

Forum: Historical Security Council

Issue: The Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-1970)

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Introduction

Throughout history, wars and conflicts between nations have been inevitable. Reasons behind wars range from the economic gain as depicted by the Safavid-Ottoman war, or religion as portrayed by the Crusades. Regardless, it unexpectedly brings foes together and rips alliances apart. In the Nigerian-Biafran War, religion, ethnic diversity and inequality between different groups played a critical role. Following Nigerian independence from Britain in 1960, the nation concentrated on uniting the diverse ethnic and religious composition of Nigeria. Varying perspectives among citizens led to ongoing military coups between the various regions, however, when the relationship between the north and east got severely heated, the eastern region declared itself independent and was named Biafra. Three years later the newly seceded state Biafra, surrendered to Nigeria.

The Nigerian-Biafran war also known as the Nigerian Civil War or Biafran war has negatively impacted the demographic, economic and political climate of Nigeria. The war has caused approximately more than a million deaths resulting from starvation and ethnic cleansing. With immense political turmoil ranging from the military coups, over 30 months of fighting and no visible conclusion, the fate of Nigeria is in question. However, now that Nigeria has been reunited as one, how will people of different religions, ethnicities, and political views live in harmony? Will another war occur with the Eastern part of Nigeria separating itself from the rest? If so, how will that affect the people, political, and economic situation? This report will discuss the Nigerian-Biafran War but also the economic, social and political causes behind the war to outline possible solutions.

Definition of Key Terms

The Republic of Biafra

Republic of Biafra is the state that originated with the secession of the southeastern part of Nigeria on March 30, 1967, from the rest of Nigeria due to discrepancies in political views.

Sovereign

A sovereign state, is a country that is independent, with a defined territory, and a central government, has the right to form relations with any other sovereign states, and isn't under any colonial rule or controlled by another country.

Coup d'état

The violent and decisive actions taken by a minority to overthrow or alter the existing government. Some common causes for coup d'états are ethnic, religious and/or social diversity and contrasting differences in political ideologies.

Unilateral

A decision or action undertaken by one person or party without the consensus of other groups and is usually enforced in terrorising ways. Unilateral decisions aren't widely accepted. For example, Biafra unilaterally declared themselves sovereign and while some neighbouring states recognised them as another country it wasn't the norm.

Federal System

A system in which there is a national government that takes care of major projects and concerns. At the same time, there is a smaller subdivision of government that handles local issues.

Background

Ethnic Groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo)

The three major ethnic groups involved in the Nigerian civil war are the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The civil war was a war between these three ethnicities in terms of political, economic and social status.

Hausa-Fulani

The Hausa lived along with the Fulani in northwestern Nigeria. They make up the largest ethnic group in Nigeria. The Hausas didn't appreciate the outcome of the first coup that happened in January 1966 because the Igbos took control of the military. The Hausa viewed it as the Igbos trying to control Nigeria as a whole. As a result, the Hausas killed hundreds of Igbos in May 1966 that lived in the north. Subsequently, mass migration of Igbos occurred back to their homeland and a countercoup was conducted by the Hausas in July 1966. The constant battle between the Hausas and the Igbos resulted in the Igbos separating from the country to come up with a new sovereign state known as the Republic of Biafra.

Igbos

Following the mass murder of the Igbos in the north, all other non-Ibgo ethnicities were expelled from the eastern region. Any and all attempts to make peace between the regions failed, subsequently, the leader of the east, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu with the support of the consultative assembly declared the east a new sovereign and independent state-Biafra. Yakubu Gowon who was the leader of the federal government didn't recognise Biafra as a separate nation and hoped to find ways to unite the two regions together.

Yoruba

The Yoruba were in between the Igbos and the Hausas. While educated, they weren't as educated as the Igbos nor were they completely uneducated like the Hausas. As a result, they sided with the Igbos against the Hausas. It wasn't necessarily that they feared the population size of the Hausas but rather were hesitant about uneducated bureaucrats taking control of the government. The predominant funding of Nigeria emerged from the East and the West (Igbos and Yorubas respectively), as a result, they wanted a representative government which the Hausas couldn't provide.



A map of Nigeria is divided into four regions and twelve states, taken from Wikipedia. The Hausa Fulani occupied the north, the Yorubas the west and the Igbos the east.

Causes of the war

Political

Until 1960 Nigeria was under British rule but gained independence on October 1st 1960. This contributed to the creation of a new constitution that established a federal government system. The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) is a national political party that governed Nigeria during British rule. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) is another political party in Nigeria which predominantly had control over the northern region. Following Nigeria's independence, Nnamdi Azikiwe the ruler of NCNC merged with NPC which was led by Tafawa Balewa due to an inconclusive election in 1959. Balewa continued to serve as the prime minister and on October 1st 1963 Azikiwe became the president of the country. Meanwhile, the northern and southern regions were officially divided and marked by an

UN-supervised referendum. Stability in Nigeria was short-lived, the western government had collapsed, the northern feared south-eastern aristocratic domination while the south felt overpowered by the north. The federal election was boycotted in 1964, and a fraudulent election conducted in 1965 resulted in army officers overthrowing the federal government and resulted in the death of minister Balewa and two other regional officers. In hopes to cease the coup staged by the army, a military group was instilled that then caused more conflict due to the various backgrounds of the personnel. In July 1966 a countercoup was set up by the northern officers resulting in further political turmoil. Around May 1967 the decree to establish a sovereign republic was passed and Nigeria was divided into four regions, consisting of twelve states.

Social

The tension between the three regions was primarily due to differences in educational levels and political views. As mentioned before, the Yorubas and Igbos were significantly more educated when compared to the Hausa-Fulani and wanted a government that primarily consisted of educated bureaucrats. However, from the perspective of Hausas, they wanted a more representative government consisting of primarily Hausa-Fulani due to the vast population density of the ethnicity. From one perspective the Hausas wanted a more Marxist/Communist so they'd be treated equally and gain as many benefits as the Yorubas and the Igbos. While the Igbos and Yorubas wanted a more capitalistic state where the "big shots" got the benefits. While neither viewpoint is right or wrong when developing solutions, ways to mitigate the tensions to suffice the requirements of all ethnicities are critical.

Economic

Nigeria's economy primarily revolved around its vast oil resources. It is estimated that Britain controlled about 90% of the oil production in Nigeria. Following the second world war, oil was widely appreciated all around the world, but especially in England due to its huge investment in factories. Another country that was invested in this race for oil in Nigeria was France, which was also highly industrialised. Both England and France wanted to extract as much oil from Nigeria as possible, and with it aiding the war was a detrimental part. The goal was to get rid of the war as soon as possible to re-establish and expand the well-oiled machine of oil production in Nigeria. The oil trade helped sustained Nigeria's economy, but a strong economy doesn't do anything if its people can't live in harmony with each other.

The war

The core of the conflict began when the deaths of former Hausa leaders ignited riots in the North and when in retaliation Yakuba Gowon, a Hausa, was made head of the military government. He attempted to unite the nation but it failed as the governor of the south thought of his diplomatic measures as fake, biased and driven by a hidden motive. While the Yoruba-Igbo combination was successful initially as they had managed to create their own nation, Biafra, the mass support and population size of Hausa overpowered them eventually. Subsequently, Biafra succumbed to the pressure of Nigeria, more so the Hausas on 15th January 1970.

Humanitarian Crisis

This war was completely brushed over by the UN, yet it was a conflict that severely required UN aid. None of the external parties involved in the war had the motive of aiding the citizens, it was primarily for the economic benefit of oil and political alliances with the rest of Africa. About 1.8 million citizens relocated to eastern Nigeria, leading to a large-scale refugee crisis in 1967. Eastern Nigeria sought restitution which wasn't addressed in any way, leading to the death of many of these refugees. It wasn't until the images shot by David Cairns, with children and mothers affected with kwashiorkor (acute protein deficiency) published in the Daily Express, funding came in. With this newfound funding from donations, especially through the Joint Church Aid (more information in the "previous attempts to resolve the issue" section), at least half a million children were saved. Despite rushed methods to save them, about a million children had already died by then, due to starvation. To this day, the UN hasn't done anything to support these refugees, or reduce the mass starvation occurring in Nigeria.

Major Parties Involved

Nigeria

Nigeria is a country surrounded by Benin, Niger, Cameroon and the Atlantic Ocean. Prior to the civil war, Nigeria comprised the Yorubas, Hausa Fulanis and Igbos. Divided into three regions within the state based on ethnicity. The Hausa were greatly in favour of seizing Biafra and eradicating the state as a whole, but the Biafrans didn't compromise for a long time. Eventually, Nigeria overpowered Biafra due to their vast amount of human and military capital. However once Nigeria was reunited, there are issues surrounding the political state, economic stability and social representation, as a result, the solutions to drive Nigeria back into overall stability are to be crafted carefully.

Biafra

Biafra is the new state that was predominantly composed of the Igbos and the Yorubas. As stated, in hopes of having an educated government to handle state affairs they separated themselves from the Hausas. However, due to the lack of military capacity of the Igbos and Yorubas, their population size, an unstable economy and lack of political stability, they couldn't compete with the domination of the Hausas. The coups conducted by Biafra in Nigeria were more of a defence mechanism against Nigeria and rather an offence strategy. The Biafrans didn't necessarily want to attack the Nigerians, it was more that they didn't have any other choice. The ultimate goal was to have a government that was representative of the demographic of Nigeria. Over the three years, the power of Nigeria grew as Biafra declined which contributed to the submission of Biafra to Nigeria in 1970. Despite surrendering to Nigeria the political, and social views of the Yorubas and Igbos prevailed higher than ever.

United Kingdom

United Kingdom was a major oil-trade partner for Nigeria. During the war, Britain didn't support either nation at first but then ended up supporting Nigeria, due to their belief that Nigeria was more likely to win the war. United Kingdom aided Nigeria in the latter part of the war with ammunition, and weapons, which helped Nigeria to overwhelm the already weak Biafra further. British support for Nigeria in this war was only because of the British need and requirement for a steady oily supply. In addition, Gowon and Ojukwu (Oxford University), both were educated in England. Subsequently, factors of did Britain have a bigger influence than portrayed in the war, should be considered.

The Soviet Union

The Soviet Union supported Nigeria for political and economic reasons. Nigeria required a few planes, which the United Kingdom refused to give, so they turned to USSR. Additionally, Nigeria was one of the most influential states in Africa, and the Soviet Union wanted higher African support in the Cold War. Meanwhile, Nigeria was going in a communist direction, which the USSR was in favour of. The Soviet Union threatened the UK in continuing the support of Nigeria so the US wouldn't get involved, painting a picture of the UK fighting communist rule in Nigeria which the US approved of.

France

France primarily supported the Igbos due to oil production just like the British. They wanted Nigeria to be divided so the states that were previously colonised by France would still operate based on French influence.

China

During this time, China and the USSR weren't on good terms. Since the USSR supported Nigeria, China decided to do the opposite and aid Biafra. They also wanted to appear to be patrons of Communism.

Israel

Politically Israel wanted to side with Nigeria, so as to promote Israeli-African relations, as most African nations were against Israel due to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, Israeli citizens were in favour of the Igbos, and in turn Biafra, so the government ended up supporting both nations in the war.

United States of America

The United States wasn't in favour of the mass brutality going on in this war but opted to take the stance of not involving themselves in the conflict because they wanted to support Britain.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1st October 1960	Nigeria gained independence from Britain
15th January 1966	First coup conducted by the Igbos was against the Hausas contributing to the death of prime minister Balewa among others. The main motive behind this coup was to eliminate the Hausa population to a certain extent to “cleanse the country of corruption”.
29th July 1966	The counter-coup by the north against the Igbos, which contributed to the death of Aguiyi-Ironsi (head of state), gave rise to Yakuba Gowon as the head of state. The success of the northern coup encouraged the negative emotions surrounding the Igbos and many were slaughtered or fled from the North back to the east.
4-5th January 1967	The Aburi Accords hoped to resolve the repercussions and consequences of the back-and-forth tension between the two ethnic groups, which failed..
27th May 1967	Following the split of Nigeria into 12 states as declared by Gowon, Ojukwu (military governor of the east), deemed the republic of Biafra independent based on an official vote that had taken place in the east.
1967-1970	Within this time Nigeria placed embargoes on Biafra and banned any form of external aid that they could receive while attacking them on the military front. Subsequently, due to constant opposition by Nigeria on the political, humanitarian and economic front, the situation of Biafra deteriorated until they surrendered.
15th January 1970	The official paper that validated Biafra's surrender to Nigeria was signed by General Philip Effiong who was the deputy of Ojukwu.

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

- Airlifts into the city of Port Harcourt, and relief operations such as the catholic relief operations conducted by Father Anthony Byrne. This was a really effective solution in 1968 because Nigeria had cut off Biafran supplies from external places and aid through airlift was really the only way to bring in supplies to Biafra. The success of these operations is explained by the recurring instances of Catholic relief operations. A downside to this solution was that it was expensive and the chances of Nigerian forces intercepting the aircraft were high, as demonstrated in 1969.
- A statement that was released by the government of Biafra known as the “Charge to humanity”. This statement hoped to elucidate the degeneration of Biafra and called for foreign aid. This action was partially successful as demonstrated by the appearance of Biafran children on the cover page of Life Magazine. This evoked emotions of guilt and charity in foreign nations as depicted by the huge sum of money that was raised through the American-Jewish Emergency Effort for Biafran Relief, \$185,000. Moreover, mercenary pilots from foreign nations now worked with Biafra to attack regions, especially military airfields in

Nigeria. However, the reason this attempt was only partially successful was due to the downing of the Red Cross plane that attempted to reach Biafra. Following the downing of the plane, many necessary goods weren't deliverable anymore and Nigeria banned the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), from aiding Biafra. The immense amount of attention received from the international community on this war in one way helped Biafra keep up the battle against Nigeria, but it also deepened and prolonged the hostility between the ethnicities.

- While not stated explicitly, churches, especially German churches played a huge role in terms of preventing or rather reducing the mass starvation that was occurring in Biafra. A couple of churchmen appealed to their citizens' conscience to aid the people in Biafra. Two humanitarian organizations the *Diakonisches Werk* and *Deutsche Caritasverband* received a lot of positive responses following which thirty-six Jewish and Christian charities worked together to create the Joint Church Aid (JCA). The JCA conducted the world's largest airlift since the Berlin episode. Without the intervention and involvement of the JCA in terms of humanitarian aid, even more, millions of people would have died due to starvation.

Possible Solutions

- The UN hasn't explicitly contributed in any way to stopping the war or mitigating the consequences. Subsequently, UN intervention would be highly beneficial. It could be in terms of funding for restoration purposes or humanitarian aid. A benefit of this solution is that the UN has more than enough economic back-up and peacekeeping workers meaning it's an action that is realistic. Something important to realize is how UN aid will be requested and how it will be distributed in the state appropriately.
- Third-party intervention. Thus far, in terms of reducing the tension between the two states, it has been the respective government or certain personnel in the governments. The lack of third-party involvement has resulted in plenty of human rights violations and predicts greater political and economic instability within the newly reunited Nigeria. Subsequently, it's beneficial for a third party to facilitate the new constitution and laws of Nigeria. This solution eradicates bias and ensures a compromisable outcome for both parties. A possible consequence of this solution would be that the third party doesn't smoothly stabilize the country due to their bias or even lack of competence on political and economic matters. Therefore, it's critical that the third party is neutral and stable.
- Regardless of what solutions are derived for this problem a priority is surrounding the economic, social and political status of Nigeria. Nigeria needs to have consensus among the society to create a stable government in order to promote economic growth. On the other hand, Nigeria needs some form of funding to stabilize the society, so as to secure the needs of all the parties involved which will deescalate the political pressure in Nigeria. Adding on, decreasing elevated tensions between different political parties will unite the society as one and through unity economic growth will be possible. In simple terms, the economic, political and social conditions of Nigeria are interconnected and since they are all equally important, reform measures must be crafted in terms of creating stability and growth in all three sectors at once.
- An extension to the social aspect of this war is that the tensions between the ethnic groups must de-escalate. The de-escalation process could include, an UN-supervised peace treaty, or a conference like

the Aburi Accords in which ways to combat the fugue are derived. Delegates must keep in mind that after prolonged periods of war, there will be hostility between the groups which must be tackled delicately.

- A major cause of this war is the existence of inequality between the Hausas and Igbos. Inequality ranges from socioeconomic status to education. The inequality present between the different groups must be reduced to ensure unity within the nation on all fronts. A solution could be as simple as education programs but this isn't recommended because it's a really common solution. Education is **one** of the factors that defines inequality, not the only one, moreover bearing in mind the resources available, any and all solutions should be based on what is available at this time.
- This isn't necessarily a solution but a note to delegates, the time period of this committee is before 1970, so you **cannot** include computers and social media. Bear in mind that the perspectives of citizens were more rooted in their heritage, traditions and religions, so think from that point of view and not from a 2023 perspective.

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