

THE BIAFRA ARMY: A HISTORICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN WAR AND DIPLOMACY IN IGBOLAND, 1967 – 1970

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Abstract: This paper examines the nexus between war and diplomacy from a historical perspective. The Igbo people of Nigeria are one of its three dominant ethnic groups. The 1959 National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) and Northern People's Congress (NPC) alliance placed the Igbos on a secured ground in Nigeria. It made Nnamdi Azikiwe the first indigenous President of Nigeria and gave Igbos good representation in Nigeria's public and civil service until the fall of the First Republic in 1966. Thus, this paper problematized the post-1966 socio-political misfortunes of the Igbos in Nigeria as the main catalyst for the creation of the Biafran army. Using historical research methodology, the paper corroborates primary and secondary materials (online sources) to demonstrate that the establishment of the Biafran army in Igboland was a secessionist alternative to diplomacy between 1967 and 1970. It finds that the Igbos' perceived threat to the security of their lives was epistemologically responded to through Igbo hermeneutics of the nexus between war and diplomacy. The ephemeral military confrontation that ensued between the fledgling state of Biafra and Nigeria was a continuation of diplomacy by other means. And the collapse of the Aburi Accord which Nigeria signed with the separatist Eastern region, was the diplomatic breakdown that triggered the outbreak of the Biafra war as a diplomatic last resort for salvaging Igbo acrimony. Therefore, this paper concludes that the institution of the Biafran army in the struggle for Biafra perfectly underscored Igbo epistemology of the nexus between war and diplomacy.

Keywords: Igbos, War, Diplomacy, Biafran army, Epistemology

INTRODUCTION

WAR IS EVIL AND DESTRUCTIVE BUT THROUGHOUT history, it is one of the most preferred diplomatic tools used by statesmen. It is desirable as a means to an end in domestic and international relations when diplomacy has failed. In Igboland, indigenous epistemologies and herme-

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neutics such as “*Odogu*” meaning brave heart, “*Dike*” meaning warrior, “*Ikenga*” meaning the strongest or head warrior and “*Agu*” meaning fearless as a Tiger used to qualify gallant and battle-hardened individuals are portrayals of the war psychology of the people. They also connote Igbo detest for cowardice and the deep sense of military readiness of some Igbo sons if diplomacy failed. Jaw-jaw and war-war in Igbo indigenous knowledge system mean there is a time for dialogue and a time to go to war. The diplomatic seasoning of the Igbo traditional knowledge system is unmistakable. It is evident in Igbo indigenous proverbs such as “*Oji oso agbakwu ogu, amaghi na ogbu bu onwu*” meaning “A man who rushes into battle does not know that war entails death”; “*Nwata hu ogo eghoro egbo osi na ogu atoka*” meaning “When a child sees a fight that is being intervened upon, he will think fight is always sweet”; “*Ukpala okpoko gburu, nti chiri ya*” meaning “The ant that was eaten by locust has shown that it is deaf” and “*Anaghi agwa ochi nti n’ agha esula*” meaning “Those who have failed to heed warning will feel the heat when the war starts.” These Igbo proverbs are valuable primary sources for unpacking the people’s conception of the nexus between war and diplomacy. They directly called for cautious diplomacy even when war is imminent. Nonetheless, in Igboland, the war readiness of the people is evident in their belief that “*Ubuchi amuru dike na mba ka amuru ibe ya*” meaning “When a warrior is born in a town, another warrior is also born in another town.”

As a national and foreign policy instrument of last resort, war is strategically regarded as the continuation of diplomacy by other means. This implies that people generally go to war when diplomacy fails, and they return to the diplomatic table after warfare. This nexus between war and diplomacy exists on a fragile balance in domestic and international politics. It is the thin line between love and hate; make or mar in the adjustment of communal or inter-state relations. The tilting of the scale towards the latter usually breeds epochal indigenous military development and social change that greatly transforms the face of human societies.¹ Over time, the inevitability of conflict in human and international relations made the possession of a military organization a domestic and international security imperative. The history of inter-group and international relations had shown that even when there is relative peace and security among groups and nations, the threat of violent conflict is ever-omnipresent. Thus, when the safety of a people as a group is threatened and unsure the observed first response to the realities of war is the establishment of a vigilante, indigenous militia groups, and even an army. In modern Nigeria, the formation of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the Niger Delta, *Amotekun* in Yorubaland, and the Eastern Security Network (ESN) in Igboland as a defensive mechanism and means to an end support this reality.

However, the focus of this paper is on how the precarious situation of the indigenous people of Igboland triggered the establishment of the Biafran Army as a means to achieve secessionism.² It complements existing literature on Igbo studies by asserting that the Biafra army was put together as a military diplomatic backup plan in the struggle for the actualization of Biafra when dialogue failed. Therefore, the army was quickly deployed to explore and exploit warfare as a continuation of diplomacy by other means when the Aburi Accord failed. This event was set in motion six years after Nigeria gained independence from Britain. The interface between the January 1966 Igbo coup and the Hausa July counter coup engineered the collapse of the fragile balance between war and diplomacy in the nascent African state. Things fell apart completely when the Muslim Hausas in northern Nigeria began massacring the Christian Igbos in the region. This prompted tens of thousands of Igbos to flee to the east, where their people were the dominant ethnic group. The Igbos then had no vote of confidence in the Nigerian military government's ability to guarantee their peace and security within the Nigerian federation. It was against this backdrop that on May 30, 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu and other non-Igbo representatives of the area established the Republic of Biafra, comprising several states of Nigeria.³ While in Nigerian and Igbo historiography this phenomenon had been well studied, there are still knowledge gaps on its military imperative in academic literature. Hence, this paper seeks to expand the frontiers of knowledge on the response and adaptation of the Igbos to the imperative of war from 1967-1970.

MILITARY ORGANISATION AND UTILITY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In the historical development of human societies and politics, dialogue, negotiation, bargaining, avoidance strategy, third-party interventionism (mediation), and compromise were diplomatic tools used to manage and adjust inter-group, suzerain, and even international relations. As an instrument of statecraft, they were containment strategies deployed to keep war at bay and when they failed, they precipitated war. The imperfection of human societies ensured that their diplomacy often snapped leading to the eventuality of war. Wars, whether it is the battle of attrition, or offensive or defensive wars, distort the fragile balance that exists between it and diplomacy and peace and security when they break out. Hence, statesmen, philosophers, and strategists over time and space sought to protect the ephemerality in the balance between human security and national security through the formation of military organizations. Understandably, Aristotle claimed that man when armed is naturally fitted to exercise wisdom and virtue; and that good rulers do not disarm their citizens. And he

conceived fighting and dying for one's country as the supreme sacrifice citizens are expected to make.⁴

The ancient military state of Sparta was the perfect embodiment of this philosophy. The Spartan army served as the foundation of political and social life in the ancient Greek city-state. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the army also served as a veritable instrument of state and empire-building. To this end, the Oyo Calvary and Benin Army respectively played critical roles in the emergence of the Oyo and Benin Empires in West Africa. The British also used the military to build a vast colonial empire across the globe. The British army in 1897 brought the Benin Kingdom to its' knees and progressively the whole of Nigeria after the collapse of diplomatic maneuvers such as Trade Treaties (the Gallwey Treaty of 1892) with the Benin Kingdom in 1895 and the Treaty of Protection that Jaja of Opobo refused to sign.

Conceptually, the military is generally regarded as the totality of the armed forces of a nation, and this includes the army, navy, air force, and to some extent the police. And the formation of military organizations in modern societies is central to achieving self-determination, secessionism and statehood. Hence, like what was obtainable in ancient societies the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria established the Biafran army as the military face of Biafra. However, in African societies and politics, the military had taken on new political roles contrary to their *raison d'être*. Eshikena conceptualized this military regime as a government led by soldiers.⁵ Military rule is generally an aberration in governance and a misnomer and negation of best international political practice. Consequently, Joseph argued that military rule is the expansion of the boundaries of soldier barracks to encroach into the boundaries of politics and governance. Therefore, Elaigwu opined that the military has become a political power contestant in Africa's power equation that must be "de-politicized."⁶ In terms of the structural organization of the military, it must be noted that the military places a high premium on absolute discipline and loyalty among subordinate soldiers (workers). It is the responsibility of the leader to engender high levels of loyalty and obedience in his "subjects" which are unconditional. The deliberate structuring of the military/corporate hierarchy so that each soldier or employee receives orders from only one superior was specifically developed to complement and allow for this absolute obedience.⁷

BIAFRAN ARMY IN THE CONTEXT OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

The formation of the British West Africa Frontier Force (BWFF) in 1900 and its reconstitutions as the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) in 1928 as a colonial army to suppress indigenous resistance, protect the

territorial integrity of the British West African colonial enterprise and to collaborate with the colonial police force in maintaining law and order in colonial Nigeria and elsewhere paved the way for military development in the region. In Nigeria, the RWAFF was disbanded in 1960 and its units metamorphosed into the Nigerian army. But the Biafran army on the other hand was arguably built from scratch. The Biafran army was born as a child of necessity. Its speedy formation and battle readiness in a short space of time after the collapse of the Aburi Accord epitomized the Igbo praxis of the nexus between war and diplomacy. The unstable socio-political milieu in Nigeria at the time, birthed by its unfruitful national dialogue since 1914, was what set the engine of the Biafran military machinery rolling. And three principal players of Igbo extraction, Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Major Timothy Onwuatiegwu, and Major Christopher Anuforo who plotted the January 1966 military coup along with Major Kaduna Nzeogwu (with ethnic roots in Ika-Igbo, Midwest) and Major Adewale Ademoyega (Yoruba, West) accidentally accelerated the rise of the Biafran army. Other key participants in Nigeria's first coup d'état were Major Don Okafor (Igbo) and Major Humphrey Chukwuka (Igbo), Captain Emmanuel Nwobosi (Igbo) and Lieutenant Atom Kpera (Tiv, North). Kpera later served as the Governor of Anambra and Benue states.⁸

This development dovetailed into the Hausa counter coup of July 1966 directed at containing what was perceived as Igbo hegemony in Nigeria and protests in the North. The killing and maiming of Igbo that followed in northern Nigeria whipped up Igbo ethnic-nationalist sentiments and the need for self-defense and self-determination. It was against this backdrop that at 6 a.m., May 30, 1967, the Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria, Lt. Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, made a broadcast declaring the Eastern Region with its continental shelf and territorial waters to be an independent state under the name, Republic of Biafra.⁹ Putting this event into proper historical perspective, Solomon Amiara observed that the declaration of the independence of Biafra came after two military coups in January and July 1966 and the subsequent killing of thousands of Eastern Nigerians resident in Northern Nigeria and some parts of Western Nigeria.¹⁰ While the January 15, 1966 coup led mainly by military officers of Eastern Nigeria origin was believed to be a revolution against a corrupt civilian regime, the July 1966 coup was understood to be a direct reprisal attack against the people of Eastern Nigeria by Northern Nigerian soldiers. In a strategic context, these coups were the harbinger of the Biafran war six weeks later.¹¹

Biafra's declaration of independence came after efforts to reconcile the Eastern Region with the Federal Government of Nigeria failed. Neither the famous peace talks in Aburi, Ghana nor the mediatory efforts of some prominent Nigerians could restore peace and trust between Eastern Nige-

ria and the Federal Government of Nigeria. Efforts by the British government to promote peaceful negotiation between Eastern Nigeria and the federal government also proved ineffective.¹² Commenting on the secession of Eastern Nigeria, the British High Commissioner in Lagos noted at the outbreak of the war that Eastern Nigerians were “grievously shocked by the massacre of their fellow tribesmen in the North. Biafran leaders presented “Biafra” to the outside world as the “last hope of security to life, to property and the will to exist as ordinary human beings for 14,000,000 people thrown out of Nigeria. Psychologically, Chinua Achebe explained “Biafra” as a “state of mind, a mind free from the pattern of the past.”¹³ The Federal Government of Nigeria, however, interpreted the declaration of Biafra’s independence as a rebellion and tried to prevent the secession by imposing a blockade on Biafra. To quell the “rebellion,” Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria’s Military Head of State, took what he described as a “police action” against Biafra. The “police action” was meant to be a short disciplinary action against “rebellious” Biafra, but it turned out to be the beginning of a thirty-month war that would attract global attention.¹⁴

The rigorous enforcement of a blockade by the Nigerian military forces had a debilitating effect on the civilian population in Biafra. There was an acute shortage of food supply from outside Biafra. The cessation of protein food supply (mainly meat) from Northern Nigeria and fish from the Nordic countries began to damage the health condition of the general population, especially children and nursing mothers.¹⁵ The food crisis was most serious in the Northern Igbo region of Biafra which was cut off from the food supply from Northern Nigeria and the relatively richer southern Biafra. The mass movement of about two million returnees from Northern Nigeria to Eastern Nigeria partly accounted for the quick exhaustion of the local food supply after the blockade. When the major areas that supplied food to Biafra were overrun by the Nigerian forces, in May 1968, Biafra began facing the prospect of serious starvation. It was at this point that both foreign missionaries in Biafra and the Biafran leaders launched an appeal to the world for food support.¹⁶

In a bid to attract the sympathy and support of the international community, the Biafran government hired Markpress, a Geneva-based public relations firm for a publicity campaign. Markpress coordinated Biafra’s propaganda campaign in Europe and North America. The public relations firm constantly used genocide and religion as its propaganda themes. The Biafran government accused the Nigerian government of waging a religious and genocidal war through starvation.¹⁷ The allegation of using starvation as a legitimate instrument of warfare against the people of Biafra roused deep feelings in many parts of the world. As people followed the course of the war through the mass media, horrifying images

of starving children elicited sympathy among many television watchers in Europe and North America.¹⁸

THE BIAFRAN ARMY: ORGANISATION AND WAR STRATEGY

The Biafran army was the main contingent of the Biafran military. It was the Biafran state's supreme fighting force on which all the aspirations and hopes of the Igbo in the Biafra War were based. The Biafra Army was Biafra's main instrument of statecraft and sharpest diplomatic tool for conducting international relations and diplomacy by other means- warfare. At the beginning of the war, the Biafra army had a troop of 3,000 soldiers strong. This number grew as the war progressed, ultimately reaching 30,000. Although the Biafran Army did not get direct official support from Western nations, it clandestinely acquired arms from them. The paucity of foreign military support to the Biafran army informed the Igbo indigenous ammunition development known as the "*Ogbunigwe*." However, in the officer cadre of the Biafran army were some Europeans that secretly served the Biafran cause. They include German-born Rolf Steiner, a lieutenant colonel assigned to the 4th Commando Brigade, and Welshman Taffy Williams who served as a major throughout the conflict.¹⁹ These officers led the Biafra special guerrilla unit, the Biafran Organisation of Freedom Fighters modeled after the Viet Cong and saddled with the responsibility of targeting and destroying Nigerian supply lines. It succeeded in forcing the Nigerian army to redeploy most of its resources to internal security efforts.²⁰

At the top of the hierarchy of the Biafran army consisting of 5 Divisions was General Ojukwu. The number of officers in this elite Biafra military caucus was later increased to make it the 11th, 12th, 13th (later re-numbered 15th), 14th and 101st Divisions. The Biafran army also had two separate Brigades namely the S Brigade consisting of specially trained Pretorian Guards for the personal security of the Biafran leader, General Ojukwu; and the 4th Commando Brigade (trained and commanded by mercenaries). It was commanded by Brigadier Hillary Njoku and later Major General Alexander Madiebo.²¹

Table 1: Weapons and Equipment Used by the Biafra Army

Type	Origin	Notes
Dane gun	home-made	In service with militias
Lee-Enfield No.4	ex-Nigerian Army	120 to 150 in January 1967
Beretta BM 59	ex-Nigerian Army (captured)	
Vz. 24 rifle	Czechoslovakia (officially	1,860 bought at the be-

	denied)	ginning of 1967
Vz. 52 rifle		820 bought at the beginning of 1967
Vz. 58 rifle		732 bought at the beginning of 1967
MAS 36	Gabon, Ivory Coast, Haiti	300 from Haiti as a gift in 1968
FN FAL/SLR	Parker-Hale (United Kingdom); ex-Nigerian Army (captured)	930 delivered in 1967; some FN FALs captured from the Nigerian Army
CETME rifle	ex-Nigerian Army (captured)	
AK-47	China (Black market)	In service with the militia

Source: Retrieved from

<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/15/africa/biafra-nigeria-civil-war>,
Accessed on 22/04/2021

The Biafran military also had an air force unit. The Biafran air force had trained pilots, but very few aircraft. They had two B-25 Mitchells and one B-26 Marauder, which was captured on the ground as it was unserviceable. Later on, they got another B-26, which during Oct-Dec were used for night raids together with the B-25s and a converted DC-3. The B-26 and DC-3 crashed in the line of duty, while the Biafran B-25s were captured on the ground. One of the relief pilots in 1968 was the Swede Carl Gustaf von Rosen.²² He saw that Biafra was unable to acquire jet fighters and brought up the idea of Minicoin with General Ojukwu. In the spring of 1969, Biafra was able to assemble five MFI-9Bs in Gabon and painted them with two green colors (Volkswagen car paint) in three large fields. They were equipped with simple sights and two pods for six 68 mm anti-armor rockets and given an extra fuel tank in the fuselage. The newly acquired fleets were named "Biafra Babies". They were at first manned by a squadron made up of three Swedish and three Biafran pilots.²³

THE BIAFRAN AIR WING

The Biafrans set up a small but effective air force. Biafran Air Force commanders were Chude Sokey and later Godwin Ezeilo, who had trained with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Its early inventory included two B-25 Mitchells, two B-26 Invaders, (one piloted by Polish World War II ace Jan Zumbach, known also as John Brown), a converted DC-3 and one Dove. In 1968, Swedish pilot Carl Gustaf von Rosen suggested the MiniCOIN project to General Ojukwu.²⁴ By early 1969 Biafra had assembled five MFI-9Bs in Gabon, calling them "Biafra Babies." They were colored green, and were able to carry six 68 mm anti-armor rockets under each wing using

simple sights. The five planes were flown by three Swedish pilots and three Biafran pilots. In September 1969, Biafra acquired four ex-Armée de l' Air North American T-6Gs which were flown to Biafra the following month; but one T-6 was lost on the ferry flight. These aircraft flew missions until January 1970 manned by Portuguese ex-military pilots. During the war, Biafra tried to acquire jets. Two Fouga Magisters and several Gloster Meteors were bought but never arrived in Biafra, being abandoned on foreign African airbases.²⁵

Table 2: Chart of Biafra Aircraft

Aircraft	Origin	Number	Notes
MFI-9B "Biafra Babies"	Sweden	5(12)	
Douglas B-26 Invader	USA	2(13)	
North American B-25 Mitchell	USA	2(14)	
de Havilland Dove	USA	2(15)	
Fokker F27 Friendship	Netherlands	1(14)	Ex Nigerian Airways and used as an Improvised Bomber.
Douglas DC-3	USA	1(14)	Improvised Bomber.
North American T-6 Texan	USA	4-6	ex-Armée de l'Air.

Source: Retrieved from

<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/15/africa/biafra-nigeria-civil-war>,
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In August 1968, pilot training was started in Biafra under von Rosen's leadership and with one Swedish teacher. Later, in September, Biafran pilots training abroad, for aircraft it was realized would never arrive, were recalled to Biafra to fly the Biafra Babies. 12 T-6s had been purchased, but they were all in bad condition, so only four could be made to fly. During the transit to Biafra, two were lost. The remaining two were used together with the MFI-9s, of which a total of nine were in service.²⁶ Normal tactic was to begin attack with 4 - 5 aircraft at a time. The unit was kept together approaching the target, with a separation of 50 m or less, as a larger separation would lead to loss of visual contact between the aircraft. The very low flying altitude was necessary to avoid being fired upon, both over the enemy and own territory, it was found. Radio silence was ordered except during the actual attack when target information had to be passed on. The tactic to ensure that a chosen target was destroyed before any remaining rockets were used on other targets was adopted. The rockets were only fired two at a time. Anti-armor rockets were chosen because it was decided that all attacks would primarily be anti-materiel, and only military targets attacked.²⁷

THE BIAFRAN NAVY

The Biafra state had a small, improvised navy, which never gained success in providing runway support for its air force. It was headquartered in Kidney Island, Port Harcourt, and was commanded by Winifred Anuku. The Biafran Navy was made up of captured craft, converted tugs, and armored civilian vessels armed with machine guns, or captured 6-pounder guns. It mainly operated in the Niger Delta and along the Niger River.²⁸

Table 3: Ships in Service in the Biafran Army

Ship	Origin	Commis- sioned	Fate	Notes
BNS Vigilance	ex-NNS <i>Ibadan</i>	30 May 1967	Sunk on 10 September 1967	Ford-class seaward defense boat
NSS Bonny	ex-HMS <i>Gifford</i>	1968	Preserved at the National Nigerian War Museum	Ford-class seaward defense boat
<i>Kwerre</i>	ex-Nigerian port authority tugboat	1967		Armed with a 105mm howitzer
<i>PC101</i>	ex-Nigerian port authority cutter	1968	Lost in July 1968	Armed with a 6-pounder and Bofors gun
<i>PC202</i>	Nigerian tugboat	1968	Lost in July 1968	Armed with a 105mm howitzer

Retrieved from <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/15/africa/biafra-nigeria-civil-war>, Accessed on 22/04/2021.

ENLISTMENT AND COMBATANTS IN THE BIAFRAN ARMY

The enlistment of officers and rank and files in the Biafran army was majorly in two folds. While more of the enlistment officers were soldiers with a military background either in the Nigerian army or in other organized military institutions, Biafran foot soldiers were largely recruited from the villages and towns of Igboland. They even included teenagers who served in the Biafran army as child soldiers. Some of the Nigerian Army officers who left the Nigerian army to support the Biafra war effort later returned to the Nigerian army at the end of the war. However, the brilliant performance of these combatants significantly helped the Biafran army in the war that lasted till 1970.²⁹ Hence, it is expedient for this paper to briefly present a biographical profile of some of the Nigerian soldiers that pulled out to support Ojukwu's breakaway here. These combatants, in no particular order, are as follows:

Ogbugo Kalu

Ogbugo Kalu (died February 2004) was a former army officer who served in both the Nigerian Army and Biafran Army. Kalu was also the commander of the Nigerian Military Training College (NMTC) in Kaduna following the 1966 Nigerian coup d'état. Before Kalu's celebrated career as an officer in the Biafran Army, he had been serving in the Nigerian Army since 1958. After being given formal military training in both Ghana and the United Kingdom, Kalu joined the Biafra Army as a short-service commission officer, a Second Lieutenant, in November 1959. He was later promoted to the rank of Major sometime during the first half of the 1960s. On the night of January 15, 1966, a coup d'état was set in motion by nine Igbo and one Yoruba army officers³⁰, but was short-lived and quelled within 48 hours by the Igbo Gen. Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi who then assumed total leadership over Nigeria. Gen. Ironsi appointed Major Kalu commandant of the Nigerian Military Training College in Kaduna because its' incumbent commander, Col. Ralph Shodeinde, was assassinated by a detachment of mutinous soldiers led by Major Timothy Onwuatuwegwu on the night of the coup. He was appointed Lieutenant Colonel in May 1966.

On July 29, 1966, a second coup d'état took place after a majority of the Nigerian Army led by 32 army officers rose against Ironsi's dictatorship and assassinated him along with several other Igbo officers and politicians. Kalu hosted an early afternoon meeting at his house in Kaduna where he informed several south-eastern officers about the coup and that their lives were in danger, these officers included Lt. Col. Alexander Madiebo, Major Christopher Emelifonwu, Major Ayodele Ogunro, and Maj. Samuel Ogbemudia. After hearing that both Major Emelifonwu and Major Ogunro were murdered by Hausa-Fulani soldiers in Kaduna, Lt. Col. Kalu made his way to a railroad depot where he managed to stow away inside the water tank of a train destined for south-eastern Nigeria. Ogbugo Kalu, who died in February 2004 was a former army officer who served in both the Nigerian Army and Biafran Army. Along with the other commands held, Kalu was made commander of the Biafran 14th Division with a strict order in a letter written to him by Odumegwu Ojukwu. In the letter, Ojukwu stated that: *"Your role in the Port Harcourt disaster is still fresh in the minds of people. You must clear the enemy from Obinze in 24 hours or submit your resignation from the army."*³¹

Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu

Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu was another Nigerian soldier veteran that crossed over into the Biafran army to serve as an officer. Nzeogwu while in the Nigerian army was given the name "Kaduna" by his Hausa colleagues because of his love for the town. He was an ambitious young mili-

tary officer, but this rebellious attitude led to his arrest after a failed plotted coup. After his release in 1967, he was asked to go into battle on the side of the Biafrans where he was promoted to the rank of a Biafran Lt. Colonel, but he got killed in an ambush.³²

Joseph Achuzie

Joseph Achuzie was a British-trained aeronautical engineer. He was born in 1929 and later earned the nickname "Hannibal." Before joining the Biafran Army in May 1967, Joseph Achuzie was an engineer with the Shell Petroleum Company based in Port Harcourt. He was amongst the founders and organizers of the Civil Militia in Port Harcourt. When that outfit was disbanded, Achuzie joined the Biafran army as a Colonel. He had a British wife and a son as of January 1970. After Biafran soldiers were forced to retreat across the River Niger Bridge into Onitsha on September 20, 1967. Achuzie was promoted to Major and given command of the Biafran 11th Battalion, responsible for defending the area between Atani and Ndoni from an imminent Nigerian attack. After the Biafran 18th Battalion under Colonel Assam Nsudoh was forced to retreat from Onitsha after 8 days of bloody house-to-house fighting, the 11th Battalion under Major Achuzie linked up with the 18th Battalion east of the city and made plans to counter-attack. The 18th Battalion swung south along the Old Market Road while the 11th Battalion under Major Achuzie swung north along the New Market Road in a coordinated Pincer Movement. The majority of the 5,000 men of the Nigerian 2nd Division stationed in Onitsha were either massacred or taken prisoner by Achuzia's men. Two separate counter-attacks were made by the Nigerian 2nd Division in the days following the Biafran assault but were both thwarted by the 11th and 18th Battalions stationed in Onitsha. Achuzia was given total control of the Biafran 11th Division on January 19, 1968, by President Ojukwu once the Nigerian 2nd Division under Murtala Mohammed reached Awka, giving the Nigerians a direct route to Onitsha. The 11th Division under Maj. Achuzie managed to hold off the Nigerians for two months until an offensive launched on March 20 resulted in the Nigerians breaking through the Biafran defensive lines surrounding the city, the final battle would last less than 24 hours. The Nigerians were forced to pay with heavy casualties but they managed to capture Onitsha and forced the Biafran 11th Division to retreat to Nnewi.³³

Augustine Ifeanyi Aniebo

Colonel Augustine Ifeanyi Aniebo was also one of the Biafran soldiers in 1967. He commanded the Biafran 58 Brigade at Uyo. He was detained by Ojukwu until the end of the war following the fall of Uyo in 1968. He was

the military administrator of Bornu State and retired as a Colonel of the Nigerian Army in 1999.

Chris Ugokwe

Colonel Chris Ugokwe commanded the Biafran 52 Brigade which was stationed in the Owerri sector. He retired as a Lt Col in the Nigerian Army around 1985 and later became chairman of the National Population Commission, Abuja.

Lambert Ihenacho

Lambert Ihenacho is known as a brilliant and resourceful officer in the Nigerian Army. As a Biafran soldier, he commanded the Biafran 63 Brigade in the Owerri sector. And he had the distinction of having held out against all odds for 15 months in the face of furious onslaughts by federal troops. He retired as a full Colonel of the Nigerian Army in the 1980s.

Robert Akonobi

Colonel Robert Akonobi commanded the Biafran 57 Brigade. He rose to the rank of Brigadier General in the Nigerian Army and he retired in the mid-1990s.

Colonel Godfrey Nebo

Colonel Godfrey Nebo was an exceptionally tenacious commander. As a young officer, he commanded the Biafran 54 Brigade stationed at Onitsha. He also saw action in the Port Harcourt sector and ultimately rose to the rank of Colonel in the Nigerian Army, he retired in the 1980s.

Conrad Dibia Nwawo

Nwawo was the most senior officer in the entire people's army of Biafra. He was also one of the most distinguished and highly decorated military officers in the country who died at 92 years of age. Some of the positions he held in the Biafran Army include administrative officer, Biafran Army Headquarters and Commander, 11th and 13th Divisions of the Biafran Army, as well as the guerrilla commando unit.³⁴

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu³⁵ was born in 1933 in Zungeru, a community in the northern part of Nigeria, which was then a colony of Britain. He was the son of Sir Louis Philippe Odumegwu Ojukwu, one of the most successful businessmen among the Ibos, the largest ethnic group in Nigeria. Consequently, the younger Odumegwu Ojukwu received the best education money could buy. His primary education was at a private Catholic school in the Nigerian city of Lagos. Before he was ten years old,

he was enrolled at nearby King's College as the youngest pupil in the institution's history. Two years later, Odumegwu Ojukwu's father transferred him to a school in Surrey, England, called Epsom College, to finish secondary studies. Odumegwu Ojukwu had a natural athletic ability and, during his years in England, he honed his skills on the playing field when not attending classes. In school-sponsored sports, he served as captain of the rugby and soccer teams. He also set the All-England Junior record in the discus throw.

In 1952, Odumegwu Ojukwu was admitted to Oxford University. He majored in history, graduating in 1955 with honors. As an undergraduate, Odumegwu Ojukwu continued to pursue his love of athletics while developing outside interests in drama and journalism. He served as a leader in the Oxford branch of the West African Students Union during this time. In addition, he was known for his flashy sports cars, which he frequently drove at high speeds between Oxford and London. It was at Oxford that he met a female law student named Njideka; she eventually became his wife. Colonel Odumegwu-Ojukwu declared Eastern Nigeria a sovereign state to be known as "BIAFRA" after the Nigerian military leadership peace conference hosted by General Joseph Ankrah in January 1967, in Aburi, Ghana. Ojukwu who was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Nigerian Army then became the General of the Biafran army. Despite his breakaway action, Ojukwu was accorded the highest military accolade and a funeral parade in Abuja. Ojukwu died after a brief illness at age 78 in November, 2011.³⁶

COMBAT ASSESSMENT OF THE BIAFRAN MILITARY DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Fighting started on 6 July 1967, with an artillery barrage against Ogoja, a town near the border with the Northern Region in the northeast corner of Biafra. Here two Federal battalions faced the Biafrans in what Colonel Ojukwu realized was a diversionary attack. The real attack came further west opposite Nsukka, the prosperous market town recently endowed with the University of Nsukka, renamed the University of Biafra.³⁷ Here the remaining six battalions of the Nigerians were massed on the main axis, and they marched in on 8 July. They advanced four miles and then struck. The Biafrans, with about 3,000 men in arms in that sector against the Nigerians' 6,000, fought back tenaciously with Eastern Nigeria Police 303 rifles, an assortment of Italian, Czech, and German machine pistols, and a sprinkling shower of shotguns. The Nigerians captured the town of Nsukka and then destroyed the university, but could advance further.³⁸ In Ogoja province, they took Nyonya and Gakem, brought Ogoja into the range of their artillery, and forced the Biafrans to cede the township and

draw up a line of defense along a river south of the town. After two weeks, discomfited by the immobility of their redoubtable infantry, Lagos began to broadcast the fall of numerous Biafran towns to the Federal forces. "To those living in Enugu, it appeared that someone in Lagos was sticking pins at random in a map."³⁹

After three weeks, the Nigerians got into trouble when two of their battalions, cut off from the rest, were surrounded and broken up to the east of Nsukka between the main road and the railway line. Two more scratch battalions composed of training staff and trainees were hastily armed and thrown into the Nsukka sector from the Nigerian side. In the air, activity was confined to the exploit of a lone Biafran B-26 American-built Second World War bomber piloted by a taciturn Pole who rejoiced in the name of Kamikaze Brown, and to six French-built Alouette helicopters piloted by Biafrans from which they rained hand-grenades and home-made bombs on the Nigerians. On 25 July 1967, the Nigerians staged an unexpected seaborne attack on the island of Bonny, the last piece of land before the open sea far to the south of Port Harcourt. Bonny was the oil-loading terminal for the Shell-BP pipeline from Port Harcourt.⁴⁰

Militarily Bonny was unexploitable, for once warned the Biafrans relentlessly patrolled the waters north of Bonny, and subsequent Nigerian attempts to launch further waterborne attacks northwards onto the mainland around Port Harcourt were beaten back. On August 9, 1967, the Biafrans struck in earnest with a coup that shook observers both in Biafra and Lagos. Starting at dawn, a mobile brigade of 3,000 men they had carefully prepared in secret, swept across the Onitsha Bridge into the Mid-West. In ten hours of daylight, the Region fell, and the towns of Warri, Sapele, the oil center at Ughelli, Agbor, Uromi, Ubiaja, and Benin City were occupied. "Of the small army of the Mid-West nothing was heard; nine out of the eleven senior officers of that army were Ika-Ibos, first cousins to the Ibos of Biafra, and rather than fight they welcomed the Biafran forces."⁴¹ The capture of the Mid-West changed the balance of the war, putting the whole of Nigeria's oil resources under Biafran control. Although she had lost about 500 square miles of her territory in three small sectors at the perimeter, she had captured 20,000 square miles of Nigeria. More importantly, the whole of the Nigerian infantry was miles away opposite Nsukka, with the broad Niger separating them from the road back to the capital and helpless to intervene, for the Biafrans the road to Lagos was open and undefended.

Colonel Ojukwu was trying to convince the non-Ibo majority of the Mid-West that he bore them no harm. "For a week delegation of tribal chiefs, bankers, traders, Chamber of Commerce stalwarts, army officers, and church dignitaries filed into Enugu on an invitation to see the Biafran leader and be reassured. Colonel Ojukwu hoped that the alliance of the

two of the three Southern regions would swing the West into an agreement and force the Federal Government to negotiate.⁴² After a week it appeared this was not going to happen, and Colonel Ojukwu gave the order for a further advance westward. On 16 August 1967, the Biafrans reached the Ofusu River Bridge which marked the border with the eastern region. Here there was a brief scrap with Nigerian troops, who then withdrew. The Nigerian soldiers were from the Federal Guard, General Yakubu Gowon's bodyguard of 500 Tivs.

On 11 September 1967, the Nigerians launched a fast attack by boat up the river Orashi towards Oguta, a lakeside town not far from Uli Airport. Unspotted, the boats crossed the lake and the men disembarked. Oguta was still full of people and there was a lot of killing. Nigerians came across the River Niger from the Midwest. Colonel Ojukwu called his commanders and told them to get Oguta back. They did get Oguta but it had a by-product. Some of the Biafran troops there had been taken from the right flank at Umuakpu, and on 13 September a Nigerian patrol probing the flanks discovered the weak spot. An attack was launched that outflanked the defenses and brought the Nigerians to Obinze, ten miles south of Owerri. From there they ran on into the town.⁴³ In the north, the First Division moved on from Obilagu and captured Oldgwi town. This happened on 1 October and the situation began to change. The arms shippers who had let the Biafrans down over Aba and Owerri had been dismissed and a new air bridge was set up from Libreville, Gabon. Pilots of British, South African, Rhodesian, and French nationality ran it. Acquiring more funds, Colonel Ojukwu gained access to the wider European arms market and greater quantities began to flow in. The Biafrans went on to the counterattack. Williams took over Steiner's position and led two more charges on the city of Onitsha, which was never captured but had the Nigerians sealed within.

However, the Nigerian troops captured the villages of Agolo and Adazi, which threatened the Biafran heartland. The Commandos in the area fought back assisted by the S battalion of infantry. The Nigerians took another beating and retired back to Awka.⁴⁴ This recital of events over the eighteen months may seem to give the impression that the Nigerians advanced into Biafra smoothly, but this was not the case. The Nigerian troops met strong resistance from the Biafran military with every inch of advancement they made into Igboland. Sometimes their objectives were reassessed three or four times due to the nature of resistance. The Biafran military at times succeeded in blocking Nigerian troops for months causing a rewrite of their battle plan. This increased Nigeria's expenditure on ammunition estimated several hundreds of millions of pounds and cost its military loss of several tens of thousands of men.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Biafran army counter-attacked Nigerian troops in Igboland in most sec-

tors, notably at Aba and Owerri. At Aba, Colonel Timothy Onuatuegwu pushed the Federal forces back to the outskirts of the town, then swung his men down the right and left flanks. At Owerri Colonel John Kalu retook 150 square miles of the ground around the town and laid siege.⁴⁶ In the final analysis, the Biafra army's combat bravery and the pockets of temporal victories it recorded during Biafra's international conflict with Nigeria despite being outnumbered and outgunned were arguably fired by Igbo epistemological leanings that laud shrewdness and courage over cowardice.

CONCLUSION

The nexus between war and diplomacy played out well in Igboland during the Biafran War. The findings in this paper showed that the Igbo indigenous knowledge system of the delicate balance between war and diplomacy informed the military readiness of the state of Biafra. Igbo epistemology that extolled gallantry in men this paper argued contributed significantly to the formation of the Biafran army. It was the traditional and philosophical rationale for the Biafran war option when diplomacy (dialogue and the Aburi Accord) failed. Therefore, this paper argued that the Biafran army was born as a child of necessity. It emerged as a backup plan and path to securing the lives and properties of the Igbos through the instrument of violent insurgency and secessionism. During the Biafran war, the Biafran army held its own and gave a good account of itself as a force to reckon with. Although the Biafran army the main component of the Biafran military collapsed in 1970; it nonetheless left its permanent mark in the sand of history. Therefore, this paper contends that factoring the nexus between war and diplomacy in statecraft, nation and state-building struggles, and domestic and international crisis management is central to readiness to respond to unforeseen events, goal setting, policy, and strategic planning.

NOTES

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12. Interview with Mr. Chigozie Chukuwemeka, 72yrs, Civil Servant, at his residence in Aba, 21st February 2021.
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25. Ibid.
26. Gideon Uchechukwu Nwafor, "Analysis of Radio Biafra Effectiveness on the Renewed Agitation for the Restoration of Biafra Republic among Listeners in Onitsha Metropolis," *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences Interdisciplinary*, 13(1), (2013): 7.
27. Ibid., p. 9.
28. Idowu Johnson & Azeez Olaniyan, "The Politics of Renewed Quest for a Biafra Republic in Nigeria," *Journal of Nigerian Institute of International Affairs*, Vol.12 No.5, 2002, 11.
29. Ibid., 22.
30. The ten (10) plotters of the 1966 coup in Nigeria were Major Kaduna Nzeogwu (Igbo), Major Timothy Onwuatiegwu (Igbo), Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna (Igbo), Major Chris Anuforo (Igbo), Major Don Okafor (Igbo), Major Adewale Ademoyega (Yoruba), Major Humphrey Chukwuka (Igbo), Captain Emmanuel Nwobosi (Igbo), Captain Ben Gbulie (Igbo), and Captain Ogbu Oji (Igbo). Retrieved from Military Wiki, "1966 Nigerian Coup d'Etat" https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/1966_Nigerian_Coup_d%27%C3%A9tat.
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35. Interview with Tony Ezewanne, 79 years, former Biafra soldier, at his residence in Nnewi, 20th February 2021.
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40. Interview with Chief Emeka Ezech, 75 years, Chief, at his residence in Nnewi, 20th February 2021.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Interview with, Mrs. Joan Ikechukwu, 68 years, Wife of a former Biafran soldier, at her Residence in Nnewi, 17th February 2021.
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