NIGERIA: BACKGROUND TO THE CRISIS *

by Lawrence Baraebibai Ekpebu**

It is a sad story to relate. It is a tale of Nigerians killing Nigerians; of the diversion of scarce resources both human and material to a self-destructive warfare. This catastrophe could have been averted had selfless leadership, less greed and a greater sense of "give and take" than exhibited, emerged, as I will try to show in this lecture. At the root of the problem which has haunted Nigeria since independence were two basic factors: first the structure of the Nigerian Federation which the British evolved and bequeathed to Nigerians at Independence in 1960 was a very shaky one, with the Northern Region nearly double in population, and in land territory three times the other two (Eastern and Western) Regions combined. The North which was given 50% representation in the Federal Parliament was dominated by the Fulani, (conquerors of that territory before the advent of the British) and the Hausa, while the East and the West were dominated respectively by the Ibo and the Yoruba. Southern Nigerians were vocal in their denunciation of this Northern domination of the Federation, but soon the East under the Ibo leadership struck an alliance with the North, thus pushing the Yoruba West into opposition. Together the Ibo and the Northern leaders pounced on the West, creating a Mid-West State of non-Yoruba tribes[1] out of the West, throwing the leader of the Majority Party in Western Nigeria, Chief Awolowo into jail, and setting up a puppet regime in the West. The East-North Alliance was a marriage of convenience. It was its final rupture in 1966 that led to the sad events of that year.

The second factor was the large-scale corruption that characterized Nigerian public life. In office the politicians turned

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* This article was the text of a lecture delivered at Uppsala, Sweden under the auspices of the African Students' Union in September 1967.

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the Government treasury into a large private gold mine. To remain in office, they used armed thugs to silence opposition, manipulated census figures to ensure better representation for their political parties and rigged elections in open daylight. The 1963 census, the 1964 elections to the Federal Parliament, and the October 1965 elections to the Western House of Assembly exhibited the worst traits of all these evils, and,in spite of Nigeria's "good" image abroad, showed the shaky foundation upon which the Nation was built.

The army coup of January 15, 1966, was therefore, a culmination of a national crisis in which the former political leadership had become hated by the general Nigerian public for its large scale embezzlement of public funds, rigging of elections, its subversion of the principles of constitutional behaviour and, generally, for its oppressive and intolerant measures. That leadership was nevertheless very agreeable in its foreign policy toward the West and the latter tended in return to heap praises on the Nigerian leadership in the World press. True, a man like the late Prime Minister, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was basically an honest and good-hearted leader. Yet the record of his domestic politics was stained both by his excessive subservience to the feudalistic personality of the late Sardauna of Sokoto, Premier of the former Northern Region, and by his apparent inability to curb the most evident excesses of his corrupt colleagues in both the Federal and Regional Governments. It became clear by late 1965 that the Nigerian leadership needed more than international flattery to forestall the eruption that was bound to take place sooner or later. The eruption came much sooner than later.

The coup then was acclaimed throughout Nigeria, although it was known soon afterwards that it had been planned and executed by young army officers of the Ibo tribe. The name of Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, leader of the January coup became a legend in Nigerian history. The coup was not complete, however, and the surviving members of the Federal Cabinet were able to "hand over"

the Government to Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi. There was hope nevertheless that under Ironsi Nigeria was finally on the move to an honest and democratic government.

Unfortunately, the full story of the plot to overthrow the civilian government of Balewa was still to unfold. As it began to do so, it became clear that certain Ibo officers among the planners did not carry out their assignments in the South, with the result that only political leaders of Northern origin (e.g. Balewa and the Sardauna of Sokoto) and their non-Ibo friends in the South (e.g. the late Premier of Western Nigeria, Chief Akintola, a Yoruba, and the late Finance Minister, Okotie-Eboh, an Itsekiri) were killed. Furthermore, most of the few Northern officers above the rank of Major, including the most senior, one Brigadier Maimalari in the Nigerian Army were killed. The Northerners were therefore quite upset by what they regarded as a calculated attempt to eliminate their leaders and Army officers by the Ibos. It is pertinent to mention here, that Major-General Ironsi, himself an Ibo, recognizing the fury of the North over this one-sided execution of the coup, did his best to appease the Northerners by excluding Northern politicians from the general clamping into detention of most of the leading politicians of the fallen regime. His conciliatory moves were not, however, appreciated by the younger Ibo officers who were openly known to be planning a new coup against Ironsi to "complete" the January coup. To the Northern leadership, this new threat meant only one thing: the elimination of more politicians and army officers of Northern origin. There were strong indications by April, 1966, therefore, that Northerners were also planning a counter coup!

It was in this state of affairs that General Ironsi decreed a Unitary form of government for Nigeria in late May, 1966. The North was suspicious of the move as they feared that a Unitary government which automatically deprived the North of autonomy could only mean a Southern, especially Ibo domination of the North. This fear was

further strengthened by information reaching the North that the then Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Mr. Ojukwu had ordered top civil servants in the East to get ready to take up jobs in the North. Already Northern wrath was being pushed to the breaking point by Ibo elements living in the North who were said to have displayed photographs of General Ironsi and that of Major Nzeogwu (organiser of the January 15 coup and the one who led the assault on the North's Premier, the Sardauna of Sokoto), the latter apparently showing Nzeogwu standing over the dead body of the late Sardauna. The Ibo elements were then reported to have bragged to the Northerners that Ironsi and Nzeogwu were the conquerors of the North. Be that as it may, Northern Nigerians were further incensed by what they regarded as acts of ungratefulness on the part of the Ibos who had controlled most of the businesses, and owned most of the modern houses in the North and had lived unmolested by the Northerners.

The reaction of the North to all of these alleged provocations and threat of Ibo domination were a series of riots at the end of May, 1966, in which several Ibos living in the North were killed. On their part, General Ironsi, as Head of the Nigerian Government, and Ojukwu as a leading member of that Government did nothing to discourage these acts of lawlessness, generally giving the Northerners further courage to stage the coup of July 29, 1966, in which Ironsi himself lost his life. It is widely believed in Nigeria that the July coup by the Northerners was staged to forestall the second coup which was being planned for early August, 1966, by the Ibo officers. The July coup was followed in late September and early October, 1966, by further killings of Southern Nigerians in the North. The Ibos were an obvious target, and they lost several thousands of people. A much smaller number of other Southern tribes - like the Yorubas, the Edos, the Ijaws, the Effiks, etc. - were also killed. The Ibos retaliated by killing most of the 5,000 Northerners who were resident in Eastern Nigeria. The Ibos had lost over 20,000.

With the fall of General Ironsi, a compromise candidate, Yakubu Gowon, an Angas from the Middle Belt, was made Head of the Federal Military Government. His emergence was something of a surprise to the Nigerian public as he was generally an unknown person, politically. He had served in Ironsi's government as chief of staff and had been sent by Brigadier Ogundipe, the next in command to General Ironsi, to go and lobby with the insurgents with a view to effecting the release of General Ironsi. The Northern soldiers then were reported to have arrested Gowon and might have shot him but for the timely intervention of Gowon's fellow Middle Belters, the Tivs who, although a minority tribe, are reputed to be the toughest fighters in the Nigerian Army. The Tivs, like their counterparts in the Southern Regions, had provided a centre of stiff opposition to Northern Hausa rule and had in fact been brutally suppressed for daring to demand their own state within the federation in the days of the Sardauna. Coming from a small tribe, Gowon was accepted as being independent of the three largest tribes (Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba) who had dominated the Nigerian scene, and the quarrel between two (Hausa and Ibo) of whom had brought the present crisis. Furthermore, although a Northerner by geographic location, he is a Christian and independent of the Muslim Hausa-Fulani, who in the present context of Nigerian politics constitute only a small minority in the Armed Forces of Nigeria. Under Gowon's regime, therefore, the old charges of "Northern domination" no longer hold.

Recognizing the suffering of Eastern Nigerians in the North, Gowon had made all sorts of concessions to Lt. Col. Ojukwu of the East, including decree No.8 which implemented the "Aburi" agreement of our military leaders by creating more powerful regions.

Gowon even went on to share his powers with the military governors; furthermore money was being made available to the military governors for purposes of resettling refugees. The biggest portion (£3½ million) of this money went to Ojukwu. Still the latter was not satisfied and went on to confiscate Federal Government property, funds, and corporations in Eastern Nigeria. Ojukwu even

spent the money the Federal Government made available for resettling refugees on an executive aircraft for himself and on arms.

Several efforts were made towards reconciliation by church leaders, top civilian leaders, labour leaders, and university professors, all to no avail.

As nothing seemed to satisfy Ojukwu and as he was bent on breaking up the Federation, the Head of the Federal Military Government, Major-General Gowon split the country into 12 states, both to satisfy the yearning of over 28 million Nigerians who had constituted minority elements in the four former regions and as a move to lend stability to the federation.

This had the effect of splitting the North which had always been criticised for its predominant position in the country into six states. Also, the East which Ojukwu was planning to take out of the Federation was split into three states.

Now the East is made up of four main tribes: the Ibo with seven million people; the Calabar, the Ogoja and the Ijaws who constitute five million people. The Calabar and the Ogoja were joined to form the South-Eastern State while the Ijaws were formed into the Rivers State. The Ibo, Ojukwu's tribe in the East now form the East Central State. (See the new States map on opposite page). People of these two non-Ibo States had agitated for separate statehood since colonial days. Separate delegations representing these "minority" tribes had always attended and made representations at all the constitutional talks between the British and Nigerian leaders before independence. An independent commission (the Willink Commission) appointed by the British in 1957 advised in its Report of 1958, that the Rivers area be made a special area for economic development purposes, in answer to the demand for separate states.[2] Also, at the pre-independence constitutional talks in London in 1959 the widespread demand by Nigerians for the splitting of the country into more states under British auspices came up. The British gave the

Nigerians two alternatives: achieve independence in 1960 under the existing arrangements of three regions, or postpone independence for a few years to allow the British to reorganise Nigeria under smaller states.

The Nigerian leaders, anxious for independence in 1960, chose the former with the understanding that they themselves would see to the states issue later. It was this long-standing issue which Gowon settled on 27th May, 1967.

The interesting thing about this long story is that almost all the oil from the East comes from the Rivers State; Ogoja is the most fertile part of the East and Calabar is known for its palm produce. Throughout Nigeria's history, the majority tribe in the East, the Ibo, have exploited the Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers areas which led to the demand by the five million people in these areas for their own states for the past fifteen years.

In the mass killings in the North, the Calabar, Ogoja and Rivers people, like other southern Nigerians were affected. Yet when the crisis began, the Ibo majority in the East turned around to victimise, persecute and murder scores of people from these "minority" areas for daring to call for a break-up of the country into smaller units as a means of removing the Northern dominance in the country and of alleviating the sufferings of the "minorities" in the East. The Ibo tribe in the East who for a long time had advocated the creation of more States in the North, now opposed the creation of states since it would also mean the emancipation of the five million people in the East. (It sounds almost ridiculous to talk of a minority of five million in the former East region of 12 million Nigerians! But the seven million Ibos were in control of the Regional Government in Enugu and so used police powers to suppress the five million).

Thus, three days after the Federal Military Government split the nation into 12 states the Governor of the East Central State, Lt. Col. Ojukwu declared that his state was seceding from the Federation,

taking with him also the South-Eastern (Calabar-Ogoja) and Rivers States which are fully committed to the Federal Government. Personally I feel that the unfortunate events of 1966 notwithstanding, it is a mistake for any state to secede from the Federation. Yet if Ojukwu and his Ibo tribe wish to secede, it is their business once they accept to face the consequences of their action. What beats my imagination is how they think they can steal with them the two million people of the Rivers and the three million of the South-Eastern (Calabar and Ogoja) States with a combined piece of territory larger than the Ibo East Central State. No doubt it is because of the natural resources of these States. A comparative situation will be created if the Governor of Pennsylvania were to decide to secede from the United States and to attempt to take with him the sister states of New Jersey and New York who are loyal to the United States Federal Government. Suppose, furthermore, that New Jersey is the oil producing state and New York is the most fertile state!

In fairness to the Ibo leadership, it must be stated that the massacre of thousands of Ibos in the North came as a shock to the country. As a Nigerian, I am ashamed that such a disregard for life and property was possible in the country. And although some indiscreet Ibo elements resident in the North had provoked the Hausa-Fulani to the breaking point, and although the Ibos themselves had started the ball rolling by the one-sided execution of the January 1966 coup by their army officers, yet the thoughtless killing of innocent women, children and other civilians in the North cannot be condoned by any sane person. Indeed, other tribes in Southern Nigeria, and especially the Yoruba, the Edo, the Ijaw, the Efik, the Urhobo, the Itsekiri who had also lost relatives in the Northern killings sympathized with the predicament of the Ibo. Above all, even some leading Northerners who were either not involved in the killings or who felt that the scale of the reprisals went too far, were ready to play their part to help their aggrieved Ibo brothers. The Ibo leadership, however, spurned all these gestures and planned for secession. One could not help getting the frightening impression that the massacres in the North were

not the major reason for the secession; but that the temporary loss of power by the Ibos at the Federal level, as represented by the fall of Ironsi, and the discovery of oil in Eastern Nigeria throw a brighter light than the massacres on the behaviour of the Ibo leadership. This view is supported by the fact that secession was being planned before the massacres. It was planned in early June, 1966, and intensified after the overthrow of Ironsi in late July. The massacres of late September and early October might therefore only have strengthened the hands of the secessionist elements among the Ibos.

The role of "oil" in this secession story is illustrated by the behaviour of the Eastern delegation to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference in August and September, 1966. In a rather dramatic break-through, the delegation from the North which had persistently opposed the creation of more states throughout our history announced its agreement to the creation of states throughout Nigeria (it was generally agreed that the predominance of the Tivs, an otherwise small minority tribe in the North who had persistently fought for the creation of their state for over fifteen years, in the Nigerian army in a period of Army rule had a most persuasive effect on the Northern delegation)[1]. With this Northern acquiescence, all (the North, West, Midwest and Lagos) but the Eastern Region who, throughout Nigeria's history had advocated the creation of states, agreed to the creation of more states. The East's position, although surprising, was nevertheless understandable. In the creation of states the new oil rich Rivers area of the Ijaws and the productive Calabar-Ogoja areas, non-Ibo territories, which had persistently charged Ibo domination and which agitated for their own states since colonial days would slip out of Ibo control. And so there was a diplomatic revolution reminiscent of European politics of 1756. Diplomatically isolated at the conference table, Ojukwu's delegation pressed for and obtained a "short break" to allow for consultations. The Eastern delegation refused to return to the conference table, charging that the proposition for the creation of states, which would finally have

ended the "Northern domination" they had always complained about, was unacceptable. The "official" reason which the East gave for boycotting the conference was that members of their delegation did not feel safe in Lagos. In the meantime rumours about planning in Enugu for secession were rife. But it was during this Eastern boycott of the constitutional talks that the Northern massacres took place in late September and early October. In a sense then, the massacres came to rescue the Eastern delegation from the rather untenable position it had found itself at the conference table.

It is rather sad for one to discuss this human tragedy in such a calculating sense. Yet one cannot avoid drawing the obvious conclusions from the sequence of events without standing a chance of committing intellectual fraud.

PROSPECTS FOR "BIAFRA"

What, then, one may ask, are the prospects for Ojukwu's secession? In my view, the secession effort will not be successful because of the following factors which the Ibo leadership found itself unable to consider seriously: First, "secession" is a dirty word in African politics. The failure of Tshombe's Katanga to sustain her secession in spite of the enormous military and financial assistance which Belgium and other powerful Western interests rendered her is an indication of the futility of resorting to "secession" as a solution to national problems. "Biafra" does not even have the friendly states like Rhodesia and Portuguese Angola which greatly facilitated Katanga's bid for "independence". Moreover, the multitribal structure of the Nigerian society is typical of most African countries. The leaders of these other African countries must loath Ojukwu's action since secession in theirs might be next if tribal secession were given encouragement in Nigeria.

Secondly, "Biafra" is not a homogeneous entity as pointed

out above. With 7 million Ibos pushing for secession and 5 million non-Ibos opposed to secession and loyal to the Federal Nigerian Government, Ojukwu's problems will only have begun, not ended with the declaration of "independence". For "Biafra" is as dependent on inter-tribal cooperation as does the Federal Republic of Nigeria; and the Ibo leadership cannot question Eastern Nigeria's membership in Nigeria without at the same time also questioning the membership of the Ijaws, the Efiks and the Ogojas of the Rivers and South-Eastern States in "Biafra". The opposition of these non-Ibo tribes to "Ibo domination" will grow even stronger than previously since secession would have the effect of removing the Central Government before which these tribes had at least found a place to lodge their appeals in the Nigerian context. Furthermore, these "security risk" non-Ibo territories in Eastern Nigeria have a combined land territory which is bigger than the Ibo Central State and also account for most of the mineral oil and the agricultural products which together constitute about 90% of the revenues upon which Ojukwu is counting for the survival of "Biafra".

The irony of Ojukwu's dilemma is that unable to count on the support of these 5 million non-Ibos in Eastern Nigeria, his security forces continue to victimize and harass the Ijaws, Efiks and the Ogojas as "security risks". Hundreds of the leaders from these areas including doctors, lawyers and civil servants are in Ojukwu's jails. Others have been killed; as a result he only alienates them further. In other words, Ojukwu's rebellion against the Federal Military Government has a built-in victimization and domination by the Ibos over the 5 million non-Ibos, a fact which further exposes the illogicality of "Biafra". Therein lies the vicious circle: A secession movement which tries to justify itself on the theory of "Northern domination" (which no longer exists) itself feeds on the domination of others tribes. To put it another way, why does the Ibo leadership argue that their attempted secession is based upon the principles of self-determination for the Ibos and yet refuse at the same

time the 5 million Ijaws, Efiks and Ogojas their own self-determination? The question which the Ibo leadership has refused to ask themselves is why they think that these non-Ibos in Eastern Nigeria would rather live together and share a common destiny with the Ibos alone, rather than with the Yoruba, the Hausa, the Bini, and the Itsekiri, etc.?

A SOUTHERN FRONT?

The third fact which works against Ojukwu is the fact that by this attempted secession, he has alienated and united the rest of the country (49 million) against his people (7 million). Originally, the Ojukwu Government had counted on the emergence of a "Southern Front", an alliance of the Eastern, Midwestern and Western Regions which could have greatly strengthened Ojukwu's hands - had it materialised. But the possibilities for such a development must now be ruled out for a number of reasons. First, such an alliance could only have arisen out of and sustained by a common Southern fear of "Northern domination". However, with the creation of states on May 27, 1967, in which the North was split into six states, this fear has been removed. The exercise brought stability to the structure of the Nigerian Federation and served not only to reassure the fears of the Western and Midwestern States but also removed the one reason upon which the Ibos (who had always advocated the creation of States) were planning to base and justify their secession (its irrelevance not withstanding, Ojukwu still used Northern domination as a reason for his "secession" on June 30, 1967). But for purposes of influencing a "Southern Front", other Southerners were no longer impressed by it. Moreover, as pointed out above, the North's Hausa-Fulani constitute only a small minority in the Nigerian Armed Forces which rule Nigeria today.

A second reason why a "Southern Front" could not emerge is that such a front would have been meaningful only within a Nigerian

context. The rationale for it would have been that a bigger Southern front would be a more effective check on the big North than the then individual Southern Regions. Now, with Ojukwu's "secession", the East would no longer be an effective partner in such an alliance. Ojukwu's "secession" has thus had the effect of strengthening the support of the Yorubas for the Federal Government, for only when Ojukwu is defeated and kept within the Federation could the East serve any useful purpose as an "ally" against the North - even if the issue of "Northern domination" were still alive.

The third factor which destroys the idea of a "Southern Front" stems from the attitude of the former Eastern Nigeria's Government toward other Southerners. It charged its grievances on the treatment which Ibos received from the Hausa-Fulani of the North; yet in its reaction, the Enugu regime fought against all other Nigerians: First, in October, 1966, Ojukwu ordered all non-Easterners out of the East. The Northerners were killed, but the other non-Easterners who were evicted were Yorubas, Binis, Itsekiris, Urhobos, etc., many of whom were not given time to pack their belongings, much less make effective arrangements for their properties. Many had lived in the East all their lives. Without exceptions they lost their jobs and other means of livelihood in the East and returned to their Regions of origin as poor refugees. Their expulsion from the East was said to be a "temporary" one "in their own interest". They have not been allowed to return yet.

Secondly, the Enugu Government seized Federal institutions and properties owned jointly by all Nigerians. Moreover, Ojukwu's secession was from the whole of Nigeria, not from the North alone. In their reaction to the North, therefore, the Ibo leadership made no distinction between the North and the rest of Nigeria. Finally to expect a Southern alliance under these circumstances is therefore expecting too much from Southern Nigerians who are capable of making their own decisions, and especially the Yorubas who have a much longer cultural and educational history and are still ahead of the Ibos in education.

The recent speeches of Chief Awolowo, Federal Commissioner for Finance and leader of the Yorubas, in which he stated categorically, his "irrevocable commitment" to the Federal Government and to Nigerian unity, serve as a final statement of Southern opinion on the National crisis.

THE "BIAFRA" VIEWPOINT

The above analysis does not posit that the Ibos did not have a case. Indeed, of all sides of the Nigerian crisis, they had the best case; they had a genuine case of grievance stemming from the massacres in the North. Apologists for the North have argued that the Northern massacres were an appropriate Northern retaliation to the events of January 1966; but these apologists overlook the national ills which instigated the January coup. They also overlook the fact that, condemnable as the one-sided killings by Ibo officers was, they nevertheless limited these killings to politicians and army officers, unlike the Northern retaliation which extended the killings to men, women and children. The analysis does posit, however, that Ojukwu overplayed his hands. In fact, in their efforts to defend themselves against the Northern massacres and their temporary loss of power in Lagos, the Ibo leadership itself became unreasonable and vindictive, not only in killing Northerners in the East and sending all non-Easterners packing, but also in two other ways: First, the leadership argued that the long resistance which the North had put up against the creation of states which would have ensured a healthier and more equitable distribution of power in the country, the overthrow of the Ironsi regime and the acts of intolerance shown to the Ibos in the North showed clearly that the North did not care for Southern (especially Ibo) participation in the leadership of the Nigerian Federation. Therefore the North must be made to appreciate the reality of the importance of the South in Nigeria and see the dramatization of the North's dependence on the South for her (North's) access to the sea. Accordingly the Ibo leadership

did four things: First, it detained one-third of the Nigerian Railways rolling stock which was then in Eastern Nigeria, thus reducing the means which the nation had provided to convey produce from the North to the sea. Secondly, the East blocked Northern use of the Eastern branch of the Nigerian Rail which runs from the North to the Port Harcourt seaport which is situated in Eastern Nigeria. Thirdly, the East seized Northern produce, mostly groundnuts which were awaiting shipment abroad at the Port Harcourt Wharf. Finally, Enugu tried to persuade the Western Region to place a similar restriction on Northern access to the Sea through the West. Of these steps those carried out in the East (the first three) were successful and might have played no insignificant role in persuading the North to the acceptance of many requests made on her by the West, including the agreement to remove Northern troops from the West and the creation of more states (particularly in the North). The East's efforts to persuade the West to punish the North did not work both because of the relative military weakness of the latter and because the success of such a blockade on the Western front depended on the proposed Southern front which never materialized.

In a second area of vindictiveness, the East sought to punish the North through the issue on revenue allocation. Here the Ibo leadership argued that since the Ibo would no longer feel safe in the North, they would no longer benefit from the economic benefits which arise from membership of a large country. Under these circumstances, and, in view of the greater number of Ibos who had returned to the East because of the disturbances of 1966, for which the Eastern government must cater, revenue derived from the East must not be allowed to help develop the North. The assumptions here were that with oil revenues now accruing from the East, the latter was contributing more to, than she was receiving from, the other regions. Furthermore, it was calculated, that the Mid-West was also contributing a little more than she was receiving; the West was receiving as much as she was contributing while the North was receiving more than she was contributing to Federal coffers. The operative system of revenue allocation which was

based on both "derivation and need" was no longer acceptable. It should now be based on "derivation" only, or, better still, each Region should keep its own resources, contributing only such amounts as were necessary to maintain a common services type of organisation in Lagos. With such a new system, the Ibo leadership argued, the North would collapse, economically.

The results which these vindictive approaches to the Nigerian crisis produced are very interesting. A few observations on the approaches themselves must be made: First, the thinking of the Ibo leadership completely ignored the fact that they in fact were the chief beneficiaries of Northern "domination" since Nigeria's attainment of independence. The North did not rule alone but did so in alliance with Ibo leadership. Together they pushed the Yoruba leadership into jail, destroyed Chief Awolowo's Action Group and set up a puppet regime in Western Nigeria in 1962. The North provided the numbers in parliamentary strength; but it was the better educated Ibo who occupied the top positions in the Balewa administration. Secondly, the Ibo leadership ignored the fact that no one Region has borne a disproportionate share of the economic burden of the Federation for very long. In the 1930's Oil Palm and Kernel from the East was the chief contributor of Federal revenue. In the 40's groundnut from the North was added, and in the 1950's cocoa from the West played that leading role. In turn, the world market turned an evil eye on these products. All the Regions had, accordingly, enjoyed the benefits of belonging to a bigger Federation. To argue now that the North be now denied a share of the windfall in the East was unrealistic.

Finally, to deal with the issues of "access to the sea" and of "revenue allocation" as purely regional matters without reference to the whole national context was probably sound in the view of the Ibo leadership, but it was short-sighted in the long-run. For when the full national implications of those vindictive approaches to the crisis began to take shape, the results which followed were those least expected and least desired by the Ibo leadership: On the issue of "access to the

sea", for instance, when other tribal units in Nigeria began to press the Ibo argument to its logical conclusion, it became clear that the Ibos themselves were landlocked, and depended on the Ijaws and the Calabars for access to the sea! The creation of states clearly dramatized this fact. In fact the three main tribal units - the Hausa-Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the West and the Ibo of the East who had dominated the Nigerian government throughout her history, have, under the new structure of Nigeria, now become dependent on other smaller states for access to the sea! For the West, Lagos is a sister Yoruba state, and with the re-approachment that now exists between the North and the rest of the country, it is the Ibo East Central State alone, with its antagonism of the Rivers and Calabar people to the South, that stands to suffer from the tribalization of the issue of "access to the sea".

The second front, that of "revenue allocation" also boom-eranged with equally disastrous effects on the Ibos. For, the oil as pointed out above, comes predominantly, from the Rivers State of the Ijaw people, not from Ibo territory. Moreover, most of the agricultural wealth of the East is concentrated in the Calabar-Ogoja area. Revenue allocation based on "derivation" alone as the Ibo leadership wanted, now holds for the Ibos the same economic strangulation which they had planned for the North! The lesson that one could draw here is that the Nigerian tribes are inter-dependent culturally, economically and politically, and that in seeking solutions to national problems such as are facing Nigeria, compromise, which will guarantee and strengthen these inter-tribal ties and cooperation rather than "extreme" actions like "secession" meet the demands of self-interest and commonsense.

THE ALTERNATIVES FOR ARMED CONFLICT

"Why then", Nigeria's many friends around the world have been asking, "have Nigerian leaders not explored non-violent alternatives to this war of self-destruction? Many recall no doubt that

Nigeria's path to independence in 1960 was marked by a series of constitutional conferences in which Great Britain and Nigeria peacefully planned in the spirit of "give and take". Why then, they wonder in agony, has this spirit failed to guide Nigerians during this national crisis?

A close analysis of the events of 1966-67 in Nigeria indicate, however, that peaceful alternatives to armed conflict were tried, but were, unfortunately, used as breathing space by the leadership in Enugu for preparing for secession. In fairness to Mr. Ojukwu, it must be said that he himself indicated genuine concern for a peaceful solution in the early days (May - late September, 1966) of the Nigerian crisis, but the hands of the planners for secession were strengthened beyond his control by the September and October massacres of Ibos in the North. From then on, he was not only won over, but assumed the leadership of the Ibos for secession. On the part of the Federal Military Government, General Gowon, sympathetic to the plight of the Ibos and conciliatory almost to a fault, did everything possible to keep the flame of peaceful settlement going; but for these efforts he earned from the Ibo leadership only the contemptuous title of "a weakling", and boycott of meetings summoned by him: The first experiment at peaceful settlement, and the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference which met from September 12 to 29, 1966 at Gowon's invitation, was boycotted by Ojukwu's delegation after September 24, on the issue of the "creation of states" and later on excuses of lack of safety in Lagos.

After the Aburi meeting in Ghana, at which Gowon and the other military governors, in deference to the sufferings and feelings of the Ibos, practically allowed Ojukwu to dictate the direction and rate of discussions, committees of legal and financial experts were set up to study the agreements with a view to drawing up a decree for implementing these decisions. The committees met, studied the decisions and drew up reports embodying both areas of agreement and referred certain matters back to the military leaders for further direction. It was obvious that meetings of the Supreme Council were

necessary to formulate the required directions for the experts and finally to agree on the decree that would implement the Aburi decisions. Yet Ojukwu took the position that he would not attend any meeting of Supreme Council until the Aburi decisions were implemented. A vicious circle had been introduced by Enugu: Gowon and the other military governors could not promulgate a decree implementing the Aburi decisions without Ojukwu's concurrence. Ojukwu was sure to reject such a decree. Yet every day the military governors waited in an effort to obtain Ojukwu's participation was, for Ojukwu, additional "evidence" that Gowon was delaying the implementation of the decisions. In frustration the Supreme Council met several times, with Ojukwu boycotting these meetings, and promulgated decree No.8 which fully implemented the Aburi decisions which had aimed at returning the country to the status quo ante the Coup of January 15, 1966. The decree even went further to create stronger regions by establishing Military Area Commands and requiring the concurrence of all military governors on certain vital decisions of the Supreme Council. In addition, Gowon changed his title from "Supreme Commander" to "Commander-in-Chief" of the Armed forces of Nigeria, all in order to meet Ojukwu's demands. Mr. Ojukwu rejected decree No.8 nevertheless.

Different levels of Nigerian leaders then took their turn to express their appreciation of the plight of the Ibos and to plead with Ojukwu and the Ibo leadership for forbearance. A delegation of Yoruba Obas and Chiefs from Western Nigeria visited all the military leaders at the latters' capitals. At Enugu the elders unzipped their purses and made contributions toward the rehabilitation of refugees in the East. The Ibo leadership was unmoved. Both the governor of Western Nigeria, Brigadier Adebayo, and his counterpart in the Mid-West, Brigadier Ejoor, paid visits to Ojukwu and announced after their meetings with the East's governor optimistic forecasts for an early settlement of the Nigerian problem. The governors had hardly left Ojukwu when the latter disowned the claims of "agreement". A conference of Nigerian University Lecturers, Professors and Administrators under the leadership of Professor Babs Fafunwa drew up proposals for a peaceful settlement of the Nigerian

problem which stated their conviction on the indivisibility of Nigeria, their belief that there was no peaceful way of breaking up Nigeria and made provisions for full financial assistance to the aggrieved Ibos from Federal Government funds, to be supplemented by a special tax on all non-Ibo Nigerians as an expression of the latter's "collective guilt" for the events of 1966. Ojukwu did not even acknowledge receipt of these proposals. Ojukwu then went on to confiscate Federal Funds, seize ten Federal Corporations in the East and seize two aeroplanes of the Nigerian Airways among other things. Gowon applied only limited economic sanctions on the East.

In a final desperate effort, a group of eminent Nigerians including the Chief Justice of the Federation, Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, the Director of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Dr. Lawrence Fabunmi, a leading Nigerian economist, Professor Samuel Aluko, a former (Nigerian) Under-Secretary and Special Assistant to the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Godfrey Amachree, a famous Nigerian anthropologist, Dr. Okoi Arikpo, and led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo dashed to Enugu and saw Ojukwu. Prior to this mission, Chief Awolowo had made statements which clearly showed his sympathies with Ojukwu, a fact which made most Nigerians predict a positive Ojukwu response to the efforts of the peace mission. This last peace mission of eminent Nigerians under the leadership of Awolowo produced recommendations which called for the simultaneous withdrawal by Gowon of economic sanctions against the East on the one hand, and the release by Ojukwu of seized Federal Government statutory bodies and other assets and properties of the federation. General Gowon accepted all the recommendations. Ojukwu turned them down. In the meantime there was clear evidence, that Ojukwu was both arming seriously and planning for secession. Still Gowon stopped at sanctions. Force was not used.

Then came Ojukwu's "independence" proclamation of May 30th, 1967, three days after Gowon had split the country into twelve states,

a measure which met the long-standing demand of the Ibos and other Southern Nigerians for the equalization of the units of the Federation, and that of the various "minorities" who had persistently fought against domination of the various Regional Governments under which they had been placed.

Ojukwu had overplayed his hand, and at that point the Federal Military Government was given no choice but fight to protect the territorial integrity of the country. For no national leader, regardless of sex, religion or ideology, and regardless of what motives impel such an act of secession, will sit down and watch his or her country balkanized. What General Gowon was forced to do on the 30th May, 1967, namely his painful decision to use force as a last resort to protect the national territorial integrity of Nigeria is what was expected of any responsible Head of Government.

The Americans did precisely this in their civil war of 1812; the Republic of the Congo (Kinshasa) with the assistance of the whole international community under the United Nations fought and defeated Mr. Tschombe's efforts to balkanize the country. If Mr. Ojukwu were Head of the Federal Nigerian Government, he would have made the same decision which Gowon made. Better still, if Ojukwu's dreams of an independent "Biafra" were to be realized, and if, as expected, the 5 million non-Ibos of the South Eastern and Rivers States decided to "secede" from "Biafra", Ojukwu would most strenuously fight to forestall such a move.

It could be assumed, therefore, that the Ibo leadership must have known the inevitability of this bloody war of Nigerians against Nigerians and the senseless destruction of Nigeria's already scarce material and human resources which was bound to follow their declaration of "secession". The mental agony which strikes one is the question: Why did the Ibo leadership, a highly educated and generally articulate group of men, whose people had already suffered so much in the events

of 1966, be blinded by oil politics to subject these same people to further misery? Why in fact, did they not take advantage of the overwhelming sympathy which they enjoyed both in Nigeria and abroad to strike out a good bargain for their people within the Nigerian context instead of this futile resort to an extreme action which only resulted in the enthronement in Nigeria of further bitterness and distrust among its other various ethnic groups on the one hand and the Ibos on the other? It is like a young man living on the 10th floor of an apartment building, whose parents have just been murdered by an assailant. The young man is angry; he is bitter; he is frightened. Yet he must try and keep his senses and descend the stairs or take the lift (elevator) downstairs as he wishes to call the police. HE MUST NOT JUMP OUT THROUGH THE WINDOW AND KILL HIMSELF. Nobody, including the Police would pardon him if he did. The Ibos suffered a most tragic fate in 1966 but what its leadership has done is to lead the Ibo people into a suicide jump through the window on the 10th floor. On the economic side the Ibos should not have assumed that their fight with the Hausa-Fulani in the North entitled them (the Ibos) to the oil wealth of the Rivers and the agricultural wealth of the Calabar-Ogoja people.

It may also be asked if there was not a peaceful alternative to Federal Military action against "Biafra". Here it must be stated that the alternative to Federal Government action was not peace but a worse, uncontrollable reign of violence. The 5 million "minorities who are now fighting in the campaign on the side of the Federal troops would most likely have revolted on their own against the authorities in Enugu. It is also certain that this would have been aided by other sections of the Federation of Nigeria; and what would have followed would have been a directionless, indiscriminate tribal warfare. With the current Federal Government action, there is direction with limited objectives: For the Federal Government under Major-General Gowon does not condemn all Ibos. The government's position is that the vast majority of Ibos are good citizens of whom Nigeria has been and will continue to be proud; but that these people have been misled by a greedy

and erratic leadership into a secession which is not in the best interest of the Ibos themselves for two reasons:

First, the 7 million Ibos in Eastern Nigeria occupy a relatively small overcrowded piece of territory. It is land-locked and relatively unproductive. Ibos have thus generally depended on other parts of the Nigerian Federation. It is no accident, therefore, that most Ibos who have acquired wealth, like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Ojukwu's own late father, have done so outside the Ibo East Central State. A very energetic and industrious people, the Ibos own the best houses in the North, share the control of the transportation business with the Yorubas, and attained fame and high standing in Nigeria's national institutions and a leading representation in her international delegations and foreign missions. The Yorubas were the first to achieve considerably high levels of education and they continue to lead the other Nigerian tribes in this field. But the Ibos are close behind the Yourbas. Last June alone, for instance, Ibos accounted for nearly 2,500 of new graduates of Nigerian Universities. Many more have received their various degrees in foreign institutions of higher learning. Most of these new graduates and those behind them will depend on the larger Nigerian market for jobs. Thus, the Federal Government feels that the Ibos, in fact, have a greater stake in the survival of Nigeria as a single nation than any other tribe in the country. Moreover, that Ibos have been the chief advocates of the idea of "one Nigeria". Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as founder of the Nigerian Nation; Major Nzeogwu who led the January 1966 coup against Balewa with the announced intention of building a stronger and more united Nigeria; the late Major-General Ironsi, who, weak and misadvised, was nevertheless fully committed to a strong united Nigeria as indicated by his ill-fated Unitary Government Decree of May, 1966; and countless other advocates of a strong and united Nigeria like the late Mazi Mbanu Ojike; all these are and were Ibos.

Secondly, the wounded, the orphans, the widows and the jobless Ibo refugees from the Northern parts of the country need, most of all, food, shelter, good care and rehabilitation, not war and suicide.

Thus the Federal Government sees the new Ibo leadership and Ojukwu whose source of strength lies in an emotional appeal to Ibo tribal unity and the exploitation of the genuine grievances which Ibo bear against the attrocities committed against them in 1966, as opportunistic and ambitious, working against the best interests of the Ibo advocates of the idea of One Nigeria and against the real needs of the suffering Ibo population. Accordingly, the Federal Government has a limited objective of crushing the Ojukwu-led secession effort and thus rescuing the vast majority of Ibos and of other Nigerians who are suffering and will continue to suffer as long as the secession effort is not crushed. The Federal Government has accompanied this assessment of the situation with a commitment, repeated several times by Major-General Gowon, that as soon as the rebellion is ended, Ibos will return to their jobs and regain their properties in other parts of the country; that for those who, out of an understandable fear of molestation in the North cannot return there, reasonable compensation for their properties will be made through sale of these properties under Federal Government auspices. With the smaller and weaker states which the creation of new states has effected in Nigeria, the chances for Federal Government supremacy and ability to honour these commitments on a national basis are very good indeed. It is conceivable too that in a new spirit of conciliation the leaders of the secession movement will receive pardon in due course.

Thus the return to peace and progress in Nigeria depends very much on the quick ending of Ojukwu's secession. Unfortunately, this ending has been prolonged by two factors: First, the Ojukwu regime has been and is being aided by illegal arms dealers through loans guaranteed by the false expectation that the oil of the Rivers people will yield wealth to the Enugu regime. Secondly, Nigeria's traditional friends, Great Britain and the United States have refused to come to her aid at a time she needed their understanding most.

There is a danger that Nigeria's inevitable purchase of arms from the Soviet Union (a purchase which is normal, Nigeria being a non-aligned country) may be used by the United Kingdom and the United States of America to further deny Nigeria the military equipment she needs. Such a behaviour on the part of the British and United States will constitute the biggest blunder in foreign policy which these powers shall have committed in independent Africa. It would also be their greatest dis-service to the Ibos themselves and all other Nigerians who must thus necessarily be condemned to a long, bitter struggle of self destruction. A non-military solution of the Nigerian crisis is also still possible. Here the Ibo leadership could be persuaded to give up secession and agree to settle the crisis within the Nigerian context. Other aspects of such a peaceful settlement would include the acceptance of Enugu of the twelve states as modified, if necessary, by the Boundaries Commission which was provided for in the decree on the creation of states. For, with the new States system, the question of Northern domination and of inter-tribal suspicions and domination, (which have been the root factors in Nigeria's problems) would stand to be removed. Under this system, the Ibos will be in full control of their own East Central State (or any number of states they may wish to redivide it, as a means of achieving greater representation at the Centre); but they will not rule any other unwilling tribes either. For, against the genuine demand of the Ibos for a fairly autonomous existence (at least to allow time to heal their fears of molestation) is an equally genuine demand by the Effiks, Ogojas, Ijaws, Ikwerres, etc., of the South Eastern and Rivers States not to live with the Ibos under one roof apart from the rest of the country. It will be logical then to allow the Ibos of the Central Eastern State their autonomy. But the Ibos in the Central Eastern State cannot survive economically without their exploitation of the resources of the sister states. However, Ibo autonomy cannot be granted at the expense of the Effiks, Ogojas, Ijaws, Ikwerres, etc. Here the Federal Government can come

in, and regarding the plight of any community of Nigerians the responsibility of the whole country, the Federal Government can undertake a crash programme to assist the Central Eastern State for a temporary period during which the economy of the Central Eastern State can be put on sound bases and to allow wounds of the present conflict to heal so that Ibos can return to other parts of the country to pursue their legitimate business. The oil and agricultural wealth of the Rivers and South Eastern States, as indeed the wealth of all other States in the Federation, will accrue to the Federal Government which will in turn redistribute the national wealth to all the other states on the basis of derivation and need. Finally, the Federal Government will take full responsibility for the tasks of reconstruction of war-torn parts of the country, of resettling, assisting, and compensating displaced Ibo families, and of guaranteeing full protection to all Nigerians. The cooperation of the Ibo leadership with the Federal Military Government will be essential to the success of this peaceful route to a settlement of the Nigerian crisis. But if the Ibo leadership does not accept this non-military route to peace which their own self-interest and commonsense dictate, the war will go on. With its superior armed forces, the Federal Government will most certainly crush the rebellion, and it is the Ibos more than any other community in the country who would suffer most from that military solution of the national crisis. For the sake of Nigeria, of Africa, and indeed of humanity, I hope the Ibo leadership will not lead their people to such a catastrophe.

FOOTNOTES

1. The creation of the Mid-West Region was the fulfilment of strong and persistent demands of these non-Yoruba tribes in the former Western Region for their own State. But the demands were only part of a National cry for splitting the country into more States on similar lines. What made the Mid-West exercise punitive on the West was the fact that the Northern and Eastern (Ibo) leaders refused to split their own regions too, as demanded by similar "minorities" in those regions. As will be seen below, Major-General Gowon has now completed the job by splitting the whole country into 12 states on a fully National basis.

2. Accordingly, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) was created under the direction of a Rivers economist, Mr. A. Zuofa, and to which the Federal Government made annual subventions for the economic development of the Rivers Area. The former Eastern Regional Government under Ibo leadership continued to neglect the Rivers and Calabar-Ogoja Areas and refused to make the proper contributions to the work of the NDDB. In the current crisis the Enugu Regimes' attitude to these minority areas in the former Eastern Region was shown by its arrest, brutal treatment and detention of Mr. Zuofa, the Secretary of the NDDB.

3. There were three groups that planned the secession of "Biafra". First, there were the young army officers who, after two coups in the Nigerian Army, felt unsafe to live in the same barracks with Northern soldiers in a unified Nigerian Army. They saw only two choices open to them - lose their military career through resignation or a separate army in an independent "Biafra". They chose the latter. Secondly, there were

some ex-politicians and top civil servants who had been found guilty of corrupt practices by independent public commissions of inquiry set up by the Ironsi Regime and continued by Gowon. For these men, a separate, independent "Biafra" offered the best escape from Federal law enforcement agencies. Finally, there were the University professors and lecturers who saw in "Biafra" opportunities for new ambassadorial and other high positions. These university intellectuals and top civil servants based predominantly in the South and therefore the least affected by the disturbances in the North took control of the public information media in the East and used same to stir up support for secession.

The tragedy of the crisis is that it was the masses of Ibomen who had already suffered in the events of 1966, and again ignored by the Enugu regime (because in the conflict which "secession invited, "defence" not "rehabilitation" became the priority item) who were again pushed on to the war fronts to die for "Biafra".