

A Critical Assessment of Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics and Nigeria Relations during the Period of Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970

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Abstract:

The paper examines Nigeria and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Relations during the Nigerian Civil War. It discusses the role of USA, Britain and France in the Nigerian Civil war. It analyzes the timely intervention of USSR which supplied military weapons and technical personnel to Nigeria when Britain and USA declined. The researcher obtains data from primary and secondary sources. Oral interviews serve as primary sources. Books, journals, articles, newspapers, projects, theses dissertations were used as secondary sources. It was found that the relationship between Nigeria- USSR in the Pre-civil war period was Lukewarm, non-chalant and sad. It was found that France openly supported the Republic of Biafra while Britain and USA refused Nigeria's request for weapons to execute the war. It was demonstrated that Nigeria needed weapons to stop the Biafran forces from succeeding and initially relied on Britain and USA to supply the weapons but they were not willing to provide the military assistance. Hence, the federal Government directed their attention to USSR for assistance which the Soviets gradually accepted. In conclusion, it was found that the continuous corporate existence of Nigeria as a sovereign state owes much to the timely assistance provided by USSR during the Nigeria's trying period.

Keywords:

USSR; Nigeria; relations; civil war; diplomacy

I. Introduction

The Nigerian Civil War which started on July 6, 1967 and ended on the 12th January, 1970 was an avoidable collision which occurred when the Nigerian and the Biafran troops exchanged salvoes inside the Republic of Biafra (Oluleye, 1985). Judging from the numerical strength of the Nigerian Army and inferiority of the Biafran Army in all respect neither side expected a prolonged war (New Nigeria, 1967).

On the other hand, the Biafran troop believed that the level of killing of the Ibos in the Northern Nigeria after the January 15, 1966 Coup and the counter-coup of July 29, 1966 was enough justification for them to fight with tenacity of purpose in order to jealously defend Biafra where their wives and children were living.

The counter-coup of July, 1966 resulted in the death of the Head of State, General Aguiyi Ironsi and his host, the Governor of the West, Colonel Fajuyi as well as various senior and junior officers of Southern origin especially the Igbo (Crowther, 1980:22).

Infact, it was the September Conference where the leaders of thought were designing constitutional arraignment for the future of Nigeria that came the news of new Massacre of the Igbos in the North (Ibid, 25-26). This time organised by both civilians and soldiers (Ibid, 27). The exodus of Igbos from the North became more evident after the September mass killing. Tekeno posits that it is not yet possible to give an accurate figure of war casualties, dead and wounded soldiers and civilians with several hundreds of deaths a day among children from starvation, malnutrition, disease, several millions of families had traumatic experiences which in turn affected their morale during the war effort (Tekeno, 1989:2).

It is also important to understand that with the death of Ironsi during the coup, Colonel Yakubu Gowon who was apparently not the most senior military officer was brought to power. This could be attributed to the inability of the most senior officer in the Nigerian Army, Brigadier Ogundipe to assert his authority over the troop. This resulted to leadership crisis between Colonel Ojukwu and Colonel Yakubu Gowon. Governor Ojukwu of the Eastern Region who considered himself to be superior, would never recognize Gowon's position as the Head of State (Muhammadu and Haruna, 1981:35).

Brigadier B.O.A. Ogundipe made some announcements to calm the public during the interregnum after the assassination of Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi before the emergence of General Yakubu Gowon, but the voice was not that of a King (Oluleye, 1985). While the appointment of General Yakubu Gowon was accepted by Governor of the Northern region, Lt. Col. H U. Katsina, Western Region, Colonel R. A. Adebayo, Lt. Col. D. A. Ejoor of Mid-West region and the administrator of Lagos, Lt. Col. Ojukwu representing his people was against the appointment. Even other members of Supreme Military Council like Commodore J. E. A. Wey, Chief of Naval Staff and Mr. Kam Salam, the Inspector-General of Police all pledged their unalloyed and unflinching loyalty and support for the Gowon led Federal Military Government.

This was a serious political mistake on part of Ojukwu because it was not in the best interest of national unity and equally unpatriotic particularly against the background that Brigadier Ogundipe failed to exert his authority through a challenge and he made a dramatic escape using amphioxus transportation to Cotonou in the Republic of Benin (Ibid, 38). It can be asserted that his departure paved the way to leadership tussle between the two lieutenant colonels which later translated into the civil war.

It is argued that without the leadership crisis between Gowon and Ojukwu, it was still possible to safe the country from the woe of the Civil War (Muhammadu and Haruna, 1981: 36).

It was again the September 1966 killing of the Ibos that convinced the Ibos including Ojukwu that nowhere in Nigeria was safe for them except their region. From that point on Ojukwu refused to attend any meeting in Lagos as it was considered not safe for him.

The disagreement on Aburi Accord by General Yakubu Gowon led Federal Government and Lt. Col Ojukwu, the Military Governor of Eastern Region finally led to Nigerian Civil War. Several diplomatic activities with the encouragement of the British and the Americans culminated in the Aburi meeting of early January 1967 (Abdullahi, 1989). By the end of December, 1966, it was becoming very clear that the Civil War in Nigeria was inevitable as both sides of the conflict were preparing gradually for war. 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. Tribute must be accorded to the Ghana Head of State General Ankrah who offered to mediate in order to find a peaceful resolution so as to promote peaceful co-existence in the country.

Walson remarks that, “it was during the Aburi Conference that the Nigerian military leaders realized that political prowess 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 ‘Linens’ 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 conference obviously exposed the military’s incapability to handle critical political issues, because of their high level of administrative immaturity. This conference was the last opportunity to avert the Civil War. So, the interpretation given to decisions of conference differed on arrival in Nigeria by the Federal Government and Eastern region. The conference failed to produce desired results so the Civil War in Nigeria started in 1967.

The military leaders saw it as opportunity to display eloquence and insulting idioms in order to showcase their strength, unnecessary pride, arrogance, heroism without the slightest consideration to national interest and unity.

The creation of 12 States by General Yakubu Gowon on May 27, 1967 created serious conflicts, with Lt. Col. Ojukwu. In the national broadcast of General Yakubu Gowon on May 27, 1967, the country was divided into twelve states with three in the East, six in the North, the West and Mid-West remained as they were and the federal capital Lagos was constituted into the twelfth state (General Yakubu Gowon’s address to the Nation, 1967). It created discord because it was interpreted by the Ibos as an attempt to disunite and destabilize the Eastern region thereby making it less powerful in the event of secession. Again, the Ibos saw the creation of River and South Eastern States as a way of depriving them of the much-needed support they could have received from these minorities in their region. By given them their state which they have been agitating for since 1950s, they were very grateful to the Federal Government. It is also clear that they will support the Federal Government in any conflict between it and the Ibos in order to reciprocate the kind gesture at the Federal Government. As a follow up of the creation of 12 States by General Yakubu Gowon, Lt. Col Ojukwu summoned a joint meeting of erudite civilians and military officers of Eastern Nigeria to appeal to them to give him the mandate to declare the Eastern Nigeria as an independent state by the name and title “Republic of Biafra (Colau, 1973:53).

Subsequently, Lt. Col. Ojukwu declared “Republic of Biafra” on 30 May, 1967 (Ojukwu’s Declaration of Secession, 30 May, 1967). The first reaction of General Gowon was to announce to the nation that Lt. Col. Ojukwu had been dismissed from the Nigeria army and relieved of his post as the military Governor of the Eastern Region. The Civil War in Nigeria officially began on July 6, 1967 between the federal troops and Biafra forces. By July 6, 1967, the federal forces invaded the East and took Nsukka after days of fighting. The war ended in 1970, January 10, when General Ojukwu and his aids fled to Ivory Coast when the self-defence was impossible leaving the second in command behind, General Philip Effiong to announce the end of secession (Ene, 2011).

II. Review of Literature

2.1 The Involvement of World Powers in the Nigerian Civil War

Significantly, neither President Nixon's Republican administration in the USA nor Harold Wilson's Labour government in Britain openly raised fears nor expressed serious concern over the possibility of communist penetration of federal Nigeria (Tamuna, 1989:20). Although each side watched the other closely in the era of the cold war, neither the West nor the East came to blows over USSR support for the federal government (Ibid). The position of the Major World Powers on the Nigerian Civil War varied from one power to the other.

2.2 USA

The United States made its policy clear at the beginning of the Civil War that the government would recognize only the Federal Government of Nigeria. However, it declared that it would not sell any arms to any of the belligerents in the Nigeria Civil War (Omosilade, 2019). Infact the United States refused to give Nigeria export permit allowing the purchase of arms on a commercial basis from US manufacturers ostensibly because the United States was basically opposed to interference in the internal affairs of another state (Ibid, 24). Also, USA was committed to supplying relief materials to both the Federal Government and Biafra.

So, USA was not steadfast in its support for the federal side. Indeed, President Nixon and Senator Edward Kennedy, who both belonged to different political parties and were usually disagreeable on issues were openly in support of Biafra (Kolawole, 2003: 53). It was quite unfortunate that Nigerian main allies were unwilling to provide military assistance to the Nigerian government. The nation really needed heavy weapons to stop the Biafran from achieving their ambition of establishing a sovereign nation. That, the US refused Nigeria permit to buy arms from its traditional source in time of conflict signaled to Nigerian decision makers that the US did not wish their country well (Omosilade, 2019:24). It was also an indirect way of supporting the secessionist who would purchase the weapons from the black market. In refusing to sell arms to federal Nigeria, both President Johnson and President Nixon considered Nigeria a British responsibility (Tamuna, 1989:20). Indeed, Nixon would have preferred a military stalemate in the Nigeria civil war to enable a political settlement in favour of Biafra. The main concern of both Nixon and Johnson was over development in other trouble spots, Vietnam and the Middle East, where American national interests stood the greatest risk during the Nigeria civil war years (Ibid, 14). Accordingly, both Presidents Johnson and Nixon emphasized relief for victims of the Nigerian civil war. Hence a black American Professor Clyde Ferguson became Nixon's Relief Co-ordinator in Nigeria. So, neither side regarded the USA as a firm and reliable friend or ally during the Nigeria civil war.

However, it must be noted that the fact that the USA gave no open recognition to the secessionist serves as consolidation to the Federal Government of Nigeria.

2.3 Britain

The Federal Government expected that the succession bid of the Eastern region would be seen as a treasonable act by her western allies and that they would join in preventing it (Kolawole, 2003: 53). To the contrary, Britain was not even sure initially which side to support in the crisis and when it finally supported the federal side, it was a cautious support (Ibid). Britain was only ready to supply light weapons and not heavy weapons.

At the same time, neither conservative nor Labour parliamentarians in the British House of commons and the House of Lords would give Prime Minister Harold Wilson the political backing to extend the sale of conventional British arms to war-planes.

The domestic opinion in Britain was not in favour of the federal side. Indeed, a Nigerian scholar has remarked that:

The strident and sometimes worthless debates, the hostile mass media, the wavering attitude of some key cabinet ministers and the refusal to supply the Nigerian Air Force with aircraft and bomb all helped to inflict goodwill that Britain enjoyed in Nigeria (Ogunbadejo, 1976:15)

Britain enjoyed strong affiliation with Nigeria after independence. Most of the country's leaders prior to independence were united that post-independence Nigeria should associate with the western countries especially Britain. Of all the commonwealth countries outside Africa, Britain remains her closest associate. As a result of the ex-colonial relationship between Nigeria and Britain, the membership of the commonwealth of both countries, the good percentage of Nigerians who had their early education in Britain, the relationship between the countries grew stronger and stronger with the passage of time (Okafor, 1982:86).

Britain maintains relations with Nigeria in the number of economic, social, political and technical fields. Nigeria exports her cocoa, groundnut, timber, palm oil, palm kernel and rubber to Britain. In return Nigeria imports capital and manufactured goods both for infrastructural development and consumption purposes. (Interview with Dr. Nwachukwu on 6-2-2022). An analysis of Nigerian/British economic relations reveal that Britain controls more than 40% of foreign investment in Nigeria and there is no doubt that Britain has a long record of medium level technology transfer to Nigeria through setting up manufacturing industries (Ibid, 87). Unilever for example was involved for sometimes in the use of Nigerian raw materials for the manufacturing of soap and detergents. Guinness is in the heart of Nigeria soft drinks and brewery industries (Ibid). Britain has also been involved in the development of Nigerian textile industries (Interview with Osagie Raji on 3-5-2022).

In its 1959 election manifesto, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) which later became the major partner in a post-independence Federal Government, had counselled that "Nigeria must maintain the closest relationship with the United Kingdom and should aim at retaining and expanding her existing ties and friendship with the United State of America" (Ajayi 1972:3). In the same vein Chief Obafemi Awolowo also posited that "there are two distinct ideological camps in the world today, the western democracies and the communist bloc, my preference is unhesitatingly for the western democracies" (Ibid). The pro-western posture of Nigeria after independence was because most of our educated elites had their education and training in the West.

Again, during the period of Tafawa Belawa's administration 1960-1966, the Nigerian press was entirely in the hands of the government and was made to serve as a strong instrument of propaganda in support of western allies as against the communist bloc. The United Kingdom, United States of America, France, Italy, Spain and other countries in the Western Europe were presented by the press in good light and seen to be ideal and friendly.

From the foregoing, based on the existing cordial relationship with Britain, it was very disappointing and a big shock that Britain refused to assist Nigeria with the needed military weapons to stop the Biafrans from seceding.

2.4 France

France was openly supporting the Republic of Biafra. This support serves as a morale booster to the Biafrans. Franco-Nigerian discord is better seen when one realizes that the Nigerian decision in January 1961 to break diplomatic relations with Paris over continued French atomic test in the Sahara was a severe blow to French prestige in Africa (Eliagwu, 1985). It could be President De Gaulle's fear of Nigeria in Africa especially in relation to France –phone African countries (Fawole, 2003).

It was said that France saw Nigeria as great and economically buoyant that is capable of challenging the position of France in West Africa. The outbreak of the Civil War provided the greatest opportunity for France to act out its morbid hatred for Nigeria, a country which Paris had always perceived as the only obstacle to French hegemony in Africa (Omosilade, 2019:26).

Thus, France without wasting time quickly gave diplomatic recognition to Biafra and also provided military and material support to the Biafrans. Through the influence and pressure of France, compelled Ivory Coast and Gabon to recognize the secessionist Biafran government. It is established that four countries who are members of OAU (Organisation of African Unity) accorded diplomatic recognition to the secessionist's government. The countries were Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gabon.

A British newspaper, the Sunday Express pointed out “from the perspective of the French, a United and Prosperous Nigeria would inevitably become an United States of West Africa and would tend to pull the former French colonies away from French influence (New-Nigerian, 1968:1).

It was also argued that Charles De Gaulle the President of France was convinced by the French big Merchants with oil interest in Nigeria that its concessions in territories controlled by Biafra could bring in much profit (Omosilade, 2019:46). Against this background, De Gaulle encouraged Portugal, South Africa and Rhodesia to recognize Biafra against the Federal Government, it was said that leaders of the Ivory Coast and Gabon supported Biafra through De Gaulle's subtle push (Tamuno, 1989:15).

On the strength of the above, it is abundantly clear that a civil war which started in July 6, 1967 described by General Gowon as a mere police operation designed to capture Lt. Col. Ojukwu and ends the war later escalated for 30 months.

III. Discussion

3.1 The Establishment of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Revolution or crisis is not new in Soviet Union. Russia had two revolutions in 1917. The first revolution took place in March 1917 and the second revolution took place in November, 1917. There was another serious discontent in Russia in 1905 when Japan defeated Russia in the war between the two in 1904-1905. The March revolution resulted in the abdication of Nicholas II and the setting up of a provisional government (Ogunmesa, 1991:60). The second revolution was led by the Bolsheviks who overthrew the interim or provisional government (Ibid).

Russia suffered serious defeat during the First World War. These defeats led to serious crisis at home as it exposed the weakness of the government. The peasants forcedly sent to the First World War were killed in large numbers. The aftermath of these humiliating defeats was protests and mutinies which resulted in the first revolution of March 1917. In this revolution, the government of Czar Nicholas II was overthrown and he abdicated in March 15, 1917 (Ibid). As a replacement, an interim government was set-up and Kerensky became the head of government with a specific instruction to withdraw from the war.

Other remote factors that led to the Revolution of 1917 include, the emancipation of the Serfs by Alexander II, lack of parliamentary government or any democratic means through which the people could express their wishes or grievances, the Czars made use of repressive policy and failure of the Czars to introduce reforms (Ibid, 60-61).

The main immediate cause which precipitated the second revolution was the policy of the interim government to continue with the First World War. This was as a result of the fact that the provisional government considered itself bound to the Triple Entente and therefore ordered a counter attack on Germany (Ibid, 62). Unfortunately, the invasion on Germany failed as many of the Russian soldiers were killed while many others ran away from the war front. The people were tired of war and they wanted peace. This defeat led to the unpopularity of the government.

The Bolsheviks opposed the continuation of the war by Kerensky's Government led by Lenin. It was the Bolsheviks that organize the November Revolution which overthrew Kerensky's provisional government Lenin became the head of the Bolshevik government.

The major effect of the Russian revolution of 1917 was the total collapse of the old Russian Empire and its transformation to the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics. The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics was formed on December 30, 1922 (Sabirov, 1987:214). At the beginning of 1918, Russia as a viable political entity scarcely existed. Russian Empire transformed into USSR. By the end of 1922, the USSR had emerged with control over the bulk of the territories of imperial Russia. USSR represents the integration of conquered territories into one state.

USSR is made up of 15 Republics. However, Russians proper accounted for 129 million of the total 241.7 million (USSR Population Census, 1970). Russians' population account for 53,4%. Other nationalities in the Soviet Republics include Ukrainians, accounting to 40.8Million, Uzbeks, Georgians, Lithuanians, Belerussians, Armenia, Azerbauijan, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Lativa, Moldavia, Tadjhikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (Oral interview conducted with Dr. Duyile Abiodun, 12-10-21).

The communist party indirectly controlled all levels of government and the party ruled the country. The party is the nucleus and the leading guiding force in carrying out the People's Socialist self-administration (Sabirov, 1987:253). The communist party gained its leading position in society through its selfless struggle to realize the ideals of scientific socialism in the interest of the working class and of all working people (Ibid, 254-255). It is important to note that the Republics had little real power. Russia officially was only one of the constituent republics but the term "Russia the USSR and the Soviet Union were often used interchangeably.

3.2 Nigeria-Ussr Relations in Pre-Civil War Period, 1960-1966

The relationship between Nigeria and USSR was Lukewarm. Nigeria being a capitalist state was not inclined to changing the experience which she had imbibed from the colonial master, Britain. Balewa led government was intolerant toward Russia which later transformed into USSR.

The Federal Government therefore after independence brought its anti-Soviet disposition to play. In October 1961, twelve Soviet technicians and two radio correspondents were refused entry to Nigeria (Ajayi, 1973:6). Justifying government's policy stance, the Foreign Minister, Jaja Wachukwu in November 1961 said that "to rush into Russia without first preparing the ground would be to commit political and diplomatic suicide (Ibid). Again, agreement to exchange ambassadors were not concluded until March, 1961 while Nigeria did not open an embassy in Moscow until March, 1963 (Ibid).

In 1963, the Soviet Government awarded 45 scholarships to Nigerians only 11 were honoured (Aluko, 1977:173). The Federal Government of Nigeria did not sign any trade agreement with Moscow until 1963 (Ibid). It is possible to say that the pro-western posture of Nigeria independence was because most of the elites had their training and orientation in the West.

At the time under consideration, the Nigerian press which was under government control was made to serve as a strong instrument of propaganda to the effect of projecting the image of Russia in bad light. Russia was portrayed as unfriendly to Nigeria and their people as wicked and inhospitable.

The above explains the Lukewarm, non-chalant and bad relationship between Nigeria and USSR in the Post-Independence era till the period of the Nigerian Civil War.

3.3 Nigeria-Ussr Relations during the Period of Nigerian-Civil War

It must be said that during the period of Nigerian Civil War, the Federal Government needed weapons to stop the Biafran forces from seceding. The Government relied on Britain and USA to supply the weapons, unfortunately they were not willing to provide the necessary military assistance.

Hence the Federal Government of Nigeria directed their attention to USSR for the supply of military weapons and fortunately USSR rose to the challenge and accepted the offer. The Soviets which had hitherto not made much progress in sub-Saharan Africa perhaps were elated and cherished the golden opportunity to make proper political and diplomatic in-roads into Africa's most important nation (Omotsilade, 2019:25). In the first instance, the Soviet Union was the World 's largest arms producer and it required buyers, as much as Nigeria desperately needed weapons, a symbiotic relationship immediately developed between them (Ibid).

Accordingly, as the necessities of war demanded, the USSR not only supplied Federal Nigeria with war-planes but also sold 122mm howitzers or field guns which had a range of 13miles with pinpoint accuracy (Tamuna, 1989:21). Tamuna posits that the cordial relations between federal Nigeria and the USSR represented the handiwork of Soviet Ambassador to Nigeria, Aleksandr Romanov (Ibid). He began his service in Lagos in May 1964 and left on 11 October, 1970. Romanov picked the Kremlin's first winner in Africa (London Daily Mail, 19 January, 1970). At a ceremony marking his departure, Romanov received from Yakubu Gowon

the high national honour of “Commander of the Order of the Niger” (Aluko, 1977:105). On the same occasion, Gowon said Nigeria found in the USSR “a true friend” while some of her traditional friend” forsook her in her hour of need (General Gowon’s Address at the Departure Ceremony of Soviet Ambassador, October, 1970).

Apart from supplying weapons to the Federal Government, the USSR also provided military and other technical personnel to the Federal Government. Little wonder, the Biafra forces were defeated by the Federal Government.

So, the drastic turn in diplomatic practice during the period under focus was partly informed by the Nigerian Civil War in which the Government solicited for military aid from Britain and United States, both declined making the government turned to the Soviet Union for military assistance (Bariledum, 2016:2138).

Nigeria solidified friendship with the former Soviet Union and recognized the Peoples Republic of China (Ayam, 2004). During the war years, Nigeria Soviet relations became very cordial (Kolawole, 2003:53). The Soviet ambassador was allowed in 1967 to make a broadcast on the nation’s radio to articulate the Soviet policy in Nigeria (Aluko, 1977:105). In 1969, the volume of trade between both countries had reached N28.6Million (Ogunbadejo, 1976:25).

In juxtaposition of that Nigeria signed various agreement on economic and technical co-operation with communist countries like Romania, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia (Ibid, 177). Also, a contract of a billion naira was awarded to the Soviet Union to construct the first iron and steel complex in the country while the National Theatre in Lagos was built by a Bulgarian firm (Ogunsanwo, 1978:52-53).

To cement the relationship further, the Head of State of Nigeria, General Yakubu Gowon visited Soviet Union in May, 1974. Consequently, there was an influx of Soviet nationals into the country and the restrictions on the number of embassy personnel no longer held (Eliagwu, 1985). The old restrictions that punctuated bilateral relations vanished as the Soviet Union became Nigeria’s best friend and ally.

Even, the former Head of State of Nigeria, Lt General Olusegun Obasanjo once stated “we are pleased to say that the development of relations with the Soviet Union has become an important trend of Nigeria’s foreign policy” (Quoted in Okafor, 1982:88). He also said the relations between the two countries had reached new heights (Ibid). This clearly demonstrated that the friendly relationship between Nigeria and USSR did not end after the civil war but was still very cordial when the civil war ended.

Again, the Soviet Union actively participated in the erection of two industrial projects namely a steel mill at Ajaokuta and a network of oil production pipes (Ibid). According to Okafor, 1,200 Nigerians have acquired professions in the Soviet Union over the years (Ibid). Nigeria and Soviet Union have some form of cultural association. A Nigerian/Soviet friendship society was formed in Lagos in 1961 and today, a Nigerian language (Hausa Language) is being taught in Leningrade, Moscow and Kiev Universities in Russia.

It can be argued that the cordial relationship between Nigeria and USSR during the period of Nigerian Civil War serves as an impetus, springboard and catalyst to strengthen further bilateral relations after the war in 1970.

IV. Conclusion

The Nigerian Civil War started on July 6, 1967 and ended on the 12th January, 1970. The bloody Civil War could have been avoided if General Yakubu Gowon, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, General Aguiyi-Ironsi and Usman Kastina were matured, tactful and diplomatic enough in handling the issues that led to the war. Such contentions issues include January, 15, 1966 Coup and the counter-coup of July 29, 1966, the promulgation of Decree, No 34, the mass killings of the Ibos in the North, the creation of 12 States and the declaration of the Republic of Biafra etc.

It is argued that without the leadership crisis between Gowon and Ojukwu, it was still possible to save the country from the woes of the Civil War.

Several diplomatic activities with the encouragement of the British and the American's culminated in the Aburi meeting of early January, 1967. However, the disagreement on Aburi Accord by General Yakubu Gowon led Federal Government and Lt. Col. Ojukwu, the Military Governor of Eastern Region finally led to Nigerian Civil War.

The creation of 12 States by General Yakubu Gowon on May 27, 1967 created serious challenge with Lt. Col. Ojukwu. It created discord and acrimony because it was interpreted by the Ibos as an attempt to disunite and destabilize, the Eastern region thereby making it less powerful in the event of secession, Lt. Col. Ojukwu responded by declaring the Eastern Nigeria as an independent state by the name and title "Republic of Biafra" on 30th May 1967.

General Gowon reacted by dismissing Lt. Col. Ojukwu from the Nigeria army and relieved him of his post as the military Governor of the Eastern Region. The Civil War in Nigeria therefore started. The Federal Government expected that the succession bid of the Eastern region would be seen as a treasonable felony by Britain and USA and that they would assist Nigeria to stop the Biafran from achieving their ambition, to the contrary, both countries declined to supply military weapons to execute the war in spite of the strong affiliation Nigeria had with Britain and USA after independence.

It must be established that during the period of Nigerian Civil War, the Federal Government needed weapons to stop the Biafran forces from seceding from the federation. Hence the Federal Government of Nigeria directed attention to USSR for the supply of necessary weapons. USSR responded positively to Nigeria's request. Since USSR this time was the World's largest arms producer and it required buyers, as much as Nigeria desperately needed weapons a symbiotic relationship developed between them. USSR supplied both, military weapons and technical personnel to the Federal Government. Little wonder Biafra forces were defeated by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

Odunuga argues that the continuous corporate existence of Nigeria as a sovereign state owes much to the timely assistance provided by USSR during this Nigeria's trying period (Odunuga, 1997). With the advantage of the Soviet-supplied 122mm field-guns, federal troops made rapid advances and had within their range Uli airtrip. As federal troops closed in, Ojukwu, on advice, left Uli in the night of a January, 1970 (Tamuna, 1980:23).

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