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**THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY:  
THE DILEMMA OF NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR, 1967-1970**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses the Organisation of African Unity and its dilemma in the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970. The role of OAU in defending the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Nigeria came to focus. It examines the total support Nigeria got from OAU member countries during the period of the crisis and the negative role, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Tanzania, Zambia and Gabon played during the period. It analyzes some challenges which confronted the OAU during the period under focus. The study relied on secondary sources like books, newspaper publications, journal articles, theses and dissertations. It was found that OAU countries supported the Federal Government of Nigeria during the civil war except Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Zambia. The study demonstrated that initially, Benin Republic and Ghana supported the Federal Government but later, they gave their support to the rebels. It was also found that many foreign nations could not recognize the Republic of Biafra because of the hard stand of OAU against succession. It was found that the OAU could not enforce international embargo on the supply of arms to the Biafra region. It was discovered that Charles De Gaulle, the President of France played a vital role in persuading Ivory Coast, Gabon and others to recognize the Republic of Biafra. The paper concludes that the OAU could not speak with one golden voice because of the recognition given to the republic of Biafra by Ivory Coast, Gabon, Tanzania and Zambia who were members of the organization.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Crisis, Resolution, Challenges, Betrayal

## Introduction

The Nigerian civil war started on July 6 1967 when the Nigerian and the Biafra troops exchanged salvos inside the 'republic of Biafra' (Oluleye, 1985). Initially, the Federal Military Government underestimated the military strength of the Biafran army and tagged its response to the crisis as a mere police operation to arrest Lt. Col Ojukwu. It is fresh in our memory when the military Governor of Northern Region boasted by saying that the federal army could crush the East in a few hours if the supreme commander gave the go-ahead (Oluleye, 1985: 48-53). Unfortunately, the war lasted for 3years before the Biafra troops were subdued and the federation was restored from total collapse.

Infact the crisis entered a decisive stage during the last part of May, 1967 when Lt. Col. Ojukwu, the Military Governor of Eastern Region got a mandate to declare the independence of the Eastern Region from the Assembly (**Eastern Region Consultative forum**) consisting of approximately 300 delegates from the various districts of the region (Olav, 1970:53-55). Hence, the Federal Military Government took some drastic steps including economic sanctions and a blockade against the Eastern Region. As a follow up, the federal forces advanced into the Eastern Region from the South and from the North.

It is quite unfortunate that the military dominated the political scene in Nigeria between 1966 and 1979 and between 1983 and 1999. Proper observation of the activities of the Military Head of State and State Military Governors indicated that military rule is not the answer to the problems of Nigeria. In fact, they compounded the problems of Nigeria. Their misconduct clearly epitomized the altruism that they were only ambitious and wanted to taste the affluence and sweetness of power to enable them display their heroic arrogance. Most military administration in Nigeria have been found to be promoting their own interest and encouraging corruption, nepotism, inefficiency, tribalism and political instability.

The Nigerian Civil War between 1967-1970 gave a strong lesson that the military cannot effectively manage the affairs of this country. The bloody civil war, could have been avoided if General Yakubu Gowon and Lt. Col. Odumengu Ojukwu were tactful in handling the issues that led to the war. Such issues include the January 15<sup>th</sup>1966 military coup. The coup claimed the lives of notable Nigerian Military and Civilian leaders, mostly from the northern and western regions (Aremu and Buhari, 2017). Those killed included Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Brigadier Zar Maimalari and Lt. col. Abogo Largema all of whom were prominent Northern leaders. Others killed included Chief Festus Okotie – Eboh from the Mid –West Region, Lt. Col. Unegbe an Ibo from the Eastern Region as well as chief S.I. Akintola, Col. Shodeinde and Brigadie Samuel Ademulegun all from the West (Akinseye – George, 2002, 451, Elaigwu, 2005: 37, Achebe, 2012: 276). The anti – Ironsi demonstrations in several towns in Northern region between May 28 -31 1966 in which Ibos were killed (Drum, January, 28, 1966). They cut the throats of the Ibos like sacrificial animals (Golden city post, July 17, 1966). This was also a critical factor that led to Nigerian Civil war.

Again, was the counter –coup of 29 July 1966, the northern ruling elite made a number of demands on Ironsi government. These included the revocation of the government's controversial decree 34 of 1966, the court martial and punishment of the leaders of the 15 January 1966 coup and the suspension of any plan to investigate the May, 1966 massacres of Easterners in the North (Achebe, 2012: 81). The failure of Ironsi to meet these demands led to the Northern Military officers to stage a counter – Coup on 29, July 1966 (Aremu and Buhari, 2017)

In actual fact the last straw that broke the camel's back before the commencement of the war was the radio broadcast by General Gowon on the 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967 dividing Nigeria into 12 States with the Eastern region divided into three States. The Eastern Nigeria Consultative Assembly reacted the same night by passing a resolution empowering Ojukwu to declare the region's independence. So, on May 30, 1967, Ojukwu went on air at Enugu and declared the Republic of Biafra (An Interview with Lt. Col. Ojukwu, 1967). General Gowon reacted by dismissing Ojukwu from

the Nigerian Army and was relieved of his post as Military Governor of the Eastern Region. On July 6, 1967, war officially broke out between the federal troops and Biafra forces (Ediagbonya, Duyile and Nwachukwu, 2020).

Many individuals, religious groups, international organizations and countries across the globe intervened to end the crisis that registered a lot of casualties on both sides especially on the side of the Ibos. Such individuals include Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Emperor Haile Selassie, General Ankrah of Ghana, Dr. Tai Solarin, President Diori, President Ahidjo of Cameroon and Organisation such as Organization Commune Africane et Malagache (OCAM) and Organization of African Unity (OAU). Countries like Britain, USA were involved in initial settlement. Lt. Col. Ojukwu refused to participate in peace conferences in an effort to avoid the war. His main focus was the acceptance of a separate Sovereign Republic by the Federal Government. The resolution of peace meeting convened by National Conciliation Committee in order to find a lasting solution was rejected by Ojukwu. This committee was made of Bishops, Judges and reputable political leaders. In fact, they were distinguished citizens of this country. At the end of the meeting, recommendations were submitted to both sides involved in the conflict. These included the reciprocal abrogation of economic measures taken by the Federal Military Government and the seizure of the Federal Statutory Corporations and Federal Revenue by the Eastern Government (Press Conference by Chief Anthony Enahoro, July 17, 1967). These reciprocal actions were to be implemented within one week that is 25<sup>th</sup> May, 1967. "I accepted the recommendations and issued instructions effective from Tuesday, May 23, 1967, the response of the East has been completely negative and they have continued their propaganda and stage-managed demonstrations for independence" (Gowon's Address, August 31, 1968).

Again, a final attempt was made in Aburi Conference to avert war. Several diplomatic activities with the encouragement of the British and the Americans culminated in the Aburi meeting of early January 1967 (Abdullahi, 1989-266). The Aburi conference which took place in Ghana in early January, 1967 came to a close on 5 January, 1967 when a communiqué was signed by the delegates representing the Federal Government and the Eastern Region. It was convened at the instance of General Ankrah, Ghana Head of State in order to find a peaceful resolution so as to promote peaceful co-existence in the country. In Ghana, Gowon, Ojukwu and other military governors and service chiefs seemed to have reached an agreement on a very loose confederation for the country which would make each region virtually autonomous (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu and Nwanbahi, 1987:266). Later, however Lagos and Enugu differed over their interpretations as to how much autonomy they had agreed for the regions (ibid). The Aburi talks had failed to provide a settlement and the East seemed now set on secession from the federation.

Walson remarks that it was during the Aburi conference that the Nigerian military leaders realized that political process was a tactical skill which is much more than being experts at the trigger and that it was the first time after independence that the country's dirty "Lenens" was washed not only in the public but also shamefully spread in the clear view of their former colonial masters and other nations who might have laughed in derision (Walson, 2012:89). The military juntas at the conference did not consider national interest instead they were more concerned and comfortable with pride heroism and sectional interest, so the interpretation given to the decisions of the conference differed on arrival in Nigeria. It was quite unfortunate that the military leaders saw the conference as opportunity to display eloquence and insulting idioms in order to showcase their strength unnecessary pride, arrogance, heroism without considering the interest of innocent Nigerians that will be killed should the war commences and national unity.

A major International Organisation that took special and keen interest in ensuring that the Nigerians civil war was brought to an end was the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU).

## Background

The Organisation of African Unity was formed on 25 May, 1963. It is an association of independent African states established to promote unity and co-operation among them and defend their sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence. Before the formal establishment of the OAU, there had been the Congo crisis which had produced two major opposing political groups in the continent. (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu and Nwaubani, 1987:292). The groups were the Casablanca, group made of up radical states like Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Algeria, Egypt and Morocco. The group supported a strong central government in the Congo under Patrice Luumba. The other group is Monrovia group also called Monrovia Brazzaville group which consisted of Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Upper Volta, Senegal, Gabon, Cameroon, Chad, Mauritania, Central African Republic, Niger, Madagascar, Congo Brazzaville, Liberia, Nigeria, Somalia Sierra-Leone, Togo, Libya and Ethiopia (Ibid). On their part they supported a loose federation of the provinces in the Congo.

At first, it was not an easy task to get members of these blocks disbanded to form one embracing umbrella union. But after some time, they were made to see the need for such an unusual but necessary exercise. It must be said that this polarization of Africa into two opposing camps was a serious obstacles or challenge to the establishment of OAU. Fortunately however, African leaders saw that their unity and collective action were necessary for Africa's survival and progress after a series of formal and informal contacts among themselves in which discussions were carried out in a spirit of give and take (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu and Nwaubani, 1987: 292).

It was at that point that Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia convened a conference of independent African states in Addis Ababa in May, 1963, 32 Heads of State from thirty-two independent countries were in attendance where the historic charter of an organisation to be known and called the Organisation of African Unity was signed. It was a big credit to the African leaders that the former blocs were dissolved after the establishment of OAU. From 32 member states in 1963, the membership of the organisation increased to 53 in 1994. However, in 2002, OAU metamorphoses into African Union in Durban, South Africa.

The OAU had the legal backing to intervene in the Nigerian Civil War because of some of objectives is contained in its Charter such as to:

- promote the unity and solidarity of the African states;
- defend their sovereignty territorial integrity and independence;
- promote and support peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration;
- unreservedly condemn political assassination and subversive activities, in all its forms by neighbouring or any other states.

More especially, in the words of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, every member state of the Organisation regards the injury of another state as its own (Ola Abiola, 1979:251). This was demonstrated during the Nigerian Civil War when all but four member states stood behind Nigeria in its bid to thwart all the evil machinations of the imperialists to break up the country.

## Factors which influenced the position of OAU's members in supporting Nigeria during the Nigerian Civil War

The country's survival as an integral entity was made possible by several internal and external factors. The most important external factor which contributed to the maintenance of Nigeria's territorial integrity lay in the roles played by the country's neighbours (Abdullahi, 1989:253). The staunch support given to Nigeria by most of its neighbours especially the OAU member countries can be attributed to many factors.

Nigeria has been playing leading role in promoting economic development in African and in ensuring that apartheid ends in South Africa. Her efforts in Liberation movement and decolonization process in Africa is highly commendable. Even her foreign policy drive from 1960-1966 was partly African-centered. When Tanzania faced a mutiny of her soldiers in 1964, Nigeria sent in troops which helped to keep the peace until the crisis was over and a new Tanzanian army trained. Through Nigeria, the OAU tried to help bring peace to war-torn Chad by providing peace-keeping troops and by mediation (Eluwa, Ukagwu, Nwachukwu and Nwanbani, 1987:294).

It is also asserted that though the OAU could not prevent or end civil wars in the African states, it has rendered considerable relief to refugees and other war victims created by those wars (Ibid). Nigeria has played an important role in this regard particularly in relation to refugees from Chad and South Africa.

Again, the merging of Southern Cameroons with Nigeria in 1922 and the enormous amount of money spend by the Nigeria government on the administration and other services of Trusteeship Territory went a long way in the establishment and maintenance of cordial relations between the peoples of the two territories (West Africa, 1959:555). The cordial relationship was further cemented considering the large number of Cameroon citizens who received University education in Nigeria particularly the University College, Ibadan. Again, their acquaintance with the internal politics of Nigeria contributed immensely in given total support to the Federal Government in our moment of crisis. Again, throughout the colonial period, the people of former Gold Coast were found in large members in all the Regions of Nigeria, where they served as clerks in government departments and colonial trading firms and in various technical jobs. Even in Northern Nigeria, the former premier, Ahmadu Bello, recalled that Nigeria had received much assistance from Ghanaian citizens when Nigerians were beginning to learn the intricacies of administration (West Africa, April 1959:147) He asserted that Nigerians welcomed Ghanaians “so long as they did not become involved in party politics” (Ibid).

So, there was much positive and rewarding relationship between Ghana and Nigeria long before the Nigerian Civil War. The 1948 census in Ghana showed that there were 46,800 Nigerians in that country but ten years later, there were at least 67,000 Nigerians in Ghana (Ibid). It was stated that by 1959, their number rose to about 100,000 (Ibid., 1959:961).

There was trading links between Nigeria with Dahomey (Benin), Togo and Gold Coast (Ghana) but that of Ghana was stronger, as Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Ijo played an important role in the booming economy of Ghana especially in the 1950s. There is no doubt that the contribution of Nigerians especially the Yoruba to the development of Ghana’s diamond industry was remarkable (West Africa, 1959:175).

Between the period of 1960-1966, Nigeria was aware of its interests and responsibility towards these neighbours. Nigeria leaders were also aware of the hostility of some of these states towards her and the need to be diplomatic. Hence the foreign policy thrust of Nigeria between 1960-1966 was based on the needs to isolate Nkrumah and neutralize the excessive influence on its former colonial territories in West Africa by France. A British newspaper, the Sunday Express pointed out “from the perspective of the French, a United and Prosperous Nigeria would inevitably become an Untied States of West Africa and would tend to pull the former French colonies away from French influence (New Nigerian, 1968:1).

Nigeria was fully aware then that it lacks the financial muscle to give these countries enough incentives to prevent or reduce their dependence on France especially when oil was not discovered. A calculation in Nigerian foreign policy then was that in due course, France’s interests in West Africa would gradually recede and the former colonial territories would look to Nigeria for leadership in the area of international security and economic development (Stremlau, 1977: 264-274).

The foreign policy drive was also designed to win the cordiality, friendship and loyalty of its neighbours and other African states. This was instrumental to her high degree of support she got from OAU members during the period of the civil war.

Nigeria after independence in spite of her advantage of the most populous Black nation in the world and abundant human and material resources, made serious attempts to show to her neighbouring countries its readiness to uphold their territorial integrity, provide them with economic assistance and promote bilateral and sub-regional economic co-operation. Nigeria fully demonstrated it in the Congo and Tanzania crises. The country also played a pivotal role in the formation of Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U).

According to Abdullahi, to assure all African countries about its sincerity and seriousness on the matter of African security and co-operation, the Federal Government gave a prepared brief to its delegation to the first Pan-African summit in May, 1963 (Abdullahi, 1989). The objectives were outlined as follows: "Prior to any discussion of a common charter, all participants at the conference shall be asked to affirm the following principles:

- a. Sovereign equality of African and Malagasy states whatever may be the size of their territories and the density of their populations, on the value of their possessions;
- b. Non-interference in the internal affairs of member states;
- c. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state and for its inalienable right to independent existence;
- d. Peaceful and harmonious settlement of all disputes arising among the African and Malagasy states;
- e. Condemnation of any subversive activity on the part of a neighbouring state;
- f. The constant promotion and fostering of all available means of co-operation in the field of economic, health, nutrition, education and culture; and
- g. Dedication to the total emancipation of the dependent territories of Africa (Stremlau, 197:11).

It would be recalled that Woodrow Wilson the President of United States of America drafted the 14 points or principles of League of Nations that was formed at the end of the first world in 1918. This was replicated in 1963 when it was established that the six points in the Nigerian prepared brief appeared in Article 111 of the O.A.U. Charter (Ibid., p.11).

In order to promote economic development in African countries, Nigeria floated an economic scheme. Nigeria assisted Chad with \$5,000 per citrus plantations, Dahomey (Benin) got \$3,000.00 food relief. Basuto obtained \$25,000.00 from Nigeria for projects development and Guinea, Kenya and Malawi received substantial amounts of assistance both in cash and in skilled manpower (Ibid., Appendix 11, p. 399).

From the foregoing, it was therefore very easy for African countries to come together to assist the Federal Government of Nigeria against the secessionists, the Biafrans. Again, the ethnic, sectional, regional, religious problems which later culminated into secession and crisis in Nigeria were also common in other African countries like Togo, Chad Republic, Niger Republic, Republic of Benin, Ghana etc. It was part of the reasons that Chief Anthony Enahoro warned that "If Nigeria breaks, no one knows how many African countries will survive (Abdullahi, 1989:260).

It was the fear of secession that really help to unite African countries behind Nigeria, it was for this fear that made the Kinshasa meeting resolve "to send a consultative mission to the Head of the Federal Government of Nigeria to assure him of the Assembly's desire for territorial integrity, unity and peace in Nigeria (Stremlau, 82).

Again, some member countries also supported the federal government of Nigeria against Biafran troops because they depended on Nigeria outlet for their export and import commodities. The countries mostly concerned were

Chad and Republic of Niger. During the civil war in Nigeria, both countries suffered serious predicament over their exports because the war disrupted vital produce export routes to the Sea (Stremlau, 1977:11). Niger was mostly affected because its modern economy was largely dependent on the sale of its groundnut crop in Europe. It is not surprising that both countries were very curious that the civil war in Nigeria should end to make it possible for them to have access to the Nigerian ports again undisturbed.

### **The O.A.U Participation in Nigerian Civil War**

The Organisation of African Unity member countries with the exception of Ivory Coast, Gabon Tanzania and Zambia, were aware of the danger associated with Ojukwu's declaration of the Republic of Biafra. They wholeheartedly supported the preservation of the Unity and Territorial Integrity of Nigeria despite the much pressure and insults from the imperialist. This is against the background that O.A.U feared that any concession made to secession would result in the balkanization of Africa. OAU gave the federal Government of Nigeria full support in its efforts to crush Ojukwu's rebellion because the members of the organisation realized that the issue of secession is a serious threat to all African countries which must not be allowed to flourish because it may be used by the imperialists to break up a promising African nation (G.M.T: 25.11.69).

The first major step of the O.A. U. was the Kinshasa summit attended by Cameroon, Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Liberia and Niger. The Chairman of the summit was Emperor Haile Salessie of Ethiopia. Emperor Haile Salessie was particularly interested in the affairs of Nigerian Civil war because he was having similar problem in Eritrea, wanting to become independent.

In Kinshasa meeting, it resolved to send a consultative mission of six Heads of State, Mobotu, Tubman, Ankrah, Ahidjo, Diori and Haile Selassie to the Head of the Federal Government of Nigeria to assure him of the assembly's desire for territorial integrity, unity and peace in Nigeria (Stremlau, 1977:82).

According to Emperor Haile Selassie:

The situation in Nigeria is of concern to all of us. It concerns us because secessionist tendencies are to be found in almost all African states ... we know that secession, if it were to be tolerated in our continent would lead to destruction of what Africans hold in high esteem their independence and progress (Ibid).

Then President Ahidjo of Cameroun observed "basically, it is the territorial integrity of Nigeria which is of concern to us (Ibid). Emperor Haile Selassie again posited that "the point of our task is to end secession which he denounced- no doubt with a view to his own domestic troubles in Eritea, as a dangerous precedent for Africa" (Ibid., 10).

The committee also maintained that any solution of the Nigerian crisis must be in the content of preserving the Unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria (Ibid., 103). It is very important at this point to say that this decision of the committee became useful to Nigeria during this crisis period. First the OAU stood by the recommendations of the committee. More importantly the committee was responsible for the drafting of all resolutions on the war so that the OAU summit can rectify.

One fundamental question may be asked here, why was the OAU and other world leaders accepting and respecting the views of this consultative summit. The Head of the committee Emperor Selassie commands much respect from African Heads of state and the Americans. So, inspite of the propaganda of Colonel Ojukwu to win sympathy of world leaders, Americans relied much on the opinions of this consultative summit, which favoured the Federal Government of Nigeria President Tubman of Liberia who was also a member of the committee was respected the world over. Of particular interest was President Diori who was the Chairman of Organization Commune Africane et Malagache (OCAM). This status helped to exert influence on members of French speaking African countries

who were all members of OAU. Also significant was the fact that President Ahidjo of Cameroun was highly respected by the President of France, General De Gaulle, well known for hatred of federations of those he considered “ill-matched people in Canada, Nigeria, Malaysia and elsewhere, he was not eager to see the British inspired federal system in Nigeria succeed. President Ahidjo was able to influence some of his decisions in favour of Nigeria to a reasonable extent.

In fact, during the last meeting of the committee in Monrovia Presidents Ahidjo and Mobutu insisted that the communiqué of the meeting should place the blame squarely on the rebels (Abdullahi, 1989:265). Accordingly, the committee appealed to the rebel supporters throughout the world to commit themselves to the goal of Nigerian Unity (Stremlau, 1977:315). Thereafter the rebels became increasingly isolated.

Another advantage of the OAU support for the Federal Government during the crisis was that, the non-African countries also stood by the decision of the OAU. When Uthant, the UN Secretary-General tabled the Nigerian civil war issue at the United Nations, there was much pressures or agitations which compelled him to say this:

If the heads of African states have asked all members of the United Nations and all members of OAU to refrain from any action likely to endanger the peace, unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria, I do not see how member states or for that matter the Secretary General can be actively involved. (Ibid., 279).

Again, when much pressure was mounted on Scandinavia during August 1968, the Prime Ministers of the five governments issued a joint statement declaring their full support for the OAU, as the proper forum for dealing with the political issues at stake in the Nigerian crisis (Ibid., 295).

There is no gainsaying of the fact that this support the Federal Government of Nigeria got from the OAU was a morale booster and discouraged the non-African countries from supporting the secessionists. It also helped in destroying the powerful and exaggerated propaganda of the rebels especially on the issue of genocide which was already attracting sympathy for them from the advanced countries.

The OAU also gave diplomatic and strategic support to the Federal Government of Nigeria. As part of the persuasive propaganda of the rebels, they claimed that much of the member countries of the OAU especially their close door neighbour have recognized the Republic of Biafra (Rebel Radio, 27 May; 1967).

At the request of the Federal Government, all the countries the rebels claimed to have recognized Biafran came out openly to denounce the claim. Such countries include Ghana, Togo, the Gambia, Ethiopia, all members of the OAU President of Cameroun, Ahmadu Ahidjo said:

There was no question of his country recognizing the rebels (NN, June, 1968) President Hammani Diori of Niger Republic assured that his government would continue to know no other. Government than the constitutional Government of the Republic of Nigeria (Ibid., June, 1967).

In the same message he said his government was following “with an anxiety the events in Nigeria” (Ibid) President Eyadema of Togo at a press conference said:

The people of Togo were anxious for the end of the civil war in Nigeria so that the country might take her proper place in fostering the unity of Africa (NN, April, 16, 1969:1).

President Sekou Toure of Guinea denounced Ojukwu as the “the Tshombe of Eastern State (Stremlau, 1977:64) William Tolbert, the Vice-President of Liberia also assured the Federal Government that his Government would not recognize the rebels (NN; May, 1968). This public repudiation went a long way in bolstering the morale of the



Federal Government, the Nigerians as well as the federal troops. This also served as a warning to the Western powers; especially France and Portugal to keep off from the internal affairs of Nigeria.

On a smaller scale, OAU provided material support which took the form of accommodation and other facilities during the series of conferences they hosted for the purpose of bringing the crisis to an end. A glaring example was the Aburi conference in Ghana to find a way to prevent the war, Ghana provided the transport facilities for the rebel leader, Ojukwu to attend, the Aburi meeting (NN., January, 1970).

Appreciating the role of OAU in the Nigerian crisis, Gowon's in his Address, August 31, 1968 said:

I am happy however that the great majority of the members of the OAU and all the members of the consultative committee of that organisation set up at the Kinshasa summit last year recognized the primary need to maintain the territorial integrity of Nigeria. (Gowon's Address, August 31, 1968).

Attesting to the strong support the Federal Government enjoyed in the hands of OAU member countries and working against the interest of the Biafrans, Ojukwu's in his Address to consultative Assembly in Owerri, he said:

The OAU as an organization has shown itself not capable and to a certain degree not interested in solving problems of any magnitude. He recalled that individuals, groups, governments and international organizations had called for peace but only the OAU had stood out for and distinguished itself in pursuance of policies which could only promote war (Ojukwu's Address to Consultative Assembly in Owerri, 5, May, 1969).

A critical assessment of the Address of Ojukwu to the consultative Assembly indicates that what he expected from the OAU to support a separate state of Biafra has failed because the OAU members were totally committed to the territorial integrity, sovereignty and unity of Nigeria as one country. The support he got from Gabon, Ivory Coast, Tanzania and Zambia as members of OAU was not enough to actualize his dream and ambition.

### **The challenges of the OAU during the Nigerian civil war**

The OAU was confronted with a major challenge in its bid, to end the Nigerian Civil War. The organisation was not able to speak with one voice because of the subversive activities of Tanzania, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Zambia and to large extent Dahomey (Benin).

One of the objectives of the OAU as contained in their charter is that "to unreservedly condemn political assassination and subversive activities, in all its forms, by neighbouring or any other states. In spite of this, the above countries recognized the Republic of Biafra which was not the stand of OAU in the Nigerian crisis.

Remote and Immediate causes may be responsible for the support Biafra enjoyed from Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Zambia and Gabon. The remote factor could be linked to the activities of Charles De Gaulle, the President of France. He was not eager to see the British inspired federal system in Nigeria succeeds. Again, the French big merchants with oil interest in Nigeria convinced De Gaulle that its concessions in territories controlled by Biafra could bring in much profit, with this in mind, De Gaulle encouraged Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia to support Biafra against the Federal Government. It was said that leaders of the Ivory Coast and Gabon recognized Biafra through De Gaulle's subtle push (Tamuno, 1989:15).

French support for Biafra, from September, 1968, took other forms, arm supplies, through friendly countries close enough to Biafra like Ivory Coast, Gabon and the Portuguese Island of SaoTome became staging posts for French arm supplies to Biafra (Ibid).

### **Immediate Factors Responsible for the Recognition given to Biafra by Ivory Coast, Gabon, Tanzania and Zambia**

For Gabon, initially was in support of the Federal Government. The country later recognized the Republic of Biafra because of the intervention of the President of Ivory Coast, Houphouet Boigny who encouraged Gabon to support the rebels. As earlier, pointed out, De Gaulle also played a vital role in influencing Gabon to give recognition to the Republic of Biafra. Hence, it was, not a surprise that France used Gabon as an avenue to supply arms to Biafra. Even the President of Gabon, Bongo could not come out with statement of encouragement to the Federal Government instead, it was his view that the conflict in Nigeria was purely a Nigerian affair.

Ivory Coast's position on the Nigerian crisis was purely dictated by the President of France, Charles De Gaulle. That was part of the reason why Houphouet Boigny made a lot of hostile statements against the Federal Government and finally recognized the Republic of Biafra in May, 1967. The Ivory Coast was the third OAU country to give recognition to the Rebels and never a time has he takes OAU seriously.

As for Dahomey, France was sending 20 to 25 tons of arms to the rebel held areas daily through Cotonou (Canard, Enchaîne, 1969). The President of Dahomey, Dr. Emile Zinsou was very logical and lucive about his comments, on Nigerian crisis. At one time, he declared:

I am against secession any day and in any part of Africa... The political life of Nigeria is not for outsiders to decide (Abdullahi, 1989:262).

This statement clearly shows that Dr. Zinsou was not wishing Nigerian crisis to end soon and it was his candid opinion that the OAU cannot intervene. Again, Dahomey is one of the poorest countries in West Africa and by 1966 she reached the limit of the annual over draft allowed her by the French as early as Feb. 1966 which led to political instability in the country. Hence, during the period of Nigerian civil war, Dahomey played a negative role by allowing the international committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to use Cotonou airport to airlift materials to the rebel held areas because of the relatively little money and other forms of assistance it received from (ICRC) (Ibid).

What is more laughable was the disgraceful role played by Ghana during the latter part of the war. Initially, Ghana played a leading role in trying to ensure that the war did not start by calling for a conference to resolve the issues heating up the body polity in Nigeria. This later became the historic Aburi Conference. It was under the chairmanship of General Ankrah, the Ghanaian Head of state. Unfortunately, the conference did not achieve the desired result hence the civil war in Nigeria started in 1967. It was said that Ghana's active solidarity waned later largely because of the influence exerted on the General Ankrah, by Arthur Nzeribe allegedly a financial crony and the Head of Biafran lobby in Accra (Stremlau, 1977:190). Ghana appeared to have become so in different to the Nigerian problem that it sent packing 75,000 Nigerians, from Ghana in December, 1969 (NN, January 7, 1970).

Whatever their reasons for recognizing or given support to the Biafrans, it was done in bad fate as that singular action delayed the Nigerian civil war that was tagged police operation when it started. Again, the O.A.U was not forth coming in given material support to the Federal Government. One of the major reasons why the USSR defeated Germany in the Second World War was the assistance received from USA and Britain. As the war was on, Britain started providing Stalin with intelligence information. Britain intensified the bombing of Berlin and other major German cities in order to force Hitler to recall some of the forces back to Germany to counter British offensive. Again, Britain and United States provided military supplies including large number of Air Craft and tanks as well as food and medical supplies. This was not forth coming from OAU members. What the O.A.U succeeded in doing was providing accommodation and other facilities during the series of conferences they hosted for the purpose of

bringing the war to an end. From all intents and purposes, that was not enough. It may be part of the reasons why in some quarters, the OAU has been described as a “Toothless Bulldog”.

OAU also encountered another challenge of not effectively placing embargo on international arms traffic to Biafra, hence, France, Portugal, South Africa, International Red Committee easily supplied arms to the rebel areas.

## **Conclusion**

The civil war in Nigeria took place between 1967-1970. The country’s survival as an integral entity was made possible by several internal and external factors. The most important external factor which contributed to the maintenance of Nigeria’s territorial integrity was the role played by the OAU member countries. Throughout the period of the civil war in Nigeria, the member countries of the OAU realized the danger associated in Ojukwu’s secession, hence they supported the preservation of the unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria.

The OAU member countries saw that the threat of secession exists in many countries in Africa and if Ojukwu’s secession is adequately crushed, then the secessionist elements in other countries in Africa will be discouraged from embarking on such a suicide mission.

Unfortunately, the OAU could not speak with one golden voice because of the dangerous recognition given to the Republic of Biafra by Ivory Coast, Gabon, Tanzania and Zambia, who were members of the organisation. The situation became complex because of the support the rebels received from France, especially Charles De Gaulle.

Again, the OAU was having the challenge of not been able to place embargo on international supply of arms to the rebels, hence France continued to supply arms to the rebels through Ivory Coast, Gabon, SaoTome hence the war was prolonged.

Also, the diplomatic support the OAU gave to the Federal Government of Nigeria, without much of material support like weapons, medical aids was not enough to end the crisis quickly.

However, the active role played by OAU in supporting the Federal Government against the rebels earned the organisation with a new aura of respectability. Hence General Gowon’s speech on August 31, 1968 on the progress of the war in Lagos posits:

I am happy however that the great majority of the members of the OAU and all the members of the consultative committee of that organisation set up at the Kinshasa summit conference last year recognized the primary need to maintain the territorial integrity of Nigeria (Gowon’s Address, August 31, 1968).

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