

## Reappraising Biafra, a hindsight on Tafawa Balewa in global politics

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### Abstract:

*In the postcolonial historiography of African Civil Wars, the Biafra secession was a major conflict, considering the dimensions of not just the carnage but the international involvements. Foreign powers and interests, by their actions and inactions, supported the war with intent to balkanize Nigeria. In this reexamination, it is argued that Nigeria's naïve elitism was solely to blame for the unprecedented foreign meddling which is consequent upon Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa's maiden speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Laden with strong intents to become a veritable global contender, the foreign policy speech expressly launched Nigeria's intentions to operate in the commanding heights of global politics at barely a week into nationhood. However, Balewa's proposals, which though were mere wishful thinking, were also premature and had betrayed Nigeria's naivety about global politics and its delicate power structure, order and balance. The launch, particularly in the height of the Cold War was ill-timed as power calculations dictate the pace of global politics, and every action/inaction often had consequences. Balewa's ambitions backfired, pitching his fragile state against the vested capitalist interests of the imperial powers, who Vladimir Lenin says, had shared out the world among themselves. These shares were also jealously guarded in the brutal mafia style. Consequently, Nigeria became a pawn in the chess game of power politics, a fierce one that she least imagined or prepared. This paper, doubling as a handbook on foreign policy, critically dissected the speech previously acclaimed by scholars and bureaucrats as being greatly historic, activist and in national interest, and rather argues that it*

*was unwholesome, nonstrategic, irritable and inimical to the interest and stability of a new state in world politics. It was also diametrical to the tenets and practice of diplomacy and internationalism. The paper contends that the speech was not only arrantly nonsensical but arrogantly preposterous for a postcolonial state. It asserts that Nigeria's approach to external affairs was improper and founded on laughable assumptions. The mediocre speech precipitated the civil war as the infuriated powers surreptitiously plotted to smash Nigeria into smithereens and less-ambitious states.*

**keywords:** Foreign Policy, Biafra War, National Power, International Politics, Tafawa Balewa

### **Introduction**

That Nigeria at barely six years into political independence plunged into a brutal secessionist war was not puzzling, civil conflicts trended among the then Africa's new States. Aside the proxy civil wars occasioned by the Cold War rival powers to win States into their opposing blocs, helping pliable groups into government in a number of States, the negative colonial legacies had also heated polity in the new States as discontented disparate groups felt the need to secede into pre-colonial entities. The Nigerian Biafra War (1966 - 1970) was classic. The Igbo, a major group, led a few other minorities in South-Eastern Nigeria to break away on grievances bothering on ethnic marginalisation and victimizations. This paper do not intend to argue on the war's justification as that had been copiously and scholarly done. However, what awed Nigeria's leaders was the dramatic extent at which the war became externalized. Foreign interests and powers vigorously laboured to destroy Nigeria's corporate existence in Biafra's favour. The foreign support for the war certainly ridiculed extant international laws that forbade it. While France and Israel blatantly mobilized Biafra, the US and Britain felt unconcerned as both tactically refused to offer the requested military assistance to Nigerian authorities.<sup>1</sup> The Western conspiracy dismayed Nigerian leaders who had hoped to be deeply appreciated for often being pro-West against the

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<sup>1</sup> The action, particularly by the British, was believed in Nigeria to be tactically aimed at weakening its capability to resist the secessionist forces.

decision by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to adopt nonalignment principles. The most shattering was the support for Biafra by some African States.

Both France and Israel massively assisted Biafra almost at no cost, and canvassed publicly for further international assistance to help in the bid to mutilate Nigeria in favour of Biafra. Britain, Nigeria's former colonial owner was unperturbed as France, her erstwhile colonial rival directed the encircling francophone neighbours, over whom France had neocolonial influence to tighten the noose against Nigeria in Biafra's interest. Israel's seditious support was so blatant that when Biafra forces eventually failed, the state<sup>2</sup> became so anguished as Abba Eban,<sup>3</sup> the Israeli envoy to Nigeria publicly lamented Israel's fruitless exertion at promoting the secession, grieving 'if another dozen or twenty countries had done so the result of the war would have been different'. But why this provocative convocation of international fury to jointly destroy another sovereign country. Perhaps until then, and may be even now, no civil war in history had been this brazenly externalised, that a foreign envoy would damn the consequence to openly unveil his seditious preference for the breakaway group while still officiating with the

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<sup>2</sup> Pat Hutton, in *'The making of Idi Amin'* New African, Issue 391, Academic Search Premier (2001), uncovered at the time, Israeli collaboration with CIA to subvert radical regimes globally towards asserting US predominance as far as possible, particular during the Cold War. Hutton reported that Israel had clearly through their military presence, and in a manner consistent with their role as America's active proxy in Africa, including Nigeria and elsewhere, the United States had been seeking to gain influence.

<sup>3</sup> Abba Eban was a veritable Israeli agent serving the US subversive interests and covert operations across Africa. Shortly after he failed with Nigeria, Eban was spirited to tame Ugandan President Idi Amin to serve American and western interests. He also attempted to arm Amin's army to suppress internal opposition but for the latter's intention to equally destabilize his region. Although Abba Eban and Israeli intelligence failed again in their Uganda mission, it is in the history of covert operations that they collaborated with Britain and the CIA, under the cover of USAID, to enthrone and strengthen President Idi Amin in power. (See *Amin: The Wild Man of Africa*. Time, 0040781X, 3/7/1977, Vol. 109, Issue 10. Database: Academic Search Premier).

mainstream government.<sup>4</sup> The War became so international that it even had impact on the then Middle Eastern conflict, such that while Israel supported Biafra, the opposing Arab League empathized with Nigeria.

Many questions and issues arose from the Biafra experience, particularly because the period, in history, marked the era when stronger States and international institutions proactively initiated wide-ranging assistance to help in building Africa's postcolonial States. It is bizarre that Britain would be so cold to a state she nurtured. Why would African countries collaborate with non-Africa entities to grant strategic and logistical assistance to the secessionists towards destroying one of their foremost and promising States? Why would Abba Eban be so brazenly seditious? Thus, this paper sought to elucidate the reasons why there were such deep international cruelties to quash the young nation. This paper seeks to argue that the source of the international conspiracy to carve Nigeria up came from the rude speech<sup>5</sup> made by Tafawa Balewa on 7<sup>th</sup> October 1960, at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). This paper is rather at variance with the hitherto trend hailing the speech as being famous and powerful. It felt strongly that the speech fell grossly short of the proper setting of foreign policy as it is devoid of the rudimentary knowledge about the nature of the international system; the ever presence of conflicting and competing (national) interests; and as well, the power dynamics and the external environment that national leaders ought to be constantly wary of while projecting own national interests.

In stark ignorance of diplomatic history, Balewa used his speech to not only register and arouse Nigeria's interests in conflictual issues in which the world powers had vested interests, he also heralded the wrong attributes and false potentials about Nigeria. This paper contends that Balewa's speech steered the hornet's nest with an impending doom. Thus, in contrast to the previous

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<sup>4</sup> After all when in 2013 the US supported the Libyan civil insurrection against Moammar Gaddafi, its embassy actually relocated to Benghazi, the leading city of the rebellion.

<sup>5</sup> Tafawa Balewa, Maiden General Assembly Statement at the United Nations | Permanent Mi... Accessed July 10, 2019.

<http://nigeriaunmission.org/maiden-speech-at-the-un/> (October 7, 1960).

stance of bureaucrats and analysts hailing the speech,<sup>6</sup> it rather bred deep international acrimony and angst against Nigeria. The speech came from the draft boards of naiveties and insubordinations, and was utterly superfluous and unrepresentative of national realities. It absolutely confronted the international politics and power dynamics of the time. The paper claims that Nigeria began external relations on the wrong policy footing, and consequently drew the ire of world powers and other African States. In a counterstrategy at barely a week into statehood, Balewa's speech constituted an effrontery to global sensitivities, marking the origin ill-fillings and conspiracy, and sealed the fate of the country thenceforth. The Biafra was effectively seized to effect the plot. These are issues the paper sets to convincingly argue by deconstructing Balewa's UNGA speech to highlight a horde of charades, including Nigeria's comical elitism, the policy loose talks, the false presumptions of prestige and the dubious national aggrandizements in Nigeria's early days.

### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical approach adopted for this work is realism. This theory is of choice not because it is popular and apt, but more importantly because the matters and events for reappraisal were situated in a period when classical realism jealously guarded interstate relations. The overarching elements informing realism are anarchy and power. States are sovereignty autonomous of one another, and nothing ordered their interrelations. Realists contend that the international system is anarchical without a central authority, hence, "power is the currency of international politics".<sup>7</sup> In such anarchic system, State power (militarily, economically, diplomatically) is key to States' defence and survival; and the distribution of coercive material capacity the ultimate determinant of international politics,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Nanven Garba, *Diplomatic Soldiering: the Conduct of Nigerian Foreign Policy, 1975 -1979*. (Kaduna: Spectrum Books Ltd., 1987).

<sup>7</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism", *International Relations Theories; Discipline and Diversity*, 83, (2007) 77-94.

<sup>8</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, "International Relations, Principal Theories," in: *Max Planck Encyclopaedia of Public International Law*, Wolfrum, R. (Ed.), doc. 2-7, (Oxford University Press 2011).

Mearsheimer (1994)<sup>9</sup> further identified the following assumptions on which realism rested. That as States are faced with the threats of foreign invasion and occupation, survival is the principal goal of every State, hence, States constantly ensure that they have sufficient power to defend themselves and advance their material interests necessary for survival. This is particularly against the background that if a rival state is adequately powerful to threaten a state, such State becomes insecure. Also, and given the first goal of survival, States as rational actors will act at best to maximize their likelihood of continuing to exist, and hence will seek to maximize their power relative to others (Mearsheimer 2001).<sup>10</sup> Realists then assume that all States possess some military capacity, and no State knows what its neighbours intend precisely, thus the world is dangerously uncertain. In such a world, it is the States with most economic clout and military might that are decisive.<sup>11</sup> Such States in the mind of realism are the Great Powers — thereby making Great Power politics extremely grave but important.

Consequently, many realists advocated hegemony as the best pursuit for a country, but only if it can. Others discouraged hegemonic domination as unwise for State survival as it may pitch a State against its peers. Realists like Kenneth Waltz (1979) actually argued that “the pursuit of hegemony is especially foolhardy”,<sup>12</sup> hence their advocacy for balance of power systems where States relatively share equal distribution of power amongst them. This way, the chances are brighter to ensure that none will risk attacking another, and thereby stabilising the system. But realists are pessimistic about the veracity of both international law and institutions, arguing that in an anarchic system with no hierarchical authority, law can only be enforced through State power, and a State will only opt to expend its

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<sup>9</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions” 19(3) *International Security*, (1994): 5–49.

<sup>10</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: Norton, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions” 5–49.

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, cited in John J. Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism”, *International Relations Theories; Discipline and Diversity*, 83, (2007) 77-94..

precious power on enforcement where it had a direct material interest in the outcome.<sup>13</sup>

### **International politics at Nigeria's independence**

Nigeria is indeed a huge state covering some 356,668 square miles with a territory roughly three times the United Kingdom's.<sup>14</sup> Its huge population and natural endowments had mesmerized Nigerians with a prestigious national image and an informal recognition as the undisputed 'giant of Africa'. Hence, Stremlau (1971) claimed that Nigerian leaders' optimism at viewing their country's international prestige to be a function of the extent to which Nigeria was considered a leader of Africa and the black race.<sup>15</sup> The endowments had intoxicated its elite into adopting the perception of a 'predestined' state to champion, not just Africa, but the entire black race. Sinclair (1983) denoted a paranoia in a 1960 Parliamentary Debate when Nigerian MPs proudly touted that "...Nigeria ...is the largest single unit in Africa... (and so) must lead Africa ...and we are not going to abdicate the (leadership) position in which God Almighty has placed us."<sup>16</sup> Confidently they asserted "if we appear well meaning to the countries of Africa, there is no reason why they should not give us our recognised position by virtue of our size and population."<sup>17</sup> Thus, from independence, Nigeria's elite nursed the idea of racial leadership, not just in Africa but globally.

But despite the self-imaging, and the domestic blabs about national aggrandizements, there were no explicitly proactive efforts to overtly and preponderantly demonstrate its hegemony, though it is doubtful if Nigeria had the means. Prior also to Biafra, Nigerian had deliberately avoided either overt or covert interference in the domestic affairs of fellow African States. This

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<sup>13</sup> Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," 5-49.

<sup>14</sup> Toyin Falola and Michael M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 368.

<sup>15</sup> John S. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970*. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977). p. 11.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Sinclair. 1983. *An Analysis of Nigerian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of Political Paranoia*. Occasional Paper. The South African Institute of International Affairs. April 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.



resulted from its foregoing naivety that other African States will volitionally revere Nigeria, and that the altruistic nation had no cause whatsoever to worry about any externally-induced subversion. Nigeria's non-interference posture was in adherence to the OAU Charter (Article 3, section 2) and other international law and norms. However, the idealist stance starkly contrasted the realist's disillusionment and ethos that urged nations to be undogmatic with international ideals. Nations are innately Machiavellian, constantly advancing own interests in the face of opposition from others. The major goal of nations is to advance own positions with little regard for morality or friendship. Hence, nations that desire greatness must be rational (making intentional choices for maximal utility of actions/gains, without recourse to moral or altruistic considerations) in foreign pursuits in the face of other nation's conflicting interests. Idealists are considered as naïve ideologues, very unmindful of the world's jungle nature where conflicts are inevitable, and where no overarching power exists to enforce any international order. Nigeria adopted unreliable paradigms to foreign relations, setting out on the poverty of appropriate theories and requisite knowledge while relying on sheer optimism and altruism.

### **The deep cycle of naiveties at Nigeria's independence**

Let us examine some of the naiveties and false assumptions that inspired Nigeria's external affairs and policies at independence when Nigerian elite repeatedly boasted and planned on spurious values, mere assumptions and potentials. First are the perceptions of her continental and racial destinies as the "giant of Africa" or "leader of the black race." Such incredulous accolades swelled their hearts and consequently the elite acted as if these were real values. Thomas Hobbes warns, "The reputation of power is power," that is, only the expressive (not the perceived) powers are effective. The immediate below are three spurious assumptions from Nigerian leaders as noted by Sinclair (1983).<sup>18</sup>

- "People say that leadership is the birthright of this (Nigeria) country ..."
- "Nigeria ... is the largest single unit in Africa ... (and so) must lead Africa..."

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<sup>18</sup> Stremlau, An Analysis of Nigerian Foreign Policy, 12.



- “If we appear well meaning to the countries of Africa, there is no reason why they should not give us our recognised position by virtue of our size and population.”

The above are sheer illusions and are totally strange to diplomatic theories and practice. They are false and laughable qualities upon which to assume international hegemony. The idea of national birthright is not only illegitimate but also theoretically strange to international relations. Given the anarchic nature of the international system, it is absurd for States to claim birthrights for whatsoever purpose, and only a jester would conclude that huge territorial and population sizes qualified a nation to lead others. Also, mammoth national sizes never determined the extents of state's sovereignty just also as the latter is immeasurable. National sizes do not confer big or small sovereignty, and neither do they translate automatically into hegemony. Thirdly, in the prevailing interstate system, and regardless of the ideology, only dreamy nations expect to be exulted for being well-meaning, and the idea itself is counterproductive and self-encumbering.

Also, there is neither the vacancy nor any allotment for States' leadership. What obtains are mere prospects for state-system hegemony which tactful and powerful nations seize, and yet from history and experience, the prospects for any state's dominance within the dynamics of interstate system are ever temporal and transient. Interstate hegemony is a function of plethoric factors, often determined by the overwhelming capabilities of the aspiring state against the tolerance or resistance of affected States. Similarly, what defines a state's capability and roles are national power and geopolitical circumstances, just as international law and standards seek to protect the rights of nations. Yet, state hegemony are subject to constant contestations by other state actors and geopolitical circumstances. Henry Kissinger asserts, that "circumstance is neutral; by itself it imprisons more frequently than it helps. A Statesman who cannot shape events will soon be engulfed ... (and) thrown on the defensive, wrestling with tactics instead of

advancing his purpose."<sup>19</sup> Hence, interstate hegemony is a critical function of systemic tolerance, and the tact and statecrafts of the aspiring state. Hence, hegemonic ascensions are tactically laboured for, it is neither conferred nor a right.

Similarly, huge territorial and population sizes are mere potentials that must be harnessed for national power, failing which they become liabilities. At that, they remained mere prospects that are unusable for power calculations. In fact, with the extreme science and technologies of this age, mammoth sizes and populations are no longer important national assets, and as terrorism increasingly becomes a political strategy, huge sizes often constitute liabilities for economy and security. The levels of human and educational advancements, science and technology, economic and military prowess, industrialisation, productivity and ingenuity, among other opportunities for which these huge sizes and natural endowments had been harnessed, are the real indices that translate into national greatness.

The other foundational naivety exercised by Nigerian leaders in modern diplomacy is their penchant to cling to mysticism in international relations. The declaration below is one:

“... Nigeria ... is the largest single unit in Africa ... (and so) must lead Africa ... and we are not going to abdicate the (leadership) position in which God Almighty has placed us”.

It is intellectually absurd to bring the God idea or ‘divine right’ theory into interstate relations, though the extinct theory may be plausible at internally securing the pre-Enlightenment States and resolving the ‘problem of obedience’. However, if there was the *divine right of kings*, there has never been the *divine right of nations* in States’ historiography as claimed by Nigeria’s early elite, and it is laughable to peddle one. The modern interstate system, by nature, had neither the provision nor the place for divinity. Similarly, it recognises no theological ordering of States. Imperial nations have only seized prospects by sheer volition and means.

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<sup>19</sup> Henry Kissinger is cited in *United States. National War College. Course 1, Syllabus - Block C: Means*. (Online) <http://www.resdal.org> (2001-2011).

Similarly in history, ambitious nations have always attempted to dominate, just also as others have rebuffed them. History recalls that empires and nations have risen and declined in the past, and some have even gone into extinction. Indeed, and for the fluxed nature of the international system, no ideology has ever recognised or assigned any role for divinity, hence, there is no theological theory of interstate relations, and is neither a theocracy. Nations are in constant contest to project their interests and national power and tact are the sole guarantor of the extent of their successes. Foreign policies founded on metaphysical assumptions are mere figments anchored on false hopes, and are disaster-bound. Despite the United States' high display of religiosity, the nation had neither asserted any divine right nor left critical issues to divine gamble. The US had persistently pursued the realist perspective of international politics, harnessing requisite powers to advance own interests and purposes in the face of opposition.

Kissinger's wisdom above clearly depicted our interstate system as devoid of any preordained theological rights. It is a pristine system that is malleable and pliant, waiting to be shaped by whoever had the means. Thus, leaders that desire national greatness must requisitely be very knowledgeable, calculative, pragmatic and proactive with statecrafts, in the design and conduct of their foreign policy and relations. While a miscalculation could backlash, skillfulness, power and stratagem are required in foreign policy pursuits and there is no appeal to divine right. Consequently, Nigeria goofed by theologizing a God-ordained international hegemony, for which she expected respect. Nigeria's early elite never had the intellectual grasp about internationalism but begun national life and external relations on false foundations and flawed euphoria.

### **Balewa's UNGA speech: Initiating a national misfortune**

Nigeria got admitted into the United Nations as its 99<sup>th</sup> member on 7<sup>th</sup> October, 1960, at barely a week into national independence and began immediately to expose its buffoonery as seen below in Tafawa Balewa's Messianic address on that day:

So far I have concentrated on the problems of Africa. Please do not think that we are not interested in the problems of the rest of the world, we are intensively interested in them and hope to be allowed to assist in finding solutions to them, through this organizations, but being human we are naturally concerned first with what affects our immediate neighborhood.<sup>20</sup>

Nigeria suddenly emerged as a 'problem solver' when Balewa presented himself as man with the silver bullet, not only to end Africa's myriad of problems, but even the worlds' (which he would later come to help solve once he's through with Africa's), and he so begged to be allowed. The entire address was laughable. It is weird that a colonial nation would audaciously seek to help its fabricators. It is absurd that a nation which just, a week earlier, gained political freedoms, despite its internal incoherence and contradictions, was suddenly ready and begging to be saddled with the weighty, costly and debilitating tasks of stabilizing the world, as if the political problems were neither deliberate nor intractable. At an instance, without an iota of clout, and oblivious of the Great Powers' vested interests that originated and festered the crises, Balewa practically reeled off instructions on how the UN should handle the Congolese political debacle.

Great Powers have great interests, not just because the interests dotted the globe, but that they are strategic, and are fearfully and jealously guarded as entire national powers could be deployed in the defence of the interests. Similarly, these power-drunk nations profit by demonstrably flexing muscles and fostering troubles round the globe. The world is an estate which, in Marxist parlance, had been shared out in vast national tranches among the imperial powers.<sup>21</sup> The international powers operate as mafias in ruthless and complex methods, coordinating their activities towards protecting their mutual matters of interests and exerting influence globally. It was also an uphill task for new States to break into their ranks, how much less a fledgling state.

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<sup>20</sup> Balewa, Maiden General Assembly Statement.

<sup>21</sup> Vladimir Illyich Lenin (1870-1924), *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, 1916. <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1916lenin-imperialism.html>

Three crucial western interests exist in the Congo. First, the Belgian reluctance to give up its colonial hold, having failed (unlike France and Britain) to efficiently exploit its resources for home industrial advancement before the post-world war II order negated all colonial enterprise. Next was the western intent to insure cheap, nonstop access to Congo's rare, but vast, solid minerals. The third strategic interest was to firmly secure the Congo in western grip during the Cold War. However, maintaining these interests looked pretty bad under the radical socialist posture of Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, triggering the concerned powers to induce the secession of the resource-rich Katanga Province.

The western stakes became acutely toxic after Lumumba invited the communist Soviet Union to help recover Katanga, and this turned Congo into a Cold War theatre (whereby he also sealed his own fate). It is this contagious feud that Balewa sought to meddle. Balewa's provocative speech proved his naivety to the dangerous nature of international politics particularly at Cold War. He ignorantly trivialised Congolese conflicts as constitutional and governance issues which can be easily mediated in the spirit of Pan-Africanism. Yet, there is neither the means nor any stake by which Nigeria could be reckoned. Balewa's loose talk at UNGA was adjudged rude having toyed with Great Powers' sensibilities. He thus incurred their wrath and conspiracy to make Nigeria also go the way of Congo, a plot that almost drowned the country within its first decade. They were nervous about the prospects that peradventure Nigeria may become powerful to challenge the international status quo if not checkmated.

Both Congo and Nigeria, and a number of other African States managed to survive balkanization plots shortly after independence, but these plots, together with the propping of *comprador* leaders in power in Africa as feared in Nkrumah's *neo-colonialism* thesis, aimed at foreclosing any possible African challenge to western dominance. It also explained the high degree of the initial western inducements of corruption and miss-governance among early Africa's elites. The strategy was to systematically scuttle developmental governance. Should African States grow strong and become assertive under the likes of Lumumba, Nkrumah, Balewa and others, the days of westerly

dominance may be numbered. However, the era of induced misgovernance went for too long that virtually all African States are today at varying degrees of failure. Even when western powers and institutions suffered diverse backlash from the failed States, virtually all measures to reverse the decay failed repeatedly as Africa remains a scar in world's conscience.

Further analysis of other naiveties and fallacious strategies in Balewa's speech are as below:

"I wish to make our position plain beyond any measure of doubt with regard to the African Continent. We in Nigeria appreciate the advantages which the size of our country and its population give us, but we have absolutely no aggressive intentions".<sup>22</sup>

- Balewa erred again on his raw reliance on Nigeria's mammoth sizes construed for actual powers, whereas they were only latent assets which, until consummated, remained unreliable in power calculations. Similarly, to declare that Nigeria had no aggressive intentions was to assume that she actually had powers to do so, whereas, Nigeria had no such military capability. It is on record that its Army numbered about 8000 in the immediate years of independence.<sup>23</sup> Ill-equipped and poorly trained, the force was incapable of any aggressive intention against its neighbours who, partly as conditions for colonial freedom, already had defence pacts with France. So at the material period, and even now, mooted aggressive ideas is nationally suicidal as Nigeria could not contend with any Great Power. By the end of the war, the force had bloated to about 250,000, largely dysfunctional, lacking cohesion,

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<sup>22</sup> Balewa, Maiden General Assembly Statement.

<sup>23</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (2 November 1970), National Intelligence Estimate 64.2-70: Prospects for Postwar Nigeria. <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/53862> Retrieved on 2nd June, 2017.

essence and competence.<sup>24</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) noted that the force was “far larger than necessary to provide defence against external aggression, maintain the unity of the Federal system, and assist in the preservation of internal security”.<sup>25</sup>

“Nigeria is a populous country. There are about 35 million of us and our territory is relatively large. We are willing to learn before we rush into the field of international politics, but we are totally unwilling to be diverted from the ideals which we think to be true. That is the reason we in Nigeria will not be found to align ourselves as a matter of routine, with any particular bloc. Indeed, I hate the very ideas of blocs existing at all in the United Nations”.<sup>26</sup>

- It was no longer puzzling that Balewa copiously flaunted the big sizes at UNGA. Like his colleague-elite at home, and against the background of their knowledge about the relatively smaller sizes of European States, he was enamored to brandish the huge features wherever he got an international audience. But that Balewa declares Nigeria’s eagerness to ‘rush into the fields of international politics’ is oddly perplexing, a *‘cart before the horse’* stance, and a perfect recipe for national failure. It was an illogical path to nation-building. Strategic leaders rather opt, first to plunge into internal development to avail the ample time to master the external environment before cautiously engaging it. The hunch to rush into the murky waters of international politics clearly showed that Nigeria neither had the blueprint for internal development nor external engagement.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Balewa, Maiden General Assembly Statement.



Also, his admittance that Nigeria wills to learn before rushing into international politics confirmed that Nigeria's elite grossly lacked the requisite experience despite their yearning to shoulder burdensome issues in the commanding heights of global politics. By his UNGA speech laden with grave interests in Great Power politics, Balewa had jumped the gun, and naively put Nigeria on the firing line of international realpolitik. His other blunder was his thinking that only learning was sufficient to engage it, whereas, he neglected the crucial element – the required and deployable State power to back foreign policy. International politics may be perilous, and may drown the inexperienced, the loose and the reckless. An arena of extreme power-play, it is absolutely nonstrategic for nations to rush into it as the consequences may be grave. Ojo and Sesay (2002) hinted about the requisite wisdom for nations before embarking in foreign policy pursuits.

“The international system to which foreign policies are directed is composed of sovereign independent States – entities over which the initiating States has no jurisdiction. Decision makers must therefore be constantly aware of the interests of other actors in the system. Sufficient account must be taken of what these actors have done, or are doing, or are likely to do in the future in response to a particular policy in question. Account must... be taken of the relative capabilities of other interacting entities...international power structure...and configuration... (and)...the structure of international economic relations also affects options available to States”.<sup>27</sup>

Wielding international influence by States is dependent on multiple variables. New States must tread cautiously until they acquire requisite power, mastery, tact and respect. Yet, wise States

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<sup>27</sup> Olusola Ojo and Amadu Sesay, (2002). *Concepts in International Relations*. (Ile-Ife: Cleanprint Publishers, 2002).

(new or old) neither rush nor dabble into international politics, especially when there are no existential threats. They are rather calculative and mindful of the grave factors involved. International politics by nature is contentious and conflictual, engaging it without prior preparation is synonymous with courting disaster. The American history was golden for new States. The US initially adopted Isolationism to internally grow and not be bogged down or distracted by world politics, and despite that President Woodrow Wilson negotiated the 'League of Nations', consequent of WWI, the Congress refused America's membership on grounds of unreadiness to shoulder the associated colossus responsibilities. When the US eventually got involved, they had fairly become reckonable and unassailable. Other examples are States that consciously refused to be active in global politics, but chose to lay low, minding their affairs and conserving energies for development. They are some of the most developed and stable States today. Such are the Scandinavian States. No nation is obligated to confront or be proactive in world politics, rash ambition and stark Ignorance rather founded Balewa's foreign policy.

- Balewa expressed total unwillingness to divert from the ideals which he thought to be true, but this stance is erroneous since the rightness of an ideal is only a function of how it affects a nation's interest or its perception. The very essence of power, international politicking and foreign policy is to influence other nations in one's interests. Thus, to announce at UNGA the unwillingness to be influenced in the absence of resistant power is to expect to be compelled or shattered in the process. What many nations don't know is that the UNGA podium serve also to trap both the uncooperative and ambitious States through their leaders' loose talks. Except for the Great Powers and perhaps their allies, it is rash to

use the podium to relay national strategies. Experienced, shrewd and modest leaders never used UNGA to contest world powers, otherwise, it ends in national doom. Only big powers have field days supplying talking (instructions) at UNGA, and other nations had better supplied listening for the next direction in global politics.

- It is also undiplomatic and an effrontery to proclaim hatred for the ideological blocs then existing. It amounts to zero understanding of the critical issues that created the very UNGA podium; the world's war and diplomatic history, Europe's imperial global conquest, the strategic security and political alliance systems, the maddening rivalries of the Great Powers which had driven the world twice to the edge, the delicate global peace and power balance systems, and the prevalent Cold War which the UN managed to save humanity from the dreaded nuclear Armageddon. It was disdainful for a new state to declare hatred for these status quo. By implication such state ignorantly launches self into that very tussle, since the 'hatred' stance itself is politically significant. The eventual civil war (after Balewa's assassination) enmeshed Nigeria in Great Power politics, and like doll in their hands, they doused Nigeria in the very politics Balewa hated.

- But Balewa was untrue about his hatred for bloc politics. Though Nigeria joined the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) yet, he was untruthful to its principles. The first compromise was his acceptance of the Anglo-Nigeria Defence Pact (resisted by Nigerians). Next was Balewa's refusal to accord diplomatic recognition to China in adherence to the Western anti-communist posture. Next was Balewa's pro-West stance that barred the import of communist literature and his restricting of travels by Nigerians to communist States. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, a forerunner gender activist, was a victim of such ban. Schwarz

(1968) described Balewa as being rabidly pro-west with a frank distaste for non-alignment.<sup>28</sup> While Balewa maintained very warm relations with the West (particularly the USA and Britain), he was openly hostile to the Eastern bloc especially the Soviet Union. Out of religious conviction, and the depth of his contempt, he reportedly believed that contact with the East was evil. History shows that in the politics and intrigues that established OAU in 1963, Balewa led the pro-West Monrovia bloc against the pro-East Casablanca bloc. Not until 1962 did he establish diplomatic ties with USSR.

“The General Assembly is the supreme conference in the world, and ... one would expect every representative, no matter from where he comes, to feel absolutely free to express the mind of the country he represents, to feel that he is in no way restricted either by the lobbying of other representatives, or in the case of under-developed countries, by being put under an obligation through technical and financial aid. Each representative should be strong enough to resist all efforts to deflect him from the path of truth as he sees it”.<sup>29</sup>

- This perhaps was Balewa’s worst assumption about the prevalent international political system. The General Assembly had never been the world’s supreme conference, and nothing that emanated from UNGA is binding, just as rulings from the International Court of Justice. UNGA is inconsequential at determining who gets what, when and how, in the high stakes of international politics. In fact, the UN is neither hierarchical nor supreme. Though the UN has many organs, none could be declared superior to the others as they handle different functions and

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<sup>28</sup> Frederick Schwarz, *Nigeria: The tribes, the Nation or the race* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965).

<sup>29</sup> Balewa, Maiden General Assembly Statement.

issues. Nations are rather wary of the Security Council, which potently has the capacity to decide who gets war or peace.<sup>30</sup> But yet, its decision making often get bogged down as long as the concerned nation is adequately powerful or well-aligned with veto. Apart from the world Powers, what Balewa and his likes perhaps never knew is that UNGA was at best a mere compensatory platform to flatter other countries with some sense of belonging and relevance, and every representative was only as strong as his State's power.

The podium was designed to grant national leaders regular opportunity to have their say, but often not their way. A notable example was the aborted attempt by 'Group of 77' at UNGA to institute a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s. Ojo & Sesay (2002) reported that developed countries of the North considered it an attempt by the South to turn the 'economic tables' round in their favour. This clearly is against the vested economic interests of the West. To all intents and purposes today, the NIEO dream is in the dustbin of history. Recent trends show that national leaders, particularly the Third Worlds, still don't know how to take the podium's advantage. They either used it to vent pent-up anger, show off, or even pursue extraneous interests. The podium is a covert trap by respective powers to identify nations that may want to pursue policies that are inimical to their vested interests in order to promptly counteract. It is much safer to stay away than to mount it in ignorance, and it is erroneous for national leaders to feel absolutely free to express their mind. The podium is treacherous with entrapments, hence, national leaders must know what to make public and what to gloss over. Balewa was clearly an

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<sup>30</sup> Oluwole J. Odeyemi, United Nations Security Council: The Post-Millennial Narratives and Imperatives for Mandate Review. *Journal of Social Science and Public Policy*, Vol. 8, No.2, (2016) 61-86.

orator, but national leaders have no one to impress with great oratory that may compromise national security, and national prestige is not lost to lackluster speeches uttered from a cautious mind.

- Technical, financial and other aids are common foreign policy tools by which donor countries seek to influence recipient States, hence it is delusive to expect Great Powers to sow where they can't reap, (See Dreher et al., 2009).<sup>31</sup> In political strategies, foreign aids are given with 'quid pro quo' intents to peddle influence in donor's favour. Usually, aids encumber recipient States to the donor's bid. In international politics, beneficiaries scarcely hurt or oppose their benefactors as the consequences may be grave, hence, Balewa asked for the impossible. But besides giving to coax international support, aids may also double as means for espionage on recipient States. Thus often, aids are not given on altruistic concerns but with intents to control.

Nigeria also enjoyed giving aids from its huge petrodollar, but experience reveals that its elites were naïve to the antics and intents of foreign aids. In what General Gowon termed 'Naira diplomacy', his government gave frivolous aids just for the fun and show off. For instance, with the massive wealth accorded Nigeria by the coinciding oil boom, Gowon embarked on international spree, buying friendships of States in the nooks and crannies of the globe. Bolaji Akinyemi,<sup>32</sup> a former Nigeria's External Affairs Minister recalled that Nigeria gave financial aids

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<sup>31</sup> Dreher, A., Sturm, J., & Vreeland J. R., Global Horse Trading: IMF Loans for Votes in the United Nations Security Council. *European Economic Review* (2009), Accessed March 12, 2015, doi:10.1016/j.eurocorev.2009.03.002.

<sup>32</sup> Bolaji Akinyemi is cited in Alkali, Rufa'I Ahmed. *Issues in International Relations and Nigeria's Foreign Policy*. Bob Academic Press. 1996. Page 71.

to many African countries for various purposes: - Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, and Sao Tome and Principe', and Mozambique at independence; Mali, Ethiopia, sierra-Leone and Somalia for drought and natural disasters; and Niger, Sudan, and Zambia for other purposes. Gowon's reckless largesse were also extended to non-African countries, international organisations, and the Commonwealth. Gowon visited two, perhaps, insignificant countries - Grenada and Guyana in the Western Hemisphere following the Kingston commonwealth conference in 1975.

In Grenada, about 15,000 miles away, he paid the salaries of all civil servants for that year, sent a contingent to train the Grenadian police at Nigeria's expense, and granted a soft loan of five million Dollars to its Prime Minister, Sir E. M. Gairy. Guyana's civil servants similarly had their salaries paid. In a reconciliatory gesture to Zambia, an African state that led the bid in OAU to recognize Biafra, Nigeria awarded \$750,000 to compensate for her losses at its border closure with Rhodesia. Perhaps, it was in the illusion of the abundance of that moment that he purportedly gave the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula over to President Ahmadou Ahidjo to appreciate Cameroon's refusal to actively support the secession plot. Still, to show off Nigeria's largesse globally, General Gowon accepted to host the acutely expensive 1973 All-African Games, and the World Black and Africa Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1977. The spending spree mainly constituted a drain on Nigeria's fortune, and were at the expense of Nigeria's development. They were all spent without the strategic *quid pro quo* intents as Nigeria lacked the hint that nations gave foreign aids usually in furtherance of national interest. Gowon's spree is rather inconsistent with the politics of foreign aids.



“One great advantage which we new nations have is that the accession to independence makes a clear break with our past and presents us with the opportunity to enter into the field of international relations untrammelled by prior commitments. It is probably the one occasion in the life of a nation when it is possible to choose the policies with the inherent qualities of goodness”.<sup>33</sup>

- Balewa not only erroneously thought that colonial ties were over with political independence, but also that the latter granted absolute freedoms to nations. While it must be affirmed that there is no nation on earth that cannot be restrained, Balewa also simply did not realise that colonial possessions were strategically important to the world powers who were hence reluctant to wholly let go. Nkrumah rather wisely detected neocolonial antics to pocket the new States. The *Commonwealth of Nations* and the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* are reminders that negated any idea of a clear break with colonial past. The neocolonial hold grossly hindered postcolonial States from pursuing foreign policies of choice.

- Crucial to development is resource. But every resource, including water, is finite, and some are very rare, hence, resource supply is always below demand. This necessarily induces conflictual resource-struggles among States. When resource-drive is tied to national survival, all options are on the table and there may be no sentiment for Balewa’s idea about policies with inherent qualities of goodness. Similarly, to thrive or survive in our kind of international system, nations have had to complement their strengths for greater reach through strategic alliances. Also, weaker States constantly align with preferred

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<sup>33</sup> Balewa, Maiden General Assembly Statement.

powers for bailout in the event of conflicts. Japan, though currently a hibernating power, once tyrannized South Korea, China and the US. But, today, both Japan and South Korea (for Chinese or North Korean threats) are tucked in security pacts with the US. Hence, sovereign independence appears only in principle as no nation could truly be untrammelled. Only the unserious or non-ambitious States would see no need to align with others for the advantages. Even world powers still strategise with allies to retain their successes. This is central to global politics, and is incompatible with Balewa's philosophies of international good and evil.

"And so, as we gratefully take the place to which you have invited us ... We see nation wrangling with nation, and we wonder how we can help".<sup>34</sup>

- It is very laughable that Balewa simply sought to reenact the Kantian dream of 'perpetual peace', quell interstates' conflict and be acclaimed the international peacemaker. Balewa nauseatingly leveraged on the claim that Nigeria had been invited, and consequently like the Leviathan, sought to help the world to rescue the wrangling nations to achieve global peace. As earlier opined, it's odd that a fabrication would demand to help its fabricators? Balewa's request to wade into the commanding heights of global politics is preposterous and unpardonable. He seemed unaware that even the nation he represented was a product of such past wrangling. Great powers often seek to treacherously flex muscles for prestige, strategic dominance and influence peddling. They also flourish by fomenting troubles across the globe. To prosecute the wars, they manufacture and supply arms and logistics to the wrangling States, and after the wars, they jostle again, as industrial

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

scavengers for lucrative contracts to clean the debris and rebuild damaged infrastructures. The business of trouble affords them the opportunity to also make strategic inroads into other States for resource expropriation and alliance building. Great Powers as war profiteers have accumulated huge fortunes through this devilish enterprise and gained critical footholds in multiple nations.

But then also, it is not just that they loved fomenting troubles for its sheer sake, but that as nations seek to meet their needs, particularly those needs that can only be externally met; as nations seek to prospect international businesses, as nations project/secure their interests and survival, they inherently infringe on one another, hence, conflicts embed in interstate relations. Obviously, Balewa never understood the political logic behind the international wrangling he worried over. States inevitably get bogged down from conflicting interests which, for Holsti (1992) necessitate acts which one undertakes to protect its interests against the demands and actions of others.<sup>35</sup> Frictional issues include access to critical resources, strategic international highways and trading, armament and many more. Balewa's ignorance about international politics and strategy made him to offer the spurious help he had no means to give.

“...we realize ... there is a divine providence, and I do honestly believe that this is the one primary essential for international friendship. Cooperation is for each man to be true to his religious belief and ... creed. It may be that, when we hear the world crying out for peace, we may receive the inspiration to deal with these intractable problems... by applying those eternal truths

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<sup>35</sup> Kalevi Jaakko Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*, 6th Ed. (New York: Prentice Hall, 1992).

which will inevitably persist long after we ourselves are utterly forgotten”.<sup>36</sup>

- Balewa had concluded his ignorant oratory by philosophizing and sermonizing his strange theological conceptions, inviting the world to accept his interstate’ theory for the ‘divine right of nations’. Incorporating divinity into global relations and politics is incredulous, impracticable and self-delusional.

I intend to close this section with Balewa’s opening paragraph to counsel States to be really wary of certain international indulgences that may also serve as trap.

“Last Saturday the country which I ...represent, the Federation of Nigeria, became independent and assumed the rights and responsibilities of a sovereign State. Today Nigeria has been admitted to the UN and assumes still more responsibilities”.<sup>37</sup>

- Much had been said about Nigeria’s weird requests for debilitating burdens, but quite often in error, many nations lived under the illusion of the inviolability of State’s sovereignty, thought also to bring certain dignity and honour. Sovereignty was never inviolable, otherwise, the World Wars may not have occurred, and thus, nations must be disillusioned about relying on principles which cosmetically granted some respite for international peace. Powerful States are ever skillful and ready to subvert others. Thus, Balewa’s assumptions that political independence accords sacrosanct and incontrovertible rights are unfounded. Also, sovereignty does not obligate taxing responsibilities like shouldering international problems. The main responsibility of sovereignty is that government ensures the internal peace and tranquility of their State, and

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<sup>36</sup> Balewa, Maiden General Assembly Statement.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

not constitute international public bad, to risk external intervention.

- That States are admitted into the UN is not granted that all members are equally endowed or limited. The UN, like the previous 'League of Nations' was invented by internationalists to pacify and tame the restlessness of Great Powers. This is confirmed by their veto powers and permanence in the Security Council. They practically operate the UN, while new States, particularly the postcolonial, are mere members. However, there are no procedures or rights by which States operate within the commanding heights of global politics as it is essentially an arena of acute power play. Aspiring States need to first consolidate on national power and development to earn international recognition. Germany is not a permanent member of the SC, but is reckoned and often consulted as an indispensable power over global issues. An instance was the once negotiated but now defunct truce by P5+1 Group with Iran on the latter's nuclear ambition. While P5 are the UNSC veto powers, the +1 was Germany.

Less powerful States also wisely align with one or more of these permanent SC members for protection. Shinzo Abe, as Japanese PM, despite the Japanese economic and technological might, paid homage to Donald Trump shortly after his 2016 election victory. Abe's diplomacy is aimed at strengthening the Japan/US alliance, both for security against regional enemies, and as shield from the Security Council's realpolitik. Israel's geopolitical advances is also covered by its strategic alliance with the US, just as China and Russia watched over Iranian interests. Having been unaware of world history and the power constellations, Balewa erroneously thought that nations can be assertive by mere reliance on sovereignty without the backing of verifiable

requisite power. In international politics, the ultimate wisdom is that nations need not be ambitious in the absence of decisive requisite power.

### **Theoretical appraisal of Balewa's politics**

Interrogating Balewa's ambitious political speech with the theoretical assumption of this work, it is obvious that, one by one, he completely contravened the prevalent theory – realism that jealously guarded global politics then. While relying on spurious assumptions and values as power, and adducing phony supremacy to UNGA, international law and institutions, he and other Nigerian elite claimed the racial hegemony that they had no means to pursue, and went headlong to challenge the existing state of global political affairs and its balance of power systems without requisite coercive material capacity. By these, Nigeria not only angered its African peers, but also confronted Great Power politics – an arena of acute military might that was grave and decisive. Balewa mounted the UNGA podium to engage in issues for which Nigeria had no direct material interest in the outcome. Unlike a rational actor, Balewa disregarded the extent of the systemic anarchy and underestimated the crucial element of State power which was key to States' defence and survival, and thus failed to act in the best way to maximize the likelihood of Nigeria's continuity to exist.

### **Conclusion**

It has been established that Nigeria's early elite scarcely understood the undercurrents of power-play and politics that created the very UNGA podium. UNGA is never an arena for the kind of Balewa's ambitious talks, making preposterous demands and assuming all kinds of power (which even the Security Council cannot claim). Thus, Nigeria joined the club of nations on a wrong intellectual footing about the whole gamut of activities that constituted international politics. To the Great Powers' angst, Balewa insulted global political hierarchy and sensitivities by his insubordination into their preexisting imperial interests, hence, his UNGA ambitions and rhetoric that flaunted mere potentials was premature, and only courted ill feelings for the young nation. His nation was punishable for his undiplomatic

contemptuousness which acquainted the Powers with Nigeria's world-dreams, and it thereby initiated the international conspiracy that eventually trapped Nigeria. It was thus not surprising that sooner than Nigeria got entangled in Biafra War, the brutal civil conflict became the sledgehammer to smash the ambitious nation, hence its acute externalization in which multiple nations daringly participated.

The Biafra plot may not have been hatched if the possibility of receiving massive foreign support were remote. Biafra's instigators engaged vigorous propaganda to justify the plot and elicit international support. In a countermove Gen. Yakubu Gowon strived spiritedly in vain to make the world see the uprising as purely a domestic issue. He however did not realise the existence of international ill feelings against Nigeria, and that the groundwork for the war's externalization had earlier been laid by Balewa. By and large, both parties failed to realise that they had played into the hands of the Great Powers conspiracy that craved Nigeria's mutilation. Nigeria learned about international relations the hard way. The war humbly taught Nigeria to tactically re-evaluate her approach to foreign relations. The civil war woke Nigeria's elites from their euphoric trance about African and global politics. The experience shattered Nigeria's messianic posture in the world and betrayed their illusions about pan-Africanism and naiveties on the inviolability of sovereign States. The war taught Nigeria the need to be pragmatic and make friends across all divides; be diplomatically proactive with neighbours; and to exercise restraints at meddling in international disputes. Nigeria bore the brunt of the destructive international realpolitik and bitterly learned to be wary of the strategic interests of world powers and the treachery of nations. Similarly, Nigeria bitterly realised that a nation's status and aspirations are neither matters for metaphysical speculations or wishful thinking, but products of internal cohesiveness, stability, the right alliance and multifactorial capability.

Following disappointments from the support for Biafra by some African States, Nigeria began to doubt OAU's reliability, and were challenged by crises of confidence and trust, both internally and externally. They were awoke to the poachable nature of the international system, and the neocolonial stratagem to not only



disrupt African unity but balkanize Africa's promising States, to evolve non-virile States incapable of challenging the West, and perpetuating thereby their dependency. In closing, it is vital to note that Nigeria narrowly survived the plot by running to the previously despised USSR for military assistance, and also by the sheer brilliance or brutality of Nigeria's war strategies which eventually forced Biafra leaders to abort the secession.

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