1969, p. 1.

⁷⁵ Shepherd Tells UK House of Lords, in: *Daily Times*, February 26, 1969, p. 12.

⁷⁶ FAFOWORA, p. 107.

⁷⁷ At Nigeria's Request, Wilson's Visit is Put Back One Day, in: *Daily Times*, March 19, 1969, p. 12.

negotiation with Ojukwu.⁷⁸ The British leader through his fact finding mission in Nigeria was able to feel the degree of support enjoyed by the federal government in its quest for the preservation of one Nigeria. For instance, Lt. Commander Diette-Spiff, the Military Governor of Rivers State and the leadership of Calabar, the capital of South-Eastern state drew the attention of Mr. Wilson to the strategic importance of preserving Nigeria against secessionist tendencies.⁷⁹ It is expediently germane to argue that the nature of domestic support enjoyed by the Gowon led federal government would have changed the perception of the British about the news of genocide committed by the federal troops in the East. Though scholars like Ijoma disagree with this submission that genocidal activities did not take place in the East as they argue that genocidal activities were carried out by the Nigerian troops based on the views of observers and commentators.⁸⁰ However, this assertion has not been supported by convincing empirical data. This lack of evidence has been buttressed by Karen Smith who postulates that the federal government during the war yielded to pressure from Britain to allow a team of international observers as the team, having stayed in Nigeria for a long period did not find traces of genocide.⁸¹ It must be stated that this lack of evidence does not exculpate the Nigerian troops from such allegations.

The visit further encouraged the British in their intensification for diplomatic efforts by collaborating with Six-Man Committee set up by the OAU. The search for peace took Wilson to Addis Ababa Ethiopia after leaving Nigeria while at the same time extended an invitation to Ojukwu for possible negotiation in any country in Africa.⁸² The response of Ojukwu to Wilson's invitation while the latter was in Ethiopia through Biafra pirate radio was that his departure from Biafra was impossible.⁸³ This unpleasant response did not dissuade the British from intensifying their diplomatic efforts towards achieving peace in Nigeria as Wilson briefed Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian

⁷⁸ Wilson Ends Final Talks, in: *New Nigerian*, March 3, 1969, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

⁸⁰ OKORO, p. 94.

⁸¹ SMITH.

⁸² Ojukwu Turns Down Wilson's Invitation, in: *Daily Sketch*, April 1, 1969, p. 1.

⁸³ Wilson's Second Note to Ojukwu, in: *New Nigerian*, April 2, 1969, p. 1.

Emperor, comprehensively on his findings in Nigeria.⁸⁴ It seems reasonable to state that Ojukwu's unpleasant response was not unconnected with the rousing reception given to Wilson by the federal government coupled with the British resolve to continue their arms supply to Nigeria. In the estimation of Biafra, such conclusion further put the British under pressure as biased Umpire in the Nigerian war who could not issue a modicum of threat in terms of cutting arms supply to their ally, Nigeria the way the United States leadership demonstrated this to the Israelis in 1969 during the latter's perennial conflict with the Arabs.⁸⁵ Since the British line of thinking in terms of preserving Nigeria as one entity was consistent with that of the chunks of members of OAU, it was natural for them to channel their peace initiative towards a body that had greater stakes in the Nigerian war because disintegration of Nigeria in the estimation of OAU was capable of having reverberating effects in the continent.

The British leadership exploited to the fullest the official position of OAU as it convinced the organization through Wilson's report submitted to its Secretary General, Mr. Diallo Telli in Addis Ababa.⁸⁶ It was stated in the report that the supply of relief materials in the war torn Eastern Nigeria was going on in accordance with the best global practices.⁸⁷ It is crystal clear that the visit of the British Prime Minister to Nigeria further convinced Britain about its unflinching support for Nigeria as this further enabled her to disregard the propagandist strategy adopted by Biafra on the issue of alleged genocidal activities carried out by the Nigerian troops.⁸⁸ This position was echoed in the report of Mr. Wilson concerning his visit to Nigeria to the British House of Commons as he argued that the British government was convinced beyond reasonable doubts about the intention of Nigerian government to give the Ibos the same rights and privileges as it had been granting it to other Nigerians provided the secessionists were opened to negotiations without prior conditions.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ A Memorandum from Henry Kissinger to President Richard Nixon on Next Step in the Middle-East- NSC Meeting Thursday, September 11, 1969, p. 2.

⁸⁶ No Reply From Ojukwu to Wilson, in: *Daily Times*, April 2, 1969, p. 1.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ Wilson Reports Back to Commons, in: *Morning Post*, April 3, 1969, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

Some sections of the British press doubted this official stance of the British government as this further propelled the British leadership to embark on a campaign of re-orientation of the British public about the Nigerian civil war.⁹⁰ One of the strategies adopted by the British government was the further assessment of the Nigerian situation after Wilson's visit to Nigeria through the British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Sir Leslie Glass who was mandated by London to monitor effectively the developments in Nigeria after Mr. Wilson's visit.⁹¹ The monitoring of situation in Nigeria even after Wilson's visit through British diplomatic presence in Nigeria in the estimation of the political leadership in Britain was the key to validating its position on the war through re-orientation of the British public. This became necessary for the political leadership in Britain because public support could enhance its two pillars of intervention in Nigerian civil war, that is, diplomatic strategy and arms supply to Nigeria. This in the permutation of the policy makers in London was capable of accelerating federal victory that in turn guaranteed over £200m investment in terms of oil installations of Shell-B.P in Port Harcourt.⁹²

Despite the stalemate which enveloped the diplomatic efforts of the British, the military victory of the federal troops in December 1968 and the subsequent extension of peace to Gowon on January 12, 1970 by Biafra reflected the magnanimity of Nigeria even in victory. It must be stated that this magnanimity was a product of British diplomatic efforts which extracted committed from the Nigerian leadership on the need to jettison vindictive disposition towards the Ibos in the post-war Nigeria. The fulfilling of this commitment on the part of Nigeria cannot be delinked from the diplomatic astuteness of the British who in turn used their bureaucratic sagacity to espouse peace initiatives that protected their economic interests in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The outbreak of the Nigerian civil war became a subject of different interpretations by keen observers within and outside Africa. These interpretations were products of the diverse interests which these ob-

⁹⁰ Britain is Committed to Keep Nigeria United-Sir Leslie, in: *Nigerian Observer*, June 26, 1969, p. 16.

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² ADENIRAN, *Nigeria and Great Britain*, p. 37.

servers had in Nigeria. For the British, the determination to preserve Nigeria as one indivisible entity was determined by their quest for the protection of British economic interests in Nigeria. This explains why the British exploited to the fullest the failure of the multilateral intervention through the instrumentalities of the Commonwealth and the OAU as this compelled Britain to intensify its strategy of intervention in the war. The twin pillars of her intervention was the arms supply to the federal government as this strengthened the federal troops against the secessionists whose tendencies were capable of balkanizing Nigeria. This balkanization was equally capable of putting the British in an economic dilemma and the need to prevent these uncertainties necessitated the intensification of arms supply. It must be added that the British diplomatic masterstroke served as an alternative strategy that whittled the effects of arms supply against the secessionists. This diplomatic masterstroke without any doubt was made possible through the unilateral British peace initiatives that salvaged the failure of multilateral diplomatic interventions in the Nigerian civil war.