

CONSEQUENCES OF ERRONEOUS STRATEGIES: THE ANTE-BELLUM PERIOD OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

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Abstract: In dealing with crises and conflicts, we often commit one of the following four errors of strategy: (1) the failure to use hard power when and where it is required; (2) the failure to use soft power when and where it is required; (3) the use of hard power when and where a combination of hard and soft powers (smart power) is required; and (4) the use of soft power when and where smart power should be used. These errors of strategy have sometimes grave and disastrous consequences. This paper aims to prove that, in order to successfully prevent, resolve, manage or deal with crises and conflicts, we need to acknowledge that some of them require hard power, some require soft power, while others require both hard and soft powers (smart power). To contextualise the above hypothesis, employing case study and process tracing, the present paper addresses the ante-bellum period of the Nigeria Civil War. In the end, it will be indicated that the above-mentioned four errors of strategy led to war. If hard, soft and smart powers were used whenever and wherever they were required, the war could have been avoided.

Keywords: conflict, crisis, erroneous strategies, Nigerian Civil War, soft power, hard power, smart power, strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is divided into five sections. The first and fifth are intended introduction and conclusions. In the second section, the key concepts will be clarified. It is very important to do so because they are the hinge around which the discussion revolves. In the third section, I will narrate a brief history of the ante-bellum period of the Nigerian Civil War. Then, in the fourth section, I will explain the

erroneous strategies that led to the war. I chose this crisis/conflict precisely because many people believe that the war was unavoidable. General Yakubu Gowon, the Nigerian head of state at the time of this war, refers to it as “an unfortunate and unpleasant, yet unavoidable, occurrence in the history of Nigeria” (Gowon 2007, 10). While I totally agree with Gowon that the war was unfortunate and unpleasant, I totally disagree with him that it was unavoidable. As I will show below, the war was avoidable. It is a combination of the already mentioned four errors of strategy that led to it.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Outlining the conceptual and theoretical framework is much more the staple of lengthy research papers than a paper like this one. Nevertheless, I need to offer some important clarifications regarding the key concepts that I will use and the sort of analysis I will undertake. These key concepts have various connotations; hence it is vital to make clear their meanings. To understand what the power-concepts of hard power, soft power and smart power are, let us begin by explaining what power is. Power is “the ability to affect others to get the things you want. You can do that in three ways: you can use coercion, sticks; you can use payments, carrots; or you can use attraction and persuasion” (Nye 2011a, 46). Joseph Nye, in *The Future of Power*, introduced the distinction between hard power, soft power and smart power. For Nye, hard power has to do with “coercion and payment”, while soft power with “persuasion and attraction” (Nye 2011b, xiii). In hard power, “coercion” is largely seen as a military force, while “payment” as economic resources. Hence, there are two kinds of hard power: military hard power and economic hard power. The first may be used as a threat of violence or, in actual violence, defensively or offensively, while the second in form of sanction or of an offer of favourable economic conditions or resources.

Soft power as attraction entails the other people in valuing or

cherishing what you are, what you have or what you represent, making them want to imitate you, join you, share in or benefit from what you are, what you have or what you represent. By doing so, they become amenable to you, so you can affect them to get what you want. Soft power as persuasion entails successfully convincing others without using threat or payment, which is a better way to make them accept your arguments or advice. While “smart power is the combination of the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction” (Nye 2011b, xiii), it also refers to “the ability to combine hard and soft power into (...) strategies in varying contexts” (Nye 2011b, xiv). “A strategy relates means to ends, and that requires clarity about goals (preferred outcomes), resources, and tactics for their use” (Nye 2011b, 208). Hence, smart power strategy “must be able to handle very different distributions of power in different domains and understand the trade-offs among them” (Nye 2011b, 213). Although there are military hard power and economic hard power, in this paper I employ the term “hard power” only as military hard power, and I treat economic hard power as soft power. Furthermore, the concepts of hard power, soft power and smart power are used in reference to foreign policy and security policies of states, in particular, and global politics, in general. I will use the concepts in reference to domestic policy, domestic politics, internal security policies and local strategies.

Regarding the Nigerian Civil War, my focus is not on the war itself; rather, on the causal factors of it. Of course, conflicts are man-made phenomena; they are caused by human activities. I am dwelling on the identification of different human activities that caused the war. There is no doubt that, in order to resolve or manage particular conflicts, it is imperative to know the causal factors and the multifaceted nature of the activities that caused them. The Nigerian civil war can be divided into three historical periods: ante-bellum, bellum and post-bellum. For the purpose of my analysis, by the bellum period I mean 6th July 1967 to 15th January 1970. The post-

bellum period starts from 15th January, when the war ended. Although it shows the impact that the war had and continues to have in Nigeria, I will not focus on it. I am more preoccupied with how this war could have been avoided, rather than how it was fought. In other words, my main concern is prevention, rather than combat.

The ante-bellum period ended on 15th January, when the war started. The beginning can be set as far back as 1914, when Nigeria came into being or might be limited to 1st October 1960, when Nigeria gained its independence. For the purpose of my analysis, I will consider its beginning on 15th January 1966, when the so-called five-majors-coup took place. I am settling this date because this event was the most prominent of all possible causes of the war. Since I am concerned with how the war could have been avoided, it is proper that I focus on the ante-bellum period, and for the purpose of my analysis, I will consider the ante-bellum period as it started on 15th January 1966 and ended on 6th July 1967—a period of one year, five months and three weeks.

For analytic, practical and moral reasons, I consider the war as a “bad thing” that ought to be avoided if it were possible. But I am not interested in how the war *should* have been avoided; rather, I am interested in how it *could* have been avoided. Furthermore, for analytic and moral reasons, I consider secession as a neutral, rather than a good or bad thing. For me, secession is what you make of it; it is bad when you make it bad, and good when you make it good. This does not mean that I am encouraging secession or I am saying that it might be good or bad, but that secession in itself is morally neutral. For instance, if a people decides to secede in order to expropriate others from the collective national investment, wealth and development, which the entire country laboured to produce it, this is a bad thing. In the case of Biafra, it will be implausible to say that the secession was based on this ground. However, if a people have to secede in order to avoid pogrom, massacre, carnage, etc., surely this sort of secession must be a good thing. On this ground, we can say that the Biafran secession was morally justified.

3. THE ANTE-BELLUM PERIOD OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR

From the beginning to the end of the ante-bellum period, the geopolitical structure of Nigeria was as follows. From 15th January 1966 to 27th May 1967 there was the Northern Region (dominated by the Hausa/Fulani), the Eastern Region (dominated by the Igbo), the Western Region (dominated by the Yoruba), the Mid-West Region (a combination of minority ethnicities) and the Federal Territory of Lagos. On 27th May 1967, the Northern Region was divided into North-Eastern State, North-Western State, North Central State, Benue-Plateau State, Kano State and Kwara State. The Eastern Region was divided into East-Central State, South-Eastern State and Rivers State. The Western Region (except the Colony Province) became the Western State. The Colony Province of the Western Region and the Federal Territory of Lagos became Lagos State, while the Mid-West Region was renamed Mid-West State. On 30th May 1967, East-Central State, South-Eastern State and Rivers State - that is, the dissolved Eastern Region – seceded from Nigeria and were renamed The Republic of Biafra. This was the final event that led to the civil war.

In the post-independence history of Nigeria (since 1st October 1960), the civil war was the greatest catastrophe that has befallen. The war, which started on 6th July 1967 and effectively ended on 12th January 1970, but officially ended on 15th January 1970, had both remote and immediate multifaceted causes. Many scholars and analysts often reduce its causal factors to ethnicity. This is tantamount to reductionism because, although ethnicity was the principal causal factor, there were other factors too. Almost as important as ethnicity was the regional affiliation. Clearly, the Igbo were the main target in the Eastern Region, and they were its champions. But while the Eastern Region was predominantly Igbo, there were other ethnic groups in that region too. Moreover, during the ante-bellum period, the Northern Region, unlike the Eastern Region, did not present a particular ethnic group as the champion of the Northern

Region, and hence no particular ethnic group was the main target in this region. Reversely, no particular ethnic group was the target in the Northern Region, hence the region did not present any particular ethnic group as its champion. Regional, rather than ethnicity, was the main affiliation there.

Some scholars and analysts erroneously give religion a prominent role in the causation of the war. But a proper analysis of the causes and fighting will show that religion had no consideration in this war. Although the Eastern Region was predominantly Christian and the Northern Region was predominantly Muslim, the principal actors on both sides were Christian: both Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and Yakubu Gowon were Christians. Furthermore, many key players on the Nigerian side were Christians; Benjamin Ad-ekunle, Olusegun Obasanjo, Godwin Alabi-Isama, Theophilus Danjuma, Obafemi Awolowo, etc.

Alongside ethnic and regional factors, the economic factor also played a crucial role. Since the war, petroleum has remained a factor in Nigerian conflicts. Oil played a strategic role in the fighting of the war. Although Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu - the leader of Biafra - was primarily fighting for the Igbo, he annexed the South-Eastern State (non-Igbo) and Rivers States (Igbo and non-Igbo). One reason for this annexation might be because of the Igbo in Rivers State; but if so, then he would have also annexed Mid-West State because of the Igbo there. Another reason for the annexation was that South-Eastern State and Rivers State were part of the dissolved Eastern Region. Yet, a more plausible reason is that of strategy. Strategically, he needed to annex the two states for military and economic reasons. Militarily, firstly, he would have more people to fight for him in these places, while the federal government would consequently have less, and, secondly, these places would have been a buffer between the core Igbo state and Nigeria. It was for the same reasons that he forced the Mid-West State to be neutral in the early days of the war and even forced them to declare independence, which lasted one day.

The economic strategy for the annexation was simply because these states have oil; at least this is the most plausible economic reason. In order to thwart the military and economic strategies mentioned above, when the strongest command of the Nigerian Army during the war (the Third Marine Commando commanded by Benjamin Adekunle, who was later replaced by Olusegun Obasanjo) invaded Biafra, the first task of the commandoes was to recapture these states for Nigeria. With the recapturing of the states, Nigeria did not only reduce the military and political strength of Biafra but also because of the oil Nigeria could fund the war, while Biafra could no longer fund it. This, to a large extent, contributed to Nigeria winning the war and Biafra losing it.

Nevertheless, among the remote and immediate multifaceted causes of the war, the most important factors are: the January 1966 coup; the July 1966 counter-coup; the pogrom before, during and after the counter-coup; the failure of Aburi Accord; and, finally, the secession of the Eastern Region, which was renamed The Republic of Biafra. The 1st October 1960 independence theoretically set Nigeria on a journey to greatness. Having been freed from the clutches of British colonialists, Nigerians felt they had 'their destiny' in their own hands and could go on to achieve greatness. But these beliefs and hopes of the average Nigerian were dashed by the political class, which was characterised by corruption, violence, electoral malpractices and regionalist favouritism. Having been disenchanted with politicians, middle-ranked military officers attempted to overthrow the government, on 15th January 1966, in a failed *coup d'état*.

On the one hand, most of the prominent leaders of the 15th January 1966 *coup* were Igbo. Among them: Majors Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, Timothy Onwuatuegwu, Christian Anuforo, Humphrey Chukwuka, Don Okafor, Captains Ben Gbulie, Emmanuel Nwobosi and Ogbu Oji. Moreover, many of the prominent persons who were killed during the coup were northerners. Among them: Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Prime Minister), Ahmadu Bello (Premier of the Northern Region), Brigadier Zakar-

iya Maimalari (Brigade Commander, 2nd Brigade), Col. Kur Mohammed (Chief of Staff, Army), Lt. Col. Abogo Lagerma (Commanding Officer, 4th Battalion), Lt. Col. James Pam (Adjutant-General, Army Headquarters), etc. When a northerner-prime minister, Tafawa Balewa, was killed, he was succeeded by an Igbo head of state, Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi. Due to the above facts, northerners saw the coup as an Igbo coup against the north. Consequently, northern military officers launched the 29th July 1966 counter-coup, primarily against the Igbo. Aguiyi-Ironsi was assassinated together with many Igbo officers. Although a northerner, Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, succeeded Aguiyi-Ironsi as the head of state, the northern vengeance against the Igbo did not stop after the counter-coup. Northern military officers engaged in massacring Igbo military officers, but also many non-Igbos from the Eastern Region. This escalated the pogrom against the Igbo, pogrom which already started in the north before the counter-coup. When thousands of Igbo and other easterners continued to lose their lives, the rest of them had to seek refuge in their region, for they could no longer feel safe anywhere else. To curb the pogrom, soldiers were asked to return to their regions of origin. Furthermore, the governor of the predominantly Igbo region - Eastern Region - Lt. Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu (an Igbo), called on easterners to leave other parts of Nigeria and return to the Eastern Region, while he ordered non-Easterners to leave the Eastern Region.

On 4th-5th January 1967, in order to resolve the crisis, the delegates of the Eastern Region, led by Ojukwu, and those of the federal government, led by Gowon met in Aburi, Ghana. At the end of the meeting, Ojukwu and Gowon signed the Aburi Accord. However, among the clauses of this accord, two of them turned out to be problematic. The first stated that federal legislative and executive powers should continue to reside in the Supreme Military Council, which was saddled with the responsibility of making decisions on all national matters. This clause had a provision which stated that when it is impossible for the Supreme Military Council to meet and decide

on national matters, such matters should be decided by the regional military governors. The other problematic clause stated that the country should revert to the Republican Constitution that existed before 15th January 1966 by repealing the decrees passed since 15th January 1966. In other words, the semi-autonomous status of the regions should be restored and power should be decentralized.

Despite the Aburi Accord, the enmity between the two sides of the conflict continued. Gowon feared that Ojukwu was leading the Eastern Region to secession. In order to avoid the feared secession, Gowon declared, on 27th May 1967, a state of emergency, dissolved the existing four regions and created, in their stead, twelve states. The Eastern Region was split into three states, namely East-Central State, South-Eastern State and Rivers State. Notably, the Igbo were separated from the minority ethnic groups in the former Eastern Region. The new home of the Igbo became the East-Central State. While there were some Igbo in Rivers States and Mid-West State, they were by no means dominant there. It was only the East-Central State that the majority of Igbo could properly call home.

In the struggle between Gowon and Ojukwu, Gowon's dissolution of regions and the creation of states gave him three advantages, which were, in turn, Ojukwu's disadvantages. First, the Igbo lost the support of the minority groups that used to be parts of the dissolved Eastern Region. Second, the petroleum resources that belonged to the dissolved Eastern Region became the property of South-Eastern State and Rivers State, where the Igbo did not have control. Thirdly, Ojukwu's reign as governor of Eastern Region had come to an end since there was no more Eastern Region; hence Ojukwu was to lose his political power. Regarding the strategic dissolution of the existing four regions and the creation of twelve states, Gowon said: "even Decree No. 81 or Confederation or Loose Association will never survive if a section of the country is in the position to hold the others to ransom. This is why the item in the political and administrative programme adopted by the Supreme Military Council last month is the creation of states as a basis for stability. This must

be done first so as to remove the fear of domination” (Vanguard 2010).

After realising his disadvantages and how the new development had breached the clauses of the Aburi Accord, Ojukwu stated the well-known phrase: “On Aburi we stand”. On 30th May 1967, he declared the secession of the entire former Eastern Region, which was renamed The Republic of Biafra. Three reasons for this secession can be plausibly deduced from the ante-bellum period. The main one - the protection of lives of the Igbo, in particular, and the lives of the people of the Eastern Region, in general. The second, closely related to the first, is the promotion of the interests of the Igbo, in particular, and the interests of the people from the Eastern Region, in general. The third reason, which is closely related to the second, is that given the petroleum resources in the Eastern Region, secession would mean that this resource would belong to the Eastern Region alone, rather than entire Nigeria; hence Biafrans would have been better-off economically if they were to secede. Declaring the Republic of Biafra, Ojukwu said:

(...) you, the people of Eastern Nigeria (...) aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives and in your property by any Government based outside eastern Nigeria; believing that you are born free and have certain inalienable rights which can best be preserved by yourselves; unwilling to be unfree partners in any association of a political or economic nature; rejecting the authority of any person or persons other than the Military Government of Eastern Nigeria to make any imposition of whatever kind or nature upon you; determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former Federal Republic of Nigeria; (...) having mandated me to proclaim, on your behalf and in your name, that Eastern Nigeria be a sovereign independent Republic. Now therefore I (...) do hereby solemnly proclaim that the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria together with her continental shelf and territorial waters shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of The Republic of Biafra. And I do declare that all political ties between us and the Federal Republic of Nigeria are hereby totally dissolved (Siollun 2008a).

In reaction to the secession, the federal government immediately

imposed economic blockades on Biafra in order to weaken its ability to successfully secede. A month and a week later, on 6th July 1967, the Nigerian Civil War officially started with the advancement of federal troops into Biafra. The Biafran soldiers surrendered, on 12th January 1967, and the war officially ended on 15th January 1970. An estimated one million civilians and one hundred thousand soldiers have lost their lives. There are many reasons for which we can say that the federal government did not acquiesce to the Eastern Region's secession bid. These include the geographical reason, namely territorial integrity. In order to explain why he rejects the Eastern Region's "insistence on its separate existence as a sovereign unit", Gowon said: "the citizens of this country [Nigeria] have not given the Military Regime any mandate to divide up the country into sovereign states and to plunge them into bloody disaster" (Vanguard 2010).

The problem with allowing a particular section of a country to secede is the fear of the domino effect, that the other parts might follow the model. Moreover, the domino effect might go beyond its borders. Here is a good proof in this regard:

Britain was a key arms supplier to the federal government, enabling it to crush the rebellion because it believed that Biafran secession would create regional instability. The British (...) Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, agonised over this policy. 'It would have been quite easy for me to say: this is going to be difficult - let's cut off all connexion with the Nigerian Government', he says, now 'If I'd done that I should have known that I was encouraging in Africa the principle of tribal secession - with all the misery that could bring to Africa in the future' (qt. in Barnaby 2000).

Moreover, in one of his speeches during the war, Ojukwu said that the Nigerian leaders "have also attempted to confuse the Africans and indeed world opinion by propagating the despicable falsehood that our independence would be a precedent for separation in other African states" (Ojukwu's Speech 2010).

Another reason for not acquiescing to secession is the fraternity. Since the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protec-

torates in 1914, Nigeria has been a “fraternal unit”. Although the easterners wanted to secede, the federal government felt that the fraternal unity was priceless. According to Gowon:

(...) whilst it was commonplace for the media reports to refer to the crisis as a ‘Civil War’, we preferred to call it a rebellion, and to therefore term the action taken to deal with it as ‘Police Action/Military Action’, not war. These terms were deliberately used because I believed that the term ‘war’ promoted the image of a battle between two hostile enemies. I did not consider the Eastern Region and the Igbos an enemy, but rather a misled area. Furthermore, the war would have entailed the excessive use of force and justify unethical behaviour and action that, in my opinion, was unacceptable (Gowon 2007, 13).

Gowon’s sense of fraternity and unity was reflected, at the end of the war, in the ideas of “no victor, no vanquished” and “no medals for the federal soldiers” in order to foster reconciliation and reintegration. In the official declaration at the end of the war, Gowon said:

On our side, we fought the war with great caution, not in anger or hatred, but always in the hope that common sense would prevail. Many times we sought a negotiated settlement, not out of weakness, but in order to minimize the problems of reintegration, reconciliation and reconstruction. We knew that however the war ended, in the battlefield, or in the conference room, our brothers fighting under other colours must rejoin us and that we must together rebuild the nation anew (Siollun 2008b).

Other reasons for not acquiescing to secession are economic and political. On the economic reason, the vast petroleum resources in the Eastern Region would have made Nigeria a more viable economy. On the political reason, a balkanized Nigeria is a weaker Nigeria, while a non-balkanized Nigeria is a stronger one. In this regard, Gowon said:

The world knows how hard we strove to avoid the civil war. Our objectives in fighting the war to crush Ojukwu’s rebellion were always clear. We desired to preserve the territorial integrity and unity of Nigeria. For, as one country, we would be able to maintain lasting peace amongst our various communities;

achieve rapid economic development to improve a lot of our people; guarantee a dignified future and respect in the world for our prosperity and contribute to African unity and modernization. On the other hand, the small successor states in a disintegrated Nigeria would be victims of perpetual war and misery and neo-colonialism (Siollun 2008b).

4. ERRONEOUS STRATEGIES

The war failed to be avoided because of a combination of strategy errors made by the principal actors during the ante-bellum period. Firstly, hard power was used when and where soft power was required. Secondly, soft power was used when and where hard power was required. Thirdly, hard power alone was used when and where a combination of hard power and soft power (smart power) was required. Finally, soft power alone was used when and where a combination of soft power and hard power (smart power) was required. In considering these errors of strategy, I will focus on the principal actors of the ante-bellum period, since their actions and omissions were of utmost importance to the country. I am not necessarily isolating the principal actors as individuals; I see them both as individuals and representatives of the various collaborators with whom they acted or failed to act, and the various constituencies they represented. The various errors of strategy are as follows.

The leaders of the coup from January 1966 believed that they could bring the revolution they wanted only through hard power. According to Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, “the aim of the Revolutionary Council is to establish a strong united and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife. Our method of achieving this is strictly military” (Siollun 2008c). This extreme reliance on military hard power did not result only in the July 1966 counter-coup and the subsequent crisis, which culminated in secession and civil war. It also produced a domino effect that established a coup culture and military rule in Nigeria until 29th May 1999.

The leaders of July 1966 counter-coup believed that the only way in which they could get the ‘justice’ they wanted for the slain north-

ern political and military leaders, the change of leadership of the country and the secession of the northern region was through hard power.

Aguiyi-Ironsi's failure to 'adequately' punish the January 1966 coup leaders and Gowon's total failure to punish the July 1966 counter-coup leaders can be considered to be grave strategic failures of relying on soft power when hard power should have been relied on. Aguiyi-Ironsi was seen as being too 'soft', rather than 'hard', by the January 1966 coup leaders. This fact contributed to northern military officers' quest for 'justice' or vengeance, which resulted in the July 1966 counter-coup. To what extent Aguiyi-Ironsi should have used hard power to adequately punish the coup leaders is difficult to tell. But he already used hard power to successfully check the coup leaders and arrest most of them, prosecuting and adequately punishing them. On his part, Gowon's placating and pacifying the July 1966 counter-coup leaders rather than punishing them contributed to the Igbo (in particular) and the easterners (in general) deciding they were no longer safe anywhere in the country except in their own region. It was this grounded feeling of insecurity that, one year later, led to secession and, subsequently, to war.

Aguiyi-Ironsi did not use military power to stop northerners from massacring the Igbo, in particular, and killing easterners, in general. Here, Aguiyi-Ironsi needed to act urgently; he should have immediately used hard power to stop the massacre, and then employ soft power to pacify, reconcile and reintegrate both sides of the conflict. Gowon too did not use hard power to stop the northern soldiers who were massacring Igbo soldiers, in particular, and killing soldiers from the eastern region, in general. Furthermore, Gowon did not use military force to stop northern civilians from massacring Igbo civilians, in particular, and killing eastern civilians, in general. Like Aguiyi-Ironsi, Gowon erroneously relied on soft power alone and failed to use hard power when and where he should have used it.

Aguiyi-Ironsi opted for extreme pacifism and persuasion to the

extent that although the country was very volatile, he failed to employ military power to quell the ongoing unrest and prevent the imminent violence that was almost certain to happen. He only relied on 'soft' consultations and persuasions. He went on a nationwide tour to seek the support of leaders in the different regions (especially traditional rulers) in pacifying and persuading their people to shelve violence. It was on that tour that he too was assassinated. While engaging on pacifism and persuasion, Aguiyi-Ironsi should have at least put the security threat level on 'red', and hence put his hard power on alert since he knew the country was facing a severe security risk.

Like Aguiyi-Ironsi, Gowon extremely relied on soft power and failed to use hard power when he should have used it to prevent an imminent civil war. In essence, he failed to combine hard power with soft power, in other words, he failed to use smart power when it was required. Dissolving the existing four regions and creating twelve states in order to avoid secession, Gowon said:

Nigeria has been immersed in an extremely grave crisis for almost eighteen months. We have now reached a most critical phase where what is at stake is the very survival of Nigeria as one political and economic unit (...). The whole world is witness to the continued defiance of federal authority by the Government of the Eastern Region (...). The consequence of these illegal sets has been the increasing deterioration of the Nigerian economy. It has also produced uncertainty and insecurity and pushed the country with increasing tempo towards total disintegration and possible civil war and bloodshed on a massive scale. In the face of all these, I have shown great restraint, hoping that through peaceful negotiations a solution acceptable to all sections of the country can be found. Unfortunately, the hopes of myself and my other colleagues on the Supreme Military Council have been disappointed (Vanguard 2010).

While engaging on pacifism and persuasion, Gowon too should have at least put the security threat level on 'red', and hence put his hard power on alert since he knew the country was facing severe security risks. Gowon believed that persuasion would work; hence

the Aburi meeting which led to the Aburi Accord. Gowon would later agree that persuasion failed. Referring to the failure of persuasion, Gowon said:

(...) but what has been the response of the Eastern Region Government? Complete rejection of Decree No. 8 and insistence on its separate existence as a sovereign unit (...). The response of the east has been completely negative and they have continued their propaganda and stage-managed demonstrations for 'independence' (...). Even Decree No. 8 or Confederation or Loose Association will never survive if any one section of the country is in a position to hold the others to ransom (Vanguard 2010).

Gowon believed that the “appeasement” of Ojukwu and the eastern region could work.

I have spared no effort to conciliate the East in recognition of their understandable grievances and fears since the tragic incidents of 1966. To this end, I agreed with my other colleagues on the Supreme Military Council to the promulgation of the Decree No. 8 which completely decentralized the government of this country and even went further than the Republican Constitution as it existed before 15th January 1966 (Vanguard 2010).

But Gowon later agreed that the appeasement failed. Referring to the failure of the appeasement of Ojukwu, he said:

Lt. Col. Ojukwu has continuously increased his demands as soon as some are met in order to perpetuate the crisis and lead the Eastern Region out of Nigeria. We know very well the tragic consequences of such a misguided step. Not only will the regions themselves disintegrate further, but before then, pushed by foreign powers and mercenaries who will interfere, this dear country will be turned into a bloody stage for chaotic and wasteful civil war (Vanguard 2010).

Even when he used hard power, Gowon was extremely cautious to the extent that rather than using military action to prevent the secession, he opted for, and attempted to use police action. It was only when his first and preferred option failed that he opted to use military action. He said: “a breakup of the country was imminent and

needed to be prevented. Police Action was taken but the defiance escalated and was insufficient to stop the drift towards secession. [Then] a full military action was ordered” (Gowon 2007, 12). Nevertheless, to his credit, Gowon was conscious of the fact that in trying to prevent a civil war like the Nigerian one, the problem with using excessive hard power is that even if it succeeds to prevent the war, it will still be counter-productive later on. Using too much hard power, even if it succeeds in preventing the secession, may make the Igbo resentful of Nigeria. If the Igbo’s resentment of Nigeria is a continuous one, then this raises questions of domination and legitimacy. Continuously forcing a people to be under you against their will can be argued to be tantamount to domination and hence the question of legitimacy will becloud the achieved ‘forced unity.’

During the January 1966 coup, Ojukwu relied on hard power to contribute to stopping the coup leaders from taking over the country. After the coup, during the subsequent crisis that ensued, Ojukwu initially relied on soft power – as evidenced by the Aburi meeting. But he later resorted to hard power to get the secession of the Eastern Region. Firstly, when he needed to use hard power, during the January 1966 coup, he did. Secondly, when he needed to use soft power during the subsequent crisis which ensued after the coup, he did. However, thirdly, when he totally jettisoned soft power and absolutely relied on hard power in order to guarantee the secession of the Eastern Region, he fell into an error of strategy. During the Aburi meeting, he wanted a clause to be included in the accord, which was to allow regions to secede if they wish to do so. But the clause was rejected by the representatives of the federal government. Nevertheless, the war became inevitable the moment he decided to totally jettison soft power and absolutely rely on hard power. Ojukwu over-relied on hard power and then got his strategy wrong. Perhaps it was Gowon’s reputation for over-reliance on soft power that led Ojukwu to wrongly believe that he could use hard power to intimidate the former. As Gowon says, “during the crisis, my colleague and brother, Emeka Ojukwu, said: ‘We know Gen.

Gowon, he is a Christian and he would not like to fight. Do you know the first thing he puts in his suitcase? His Bible; and that will make him not to engage in a fight'. I think, unfortunately, he was proved wrong. As a Christian soldier, it was my duty to keep my country together" (Punch 2015).

In short, it is not that Ojukwu, the January 1966 coup leaders and the July 1966 counter-coup leaders should have totally rejected hard power and absolutely opted for soft power. Also, it is not that Aguiyi-Ironsi and Gowon should have totally rejected soft power and absolutely opted for hard power. Soft power, as well as hard power, might work extremely well or might not work at all. Some contexts require soft power just as some other require hard power. But, there are situations that require smart power. Given that smart power contains the resources of both soft and hard powers, it has the best chance of success and, hence, it is the best possible option. In an economic analogy, soft power and hard powers can be seen as mono-product economies, while smart power as a diversified economy. Just as a diversified economy, rather than a mono-product economy - or an almost mono-product economy - is a safer way to produce economic growth, in particular, and economic development, in general, so smart power is preferable to soft power on the one hand, and hard power, on the other. Nevertheless, there are contexts that require only hard power or soft power, just as there are contexts that require smart power.

The problem is not that Ojukwu, the January 1966 coup leaders and the July 1966 counter-coup leaders relied on hard power, nor that Aguiyi-Ironsi and Gowon relied on soft power. Rather, it is that the January 1966 and the July 1966 coup leaders exclusively relied on hard power to the extent that they totally rejected or, at least had no consideration, for soft power in their strategy. Similarly, the problem is that Aguiyi-Ironsi and Gowon over-relied on soft power and neglected hard power to the detriment of their strategies. Also, in the end, Ojukwu over-relied on hard power and jettisoned soft power. Ironically, the January 1966 coup leaders, especially

Nzeogwu - the most popular of them - used the soft power of ideology to recruit soldiers for the coup. But they totally abandoned soft power when they planned and executed their revolution. Similarly, it was the soft power of regional affiliation that united northerners, and it was based on this regional affiliation that the northern coup leaders of the July 1966 counter-coup sought to seek 'justice' for fellow northerners. But they threw soft power out of the window when they embarked on their mission to seek 'justice.' Also, ironically, it was hard power that Aguiyi-Ironsi used to successfully check the January 1966 coup. But after this, he jettisoned hard power, just as it was soft power that took Ojukwu to Aburi.

5. CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion shows that the Nigerian Civil War failed to be avoided because of four errors of strategy. In other words, if hard power, soft power and smart power were used whenever and wherever they were required, the war could have been avoided. To resolve, manage or deal with cases such as the ante-bellum period of the Nigerian civil war, we need strategies that are at once balanced and flexible. On the one hand, by balanced strategy I mean a strategy that neither only considers hard power and discounts soft power, nor only consider soft power and discounts hard power. Rather, it contains both - smart power. On the other hand, by flexible strategy I mean a strategy that is not only suitable for crises and conflicts that require hard power or soft power but is at once suitable for crises and conflicts that require hard power or soft power or smart power (Abumere 2015, 7-8). As Nye says, "an approach too rigid to strategy can be counterproductive" (Nye 2011b, 212). The three merits of a balanced and flexible strategy are: it has hard power to deal with crises and conflicts when and where hard power is required; it has soft power to deal with crises and conflicts when and where soft power is required; and it has smart power – that is, it can

combine both hard power and soft power in order to deal with crises and conflicts (Abumere 2015, 7-8). Hence it eliminates, or at least reduces, the frequency of occurrence of these four errors of strategy.

Nye aptly asserts that “power always depends on context” (Nye 2011b, xiv). In view of the above assertion, using hard power in a context that requires soft power will be counterproductive or, at least, will lead to failure; and using soft power in a context that requires will have the same negative result (Abumere 2015, 7-8). In other words, hard power is useless in a context that requires soft power, and soft power is useless in a context that requires hard power. “In the relationship between strategy and crisis or conflict, the nature of the crisis or conflict should determine the nature of the strategy that is formulated and implemented to deal with them” (Abumere 2015, 7-8). In order to know when and where to use hard power, soft power or smart power, we should ask the following questions: (i) “what goals or outcomes are preferred?”; (ii) “what resources are available and in which contexts”; (iii) “what the positions and preferences of the targets of influence attempts are?”; (iv) “which forms of power behaviour are most likely to succeed?”; (v) “what the probability of success is?” (Nye 2011b, 208-209). Depending on the answers to these five questions we will know whether we should rely on only hard power, only soft power, or we should use smart power.

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Notes

1. In essence, this decree has constitutionally restored the confederation.