

ACCOUNT ON CIVIL WAR

This is the account of the Civil War as witnessed by the legendary Col. Nwawo who was a commanding officer in the Biafran/Nigeria War. It is a heart breaking story that captures the events that led to the fall of Onitsha, Amensi, Akwa, and in general, the fall of Biafra. The details of the war, the Abagana encounter, the defence of Onitsha, the loss of Akwa and parts of Biafra is a heartbreaking story of the gallant defence of Biafra by the Biafrans who fought with all they had to ward off the Nigerian invasion.

For those of us who were here to witness the beginning of the crisis I testify that Biafra did not start the war; that the Biafrans fought in self defence. Indeed it was Nigerians that declared a 24 hour police operation, and claimed that they would crush Biafra in 24 hours. The gallantry of the Biafran soldiers kept the war on for three years. Like Col Ojukwu said “*we in Biafra did not start the war; we fight in self defence*”. It is my view that if Gowon and the Northerners had kept to the spirit of Aburi accord, there would have been no war. At Aburi, Nigerians had agreed to settle for a confederation. Unfortunately, when they returned to Nigeria, Gown reneged.

It is also on record that Nigeria shot the first bullet against Biafra and throughout the war Biafra fought in self defence. The War is over, but the nagging questions which led to the war are still hurting Nigeria. In agreeing to write this forward it is my responsibility as scholar to caution Nigeria that we cannot fight a second Civil War and remain One Nation. The clamour of Nigerians for restructuring is a testimony that Nigeria made a costly mistake by invading Biafra. If we want to this nation to remain one united nation, we should sit at a round table conference, as Nnamdi Azikwe warned us in

1964 that “*if we have decided to destroy Nigerian unity, we should call a roundtable conference to decide how to share our asset*”.

I think this call by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe in 1964 inspite of the experience of the war, remains valid. From 1951 crisis to the Civil War it has dawned on Nigerians that we cannot remain one country the way some of the Northerners want it to be. It is my advice that a round table conference of selected or elected people should be called immediately to discuss how we can relate and remain One Nation. We have to renegotiate our cooperate existence. The Civil War ought to have thought Nigerians that a marriage that has gone to a divorce court can never be the same marriage again.

Those who destroyed the independence constitution which gave us regional autonomy should now realize that they were wrong. The British Government knew that we could not be under a centralized government and consequently gave us independence with regional autonomy.

Let me speak like a Cassandra Prophet, that unless we return to regional autonomy where each area is responsible for its own grow and development this country will continue to enjoy civil strife and crisis. Biafra was defeated by the military. But Nigeria has failed to tame or suppress the ferocious and the undying spirit of Biafran nationalism. 47 years after the war, Nigerians have failed to keep Nigeria as one United Nation. The verdict of history is a question to Nigeria: what was the purpose and the benefit of the Civil War? Col Nwawo’s book title..... is a “must read” by both Nigerians and Biafrans.

Prof. B.I.C Ijomah
Centre for Policy Studies and Research,
Asaba, Delta State.

4 POINT MEMO BY AWOLOWO

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Following is the full text of Chief Awolowo's Address.

The aim of a leader should be the welfare of the people whom he leads. I have used "welfare" to denote the physical mental and spiritual well-being of the people.

With this aim fixed unflinchingly and unchangeably before my eyes I consider it my duty to Yoruba people in particular and to Nigerians in general, to place four imperatives before you this morning.

Two of them are categorical and two are conditional only a peaceful solution must be found to arrest the present worsening stalemate and restore normalcy. The Eastern Region must be encouraged to remain part of the Federation.

Committee

If Eastern Region is allowed by acts of omission or commission to secede from or opt out of Nigeria then the Western Region and Lagos must also stay out of the Federation.

The people of Western Nigeria and Lagos should participate in the ad hoc committee or any similar body only on the basis of absolute equality with the other regions of the Federation.

I would like to comment briefly on these four imperatives. There has of late, been a good deal of sabre rattling in some parts of the country. Those who advocate the use of force for the settlement of our present problems should stop a little and recollect.

I can see no vital and abiding principle involved in any war between the North and the East.

If the East attacked the North, it would be for purpose of revenge, pure and simple. Any claim to the contrary would be untenable. If it is claimed that such a war is being waged for the purpose of recovering the real and personal properties left behind in the North by Easterners, two inseparable points are obvious.

Attack

Firstly the personal effects left behind by Easterners have been wholly looted or destroyed, and can no longer be physically recovered.

Secondly, since the real properties are immovable in case recovery of them can only be by means of forcible military occupation of those parts of the North in which these properties are situated.

On the other hand, if the North attacked the East, it could only be for the purpose of further strengthening and entrenching its position of dominance in the country.

It is claimed that the attack on the East is going to be launched by the Federal Government and not by the North as such and that it is designed to ensure the unity and integrity of the Federation, two other inseparable points also become obvious.

First, if a war against the East becomes a necessity it must be agreed to unanimously by the remaining units of the Federation. In this connection, the West, Mid-West and Lagos have declared their implacable opposition to the use of force in solving the present problem.

In the face of such declarations by three out of remaining four territories of Nigeria, a war against the East could only be a war favoured by the North alone.

Second, if the true purpose of such a war is to preserve the unity and integrity of the Federation then these ends can be achieved by the very simple devices of implanting the recommendation of the committee which met on

August 9, 1966, as reaffirmed by a decision of the military leaders at Aburi on January 5, 1967 as well as by accepting such of the demands of the East, West, Mid-West and Lagos as are manifestly reasonable, and essential for assuring harmonious relationships and peaceful co-existence between them and their brothers and sisters in the North.

Lincoln

Some knowledgeable persons have likened an attack on the East to Lincoln's war against the southern states in America.

Two vital factors distinguish Lincoln's campaign from the one now being contemplated in Nigeria.

The first is that the American civil war was aimed at the abolition of slavery – that is the liberation of millions of Negroes who were then still being used as chattels and 'worse than domestic animals.

The second factor is that Lincoln and others in the northern states were English-speaking people waging a war of good conscience and humanity against their fellow nationals who were also English speaking.

A war against the East in which Northern soldiers are predominant will only unite the Easterners or the Ibos against their attackers, strengthen them in their belief that they are not wanted by the majority of their fellow-Nigerians, and finally push them out of the Federation.

We have been told that an act of secession on the part of the East would be a signal, in the first instance, for the creation of the COR state by decree, which would be balanced, if need be by the use of force.

With great respect, I have some dissenting observations to make on this declaration. There are 11 national or linguistic groups in the COR areas with a total population of 53 million. These national groups are as distinct from one another as the Ibos are distinct from them or from the Yorubas or Hausas. Of the 11, the Etik/Ibibio/Annang national group are 3.2 million strong as against the Ijaws who are only about 700,000 strong.

Ostensibly, the remaining nine national group number 1.4 millions. But when you have subtracted the Ibo inhabitants from ranges from the Ngenis who number only 8,000 to the Ogonis who are 220,000 strong.

A decree creating a COR state without a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the people in the area, would only amount to subordinating the minority national groups in the state to the dominance of the Efik/Ibibio/Annang national group.

States

It would be perfectly in order to create a Calabar state or a Rivers state by decree and without a plebiscite. Each is a homogeneous national unit. But before you lump distinct and diverse national units together in one state, the consent of each of them is indispensable.

Otherwise, the seed of social disequilibrium in the new state would have been sown. On the other hand, if the COR State is created by decree after the Eastern Region shall have made its severance from Nigeria effective we should then be waging an unjust war against a foreign state.

It would be an unjust war, because the purpose of it would be to remove 10 minorities in the East from the dominance of the Ibos only to subordinate them to the dominance of the Efik/Ibibio/Annang national group.

Normalcy

I think I have said enough to demonstrate that any war against the East, or vice versa, on any count whatsoever, would be an unholy crusade, for which it would be most unjustifiable to shed a drop of Nigerian blood. Therefore, only a peaceful solution must be found, and quickly too to arrest the present rapidly deteriorating stalemate, and restore normalcy. With regard to the second categorical imperative, it is my considered view that whilst some of the demands of the East are excessive within the context of a Nigerian union most of such demands are not only well-founded, but are designed for smooth and steady association amongst the various national units of Nigeria.

For instance the East has demanded:

- The creation of separate regional monetary authorities
- Sublimation of the appellate jurisdiction of the Federal Supreme Court.
- The dependence of the Federal Government on financial contribution from the regions. These and other such like demands I do not support. Demands such as these if accepted, will lead surely to the complete disintegration of the Federation which is not in the interest of our people. But I wholeheartedly support the following demands among others, which we consider reasonable and most of which are already embodied in our memoranda to the Ad hoc Committee.
- That mines and minerals should be residual subjects.

Derivation

- ❖ That revenue should be allocated strictly on the basis of derivation that is to say after the Federal Government has deducted its own share for its own services the rest should be allocated to the regions to which they are attributable.
- ❖ That the existing public debt of the Federal should become the responsibility of the regions on the basis of the location of the projects in respect of each debt whether internal or external.
- ❖ That each region should have and control its own militia and police force. That with immediate effect all military personnel should be posted to their regions of origin.

I can advance cogent reasons in support of these demands. But as the time for such as exercise is not available today. I will confine myself to bringing to your notice certain facts relating to our public debt, as a sample of the cogency and reasonableness of the above demands. Under the current six year plan which ends next year on March 31, the summary of the location, value and external debt element of project is as follow – Lagos – total value of project £36.79 million external debt element £12.80 million. In addition, expenditure on aircraft and

warship £10.93 million, with external debt element and that £2.8 million – West – total value of projects £5.88 million, external debt element £3.75 million – East – total value of project £18.75 million (including the Niger bridge) external debt element £7.86 million. North – total value of project £12.21 million (including Kainji dam, external debt element £60.1 million. Mid-West - £6.95 million (excluding Niger bridge) external de element – nil.

If we are to live in harmony one with another as Nigerians it is imperative that these demands and others which are not related should be met without further delay by those who have hitherto resisted them.

To those who may argue that the acceptance of these demands will amount to transforming Nigeria into a federation with a weak central government, my comment is that any link however tenuous, which keeps the East in the Nigerian union is better in my view than no link at all.

Before the Western delegates went to Lagos to attend the meetings of the ad hoc committee, they were given a clear mandate that if any region should opt out of the Federation should be considered to be at an end, and that the Western Region and Lagos should also opt out of it.

It would then be up to Western Nigeria and Lagos as an independent sovereign state to enter into association with any of the Nigerian units of its own choosing and on terms mutually acceptable to them.

I see no reason for departing from this mandate. If any region in Nigeria considered itself strong enough to compel us to enter into association with it on its own terms; I would only wish such a region luck. But such luck, I must warn will in the long run be no better than that which has attended the doings of all colonial powers down the ages.

This much I must say in addition, on this point. We have neither military might nor the overwhelming advantage of numbers here in Western Nigeria and Lagos. But we have justice of a noble and imperishable cause on our side, namely; the right of a people to unfettered self-determination.

If this is so, then God is on our side, and if God is with us then we have nothing whatsoever in this world to fear. The fourth imperative and the second conditional one has been fully dealt with in my recent letter to the Military Governor of Western Nigeria Col. Robert Adebayo and in the representation which your deputation made last year to the head of the Federal Military Government, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon. As a matter of fact, as far back as November last year a smaller meeting of leaders of thought in this Region decided that unless certain things were done, we would no longer participate in the meeting of the ad hoc committee. But since then, not even one of our legitimate requests has been granted. I will therefore take no more of your time in making further comments on a point with which you are well familiar. As soon as our humble and earnest requests are met, I shall be ready to take my place on the ad hoc committee. But certainly - not before. In closing I have this piece of advice to give. In order to resolve this crisis amiably and in the best interest of all Nigerians certain attributes are required on the part of Nigerian leaders – Military as well as non-Military leaders alike – namely; vision, realism and unselfishness.

Courage

But above all, what will keep Nigerian leaders in the North and East unwaveringly in the path of wisdom realism and moderation is courage and steadfastness on the part of Yoruba people in the course of what they sincerely believe to be right equitable and just. In the past five year we in the West and Lagos have shown that we possess these qualities in a large measure. If we demonstrate them again as we did in the past calmly and heroically, we will save Nigeria from further bloodshed and imminent wreck and at the same time, preserve our freedom and self-respect into the bargain.

May God rule and guide our deliberation here, and endow all the Nigerian leaders with the vision, realism, and unselfishness in the course of truth, which the present circumstances demand.

In this statement Chief Awolowo makes it quite clear that:

- ★ He was against the use of force to settle Nigeria's problems;
- ★ He supported most of the demands being made by the Eastern Region;
- ★ He felt that any association between the 'national units' was better than none, and that the unity and integrity of Nigeria could be most simply achieved by implementing the Aburi agreements;
- ★ He also rejected a war against the Eastern Region on pragmatic grounds (i.e; Force would increase resistance not remove it);
- ★ And he also made it clear that if the East was forced to secede the West would follow suit.

In the light of this statement it is interesting to record just what has happened since;

- ★ The Aburi agreements were not implemented;
- ★ Chief Awolowo was appointed to a key position in Gowon's government;
- ★ The East was divided by Federal decree into three states;
- ★ The East seceded on May 30, 1967;
- ★ The East (now Biafra) was invaded July 6, 1967, by a predominantly North Army;
- ★ The war has continued for over two years and the world has been amazed by the Biafran's resistance and horrified by the loss of life.

Chief Awolowo's latest statement:

- ★ "All is fair in war and starvation is one of the weapons of war. I don't see why we should feed our enemies fat in order for them to fight us harder."

When Chief Awolowo made this statement he knew that the result of the Nigerian Government's blockade of Biafra had led to the death of an estimated million and a half Biafra children. Comparing this last statement with the paragraph below the word **COURAGE** in his May 2, 1967 speech, one can't help feeling one is witnessing the ultimate hypocrisy. The two statements taken together are a clear indictment of Chief Awolowo for a major responsibility for much of the blood now being shed in the war between Nigeria and Biafra.

1234 Broadway New York, New York 10001
Telephone: (212) 736 – 2040