

The abandonment of Biafran military initiative and indigenous weapons development in Nigeria

Abstract

The study examined the Nigeria-Biafra war vis-à-vis indigenous weapon development in Nigeria in order to ascertain whether the abandonment of Biafran military initiative undermines indigenous weapons development in Nigeria. The study leveraged the proposition of the Marxian theory of the post-colonial state propounded by Hamza Alavi in 1972 to bear witness with the argument in discourse that the abandonment of Biafran military initiatives undermined indigenous weapons development in Nigeria. The study also adopted the documentary method of data collection and content analysis with the purpose of analyzing data generated through secondary sources. It also revealed that the abandonment of Biafra military initiatives, such as Ogbunigwe, Biafra-made arms and ammunition, amongst others, undermined indigenous weapons development in Nigeria, consequently leading to high dependence on weapon purchases and huge military expenditure in the country. Finally, it is recommended, amongst other things, that the Federal Government of Nigeria should revisit the Biafran War Museum in Umuahia, Abia State, and set up a special committee of inquiry in order to revamp it for technical military training/studies.

Keywords: coups, genocide, killings, marginalization, Ogbunigwe, Ojukwu buckets

Volume 12 Issue 4 - 2024

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Received: November 30, 2024 | **Published:** December 18, 2024

Introduction

It is an obvious fact that the corporate existence of Nigeria has its etymological trace to 1914, when British government forcefully amalgamated various ethno-religious groups of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani into an entity called Nigeria through a British Colonial Governor, Fredrick Lord Lugard on 1st January, 1914 for easy colonial administration.¹ The country gained her political independence in 1960, after much persuasion with the north that had initially refused self-governance on the account that they were not ready. Subsequently, political competition in Nigeria became firmly entrenched in significant issues, sparking intense disputes along ethnic, religious, and regional lines within the nation.² This situation was exacerbated by an adopted British-imposed constitution that disproportionately granted overwhelming authority to the northern region, thereby fostering increased regionalism and political discord throughout the country.²

Moreover, the foundational factors that precipitated the Nigerian Civil War from 1967 to 1970 were closely tied to evident and persistent ethnic, religious, and regional mistrust among the three major groups—the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa/Fulani—in the country. Before the civil war, Nigeria experienced a series of political crises and upheavals, with notable events such as the Kano Riot of 1953, the Census Crisis of 1962, the Federal Election Crisis of 1964, and the Coups and Counter Coups of 1966.³ Oyekanmi² argued that the 1953 Kano Riot stemmed from Northern leaders' suspicion that Southern leaders were attempting to coerce them into a national integration they were unprepared for. Southern leaders, led by Chief S. L. Akintola of the Action Group, sought to educate Northerners about the benefits of self-determined governance. However, this effort led to a four-day riot in Sabongari, Kano, from May 16 to 19, 1963, exacerbating tensions between Southern and Northern leaders.⁴ Similarly, the Census Crisis of 1962 was fueled by ethnic suspicion, with Southerners assuming that the Census Director, a Northerner, had been influenced to favor the North in reporting census figures. The Federal Election Crisis of

1964 revolved around regional politics, with the United Progressive Grand Alliance (comprising NCNC and AG) considered a Southern party and the Nigerian National Alliance (comprising NPC and NNDP) viewed as a Northern party.²

This regional polarization culminated in inevitable crises, leading to coups and countercoups in the country. The pursuit of political power became paramount, resulting in Nigeria's first-ever military coup on January 15, 1966. The coup, led by a group of army officers, predominantly Southeastern Igbos—Emmanuel Ifeajuna and Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu—was labeled by some Nigerians, particularly those from non-Igbo ethnic groups, as the «Igbo coup.» This perception was based on the belief that it was a calculated effort by the Igbo to ascend to power, as numerous Northern politicians, including the Federal Prime Minister and the premiers of the Western and Northern regions, were killed, while their Igbo counterparts were spared.⁵ This led to the mass migration of hundreds of thousands of Ibos from the North to the Southeast, fuelled by the rising prominence of Igbo secessionist sentiments, particularly in response to the Igbo massacre in the North in 1966. Additionally, the July 1966 counter coup, resulting in the death of General Aguiyi Ironsi and the emergence of Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon as the new Head of State, intensified tensions. However, Gowon's appointment was contested by the military governor of the Eastern Region, Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, who advocated for Brigadier Ogunjipe, a senior military officer, to succeed Ironsi instead. These conflicts, as noted by Ajetunmobi,² set the stage for the declaration of the independent Republic of Biafra by Lt. Col. Ojukwu on July 6, 1967. Subsequently, the war erupted, marked by genocidal acts committed against the people of the Southeast. The war was according to its effect as meted to the people of the southeastern region, described as an “unfortunate Nigerian civil war,” as over 3 million people, majorly Igbos, died, including women and children. According to Ezeani⁵, “Giwa Amu, a solicitor-general, writing in the *Sunday Observer*, March 16, 1983, described how a large number of Midwestern Igbo were slaughtered.” He further maintained that “for record purposes, however, let me state

fearlessly that I saw hundreds of unarmed civilians being shot at sight in Benin City when federal troops arrived to liberate the city from rebel soldiers".⁵

However, our major concern is never surrounded on the war and its effects, because documentary evidence abounds on the effects, onslaught, and terrors meted against the people of the southeast during the war. But our major concern in this work is on the technological improvising by the South-Easterners (Igbo Biafrans) during the war as against an obvious non-availability of sufficient war materials (ammunitions). Apparently, it is pertinent to note that unlike the Biafra side, Nigeria fought the war under favourable conditions of sufficient and sophisticated war ammunitions and international id. It is crucial to emphasize that the history of the Nigerian Civil War represents a significant milestone in the military history and diplomatic relations of an independent African state. Notably, during the conflict, Nigeria experienced the introduction of sophisticated 20th-century military technology in a battlefield where fellow Nigerians engaged in unfortunate conventional territorial combat, thanks to international assistance. Interestingly, the quantity of modern weapons in the Nigerian-Biafra War was not substantial on the part of Biafra; however, their impact was profound on the opposing side.² The above statement implies that Biafra never had much sophisticated arms and ammunition unlike their Nigerian counterpart. Or in other words, Biafra's armed strength did not match that of the Federal Government of Nigeria, because it (Biafra) was placed on the brink of relative isolation from the rest of the world largely due to persistent Federal blockades.⁶

This therefore compelled Biafra to be faced with grave difficulties in securing external arms supply and economic assistance from other willing and volunteer nations, yet they were still able to surmount the pressure and the Nigerian army for the period of 30 months through improvised, locally made weapons. The intensity of the war due to a lack of conflict capital (arms) subjected the Biafran side to the development of the Biafran infant arm industry. The infant arm industry independently produced locally fabricated hand grenades, cartridges, mines, and guns, with the most outstanding being the Ogbunigwe, which is literally translated to mean mass killer.⁶ He further maintained that the aforementioned locally made weapons, particularly the ogbunigwe, were fabricated in various shapes and sizes to act as rockets, hand grenades, and mines, or as a surface-to-air weapon. Furthermore, there were also considerable advances made in the fabrication of armoured vehicles from agricultural tractors, bulldozers, and harvesters, which were popularly known as the *Biafran Red Devil* and *Genocide*.⁷ Aside from the above-mentioned technological improvisation development, Radio Biafra, which was established by the defunct government of the Republic of Biafra during the Nigeria-Biafra war on the 30th of May, 1967, to champion the Biafran war propaganda,² was another record of Biafran technological development during the war.

What next after the war? It is essential to note that following every war, societies confront challenging decisions in addressing post-conflict issues. These include grappling with the legacy of past injustices and atrocities, rebuilding strained relationships resulting from conflict, ensuring public safety in all aspects of life, and the establishment of legitimate, effective political and administrative institutions.⁸ The distinct nature of each post-conflict society means that these processes vary in terms of prioritization, timing, responsible parties, and methodology. The aftermath of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War from 1967 to 1970 was no exception to these challenges. Similar to the aforementioned considerations, there was a declaration of 'no victor, no vanquished' following the regrettable civil war. This

means neither Nigeria nor Biafra lost nor won the war, even though there was an obvious winner and loser of the war, as the secessionist Biafra was obviously defeated in the war. In consonance with the above, Ndiokwere⁹ argued that there were the obvious victors and the vanquished of the concluded Nigeria-Biafra civil war. He further contends that "it was only a truce that was declared as the vanquished Igbos continued to suffer unparalleled humiliation, marginalization, and alienation from the government that promised reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction".⁹ Obviously, the above declaration and promises may be characterized by deceit or a pretentious strategy of reabsorbing the defeated Biafran side into Nigeria under the banner of national unity.

As clearly observed, the above declaration was to reintegrate both sides into one entity called Nigeria. Furthermore, the 3Rs of the reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation policy were introduced, with the aim of reuniting the defeated Biafra with Nigeria. However, our primary concern with this work is the genuine commitment to re-integrate the defeated Biafran into Nigeria. This is because some of the Biafran technological advancements, such as the locally fabricated hand grenades, cartridges, mines, guns, Ogbunigwe, the fabrication of armoured vehicles known as the Biafran Red Devil and Genocide, and the construction of radio stations, have been abandoned since the end of the war in 1970. The failure to genuinely adhere to the proclaimed declaration of 'no victor, no vanquished' after the war, coupled with the implementation of the 3Rs policy - reconciliation, reconstruction, and rehabilitation - resulted in the displacement of the Igbo population from formal sectors of the economy. The failure to integrate the Igbos into the formal sector after the war, especially in the country's science and technological department, justified their involvement in the informal sector. This sector, characterized by informal manufacturing and long-distance trading networks, heavily relies on operations outside state structures for survival.⁸ Consequently, this led to the abandonment of the Biafran military initiatives, which could have facilitated the development of indigenous weapons in Nigeria. Therefore, the study shall advance using the following subheading to bear witness to the argument that the abandonment of the Biafran military initiative undermined indigenous weapons development in Nigeria. The subheadings include, amongst others, bombs of mass destruction (Ogbunigwe) and dependency on weapon purchases in Nigeria; Biafra-made arms/ammunitions and huge military expenditure; Ojukwu buckets/airstrips and aggression/terrorism in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study employed the documentary method as its primary approach for data collection. The documentary method involves utilizing relevant written and documented materials already in existence, even if they were not originally created for the direct use of the researchers.¹⁰ These materials, such as books, book chapters, journal articles, official documents, newspapers, magazines, internet resources, and unpublished papers, were deemed valuable for the study. Additionally, content analysis was adopted to analyze the documented materials gathered through secondary sources of data collection. As highlighted by Udeh et al.,¹¹ content analysis is a structured technique for systematically and validly analyzing documents. In this approach, the researcher establishes a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories, which are then used to analyze documents, recording the frequency of each category observed in the studied documents. Furthermore, content analysis serves as a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication, making it well-suited for this study given its complex nature.

Theoretical discourse

For the purpose of explaining how the abandonment of the Biafran military initiative undermined indigenous weapons development in Nigeria, this study utilized the propositions of the Marxian theory of the post-colonial state propounded by Hamza Alavi in 1972¹² to firmly bear witness to the scholarly argument that the abandonment of the Biafran military initiative undermined indigenous weapons development in Nigeria. The theory was further popularized by the emerging political economic scholars such as Ake (1981) and Idode (1989).¹³ Accordingly, John Soul explicitly highlighted three dominant assumptions of the theory in the contemporary African states as follows:

- I. The post-colonial African state was created by the metropolitan bourgeoisie, because of that it needs an administrative apparatus it could control. While, the local administrative state is in turn controlled by the indigenous population.
- II. The post-colonial state has a specific role in promoting and manipulating the indigenous policies (politics and economic).
- III. In post-colonial societies political hegemony (leaders) must be maintained by the African state once it assumes political power.¹²

Furthermore, the theory emphasized that post-colonial states like Nigeria appear as the most precious value desirable to possess due to the weak nature of their members to politics. Therefore, creating an impression that access to state power is the quickest and easiest means for religious, regional, and ethnic patronage on one hand; again, access to state power is also conceived as an instrument of inflicting pains, penury, marginalization, and domination of other sections and ethnic nationalities, amongst others in the society. Akin to the above, state power therefore becomes the most lucrative desire of leaders as an instrument of power, domination, and wealth against the general interest of the state and citizenry at large, whom they are expected to serve.

The situation appears so worrisome and attracted a question like, why are leaders in most third world countries, like Nigeria, who are meant to use their leadership position to reposition the country, introduce, and implement policies and programs geared towards national development, rather than using it retrogressively against some individuals, regions, and tribes, and for personal interest and survival as against the national development of the country? However, the answer to the above question is never far-fetched from the assumption of the theory that access to state power is not only conceived as the quickest means of en-massing wealth and becoming so rich. But also as an instrument of becoming too powerful, even above the state that conferred such leadership power on them on one hand, and as an instrument of marginalization, domination through an unprecedented process of manipulating national policies on the other hand.¹³

Again, Ake argued that the contemporary African states are predominated by elements of class domination, who see their acceptance by the dominant political class as an opportunity to exhibit their individualistic corrupt character as against the primary purpose of leadership, which entails dedication and selfless service and service delivery to the society that confidently will their support to them (leaders).¹² In acceptance of the assumptions of the theory, scholars within the background of consequences of bad leadership argued that no development can thrive under such a hostile environment due to bad leadership and governance; instead, it may create more social vices and social unrest, regional and ethnic distrust capable of dividing the country as currently experienced in the country.

The application of theory

Obviously, leadership is a pivotal and integral unit in the society working together to ensure equilibrium and stability through the introduction and implementation of policies that promote peace, unity, and development. It also entails envisioning a desirable future, promoting a clear purpose or mission, supportive values, and intelligent strategies, empowering and engaging all that are concerned for the purpose of national development in the society. Failure in this direction leads to corruption, embezzlement, and abandonment of projects, among other things. It is also observed that the success or failure, collapse or survival, progress or retrogression of a business, organization, or state depends largely on the leadership of such establishment/country.

Thus, the abandonment of the Biafran military initiatives of different types of bombs of mass destruction (Ogbunigwe), different types of manufactured Biafran-made armoured tankers, ferret cars, flying and mass-destruction bombs (Ogbunigwe), including the most dreaded and popular Ojukwu buckets, and many other locally manufactured products and firearms during the war was a result of leadership deficit in the country. The initiatives that would have been utilized for indigenous military development by reintegrating and reabsorbing the Biafra Igbo brothers into the mainstream of the country's formal sector, particularly in science and technology, the security agency (military) for further research, and setting up a special unit of inquiry in order to discover how the young Igbo Biafran scientists and engineers were able to develop such amazing weapons of mass destruction and other technologies developed during the war. However, the lack of mission and visionary leadership of the country killed the amazing technological discovery of the Biafran scientists and engineers in broad daylight for selfish regional interest, regional domination, and tribal superiority. The above therefore never allows for the utilization of the Research and Production (RAP) Unit of the Biafran Army to be arrested by the Nigerian military regime at the end of the civil war and placed in a detention camp, in safe custody for further interrogations. Instead, they sent the defeated Biafran side on an informal long-distance trading network and allowed their military initiatives to die a sudden natural death.

Literature review

Mass-destruction bombs (Ogbunigwe) and dependency on weapon purchase in Nigeria

It is generally observed that the Nigerian Civil War was pathetically confronted by agitation for Biafra and a host of other military problems. In order to serve the ends of the war and deal with the inevitable external threat to Biafra's national security, there was an establishment of the Science Group.⁶ This collective consisted of individuals with diverse scientific and technological expertise, both formal and informal, who were dedicated to investing their skills, loyalty, and patriotism in conducting research and creating essential materials for the prosecution of the war. Importantly, this group exclusively comprised indigenous people of Biafra, and they were entrusted with the crucial responsibility of spearheading technological innovation, replicating technological creativity, and improvising under challenging conditions. Its members were drawn from the Science Group from various walks of life, such as:

- I. Teachers from the Universities, Colleges of Technology and Secondary Schools;
- II. Research scientists from research and technical establishments;

- III. Scientists, technologists, and craftsmen from various public services, organisations, such as Railways, Ports Authority, Electricity Corporation, Petroleum Refinery and Geological Surveys;
- IV. Engineers and technicians from the private sector such as Shell BP, United Africa Company (UAC) etc.;
- V. Ordinary artisans and craftsmen and mechanics.⁶

Initially, the group functioned as two separate and independent sub-groups—the Enugu Group, primarily led by university scientists from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and the Port Harcourt Group, led by engineers and technicians from Shell-BP and other industrial establishments around Port Harcourt.⁶ Subsequently, the two sub-groups merged and established their inaugural headquarters in Umuahia in December 1967 after the Enugu group was lost. The two groups were amalgamated into the Research and Production (RAP) organization, with three major divisions of responsibilities such as:

- I. Research and Technical Services group;
 - II. Materials for Production and Services group; and
 - III. Administration and Personnel Welfare.⁶
- Also, the RAP established specialized groups viz:
- I. Weapons Research and Production Group.
 - II. Chemical Materials Research and Production Group.
 - III. Airport and Road Development Group.
 - IV. Electrical and Electronic Devices Group.
 - V. Industrial Material Research and Metallurgy Group.
 - VI. Refinery and Fuel Group.
 - VII. Essential Food Processes and Production Group.
 - VIII. Alcohol and Assorted Drinks Group.

The technical and science groups mentioned above played a pivotal role in the formation of the Biafran infant arms industry. They spurred the independent and domestic manufacturing of hand grenades, cartridges, mines, and guns, with the most notable creation being the Ogbunigwe, which translates to “mass killer”.⁹ The Ogbunigwe served as an improvised explosive device designed in diverse shapes and sizes, functioning as rockets, hand grenades, and mines. Therefore, other forms of Ogbunigwe include “the Beer Ogbunigwe (hand grenade), the Foot-Cutter Ogbunigwe (land mine), the Coffin Box Ogbunigwe (land mine), the Bucket Ogbunigwe, and the Flying Ogbunigwe (surface to air weapon)”.⁶ However, the abandonment of these different types of Ogbunigwe by the Nigerian Government has not only made mockery of the country, but also has left the country in the hands of the western hocks who depend in the exploitation of the country for national development.¹⁴ Similarly, the western weapon exploitation of Nigeria appears as a resultant effect of leadership deficit that sentimentally and parochially hindered the incorporation of Biafran military initiatives into the mainstream of the country’s science and technology department for developmental purposes. Akin to the above, Ndiokwere⁹ contend that:

The Research and Production (RAP) Unit of the Biafran Army should have been the first to be arrested by the Nigerian military regime at the end of the civil war and placed in a detention camp, in safest custody for further interrogations. Special commission of

inquiry should have been set up discover how the young Igbo Biafran scientists and engineers did it. Consequently, the adverse implication of the abandonment of the Biafran military initiatives resulted in an overdependence on weapon purchases from other western countries of Europe, Asia, and America, among others. For instance, over the decades Nigeria had depended on the United States of America, Germany, Britain, China, and others for military equipment and training,¹⁵ upon which inundated expenditures were involved in such a process. Akin to the above, it was observed that between 2014 and 2018, Nigeria spent over US\$3.9 billion in arms procurement.¹⁶ They further maintained that, in the same vein, over US\$2 billion were also siphoned through such a defence budget. Obviously, this amount would have been channeled to other national development issues if Nigeria had utilized the Biafran military initiatives or possibly would have developed to the point of manufacturing for herself and for commercial consumption on one end, which would have also contributed to the gross domestic product and national development of the country on the other hand. Again, if Nigeria as a nation had, through a national policy, internalized and patronized the *so-called Igbo-made products* after the war, this would have assisted in the development of the military technology industry. Similarly, Nigeria may have been manufacturing jets of any kind and would not have been dependent on foreign nations for weapons to fight terrorism and other forms of aggression, both internal and external, if it had integrated the Research and Production Organization of Biafra (RAP) into the Nigerian Army Corps of Engineers.

Biafra-made arms/ammunitions and huge military expenditure

Regrettably, the Nigeria-Biafra civil war in 1967-70 was described as an unfortunate event due to the huge damages meted out and pogrom committed against the people, particularly the Igbo Biafrans, during the war on one end; however, it was also a significant breakthrough in science and technology on the other end. This is so because there were lots of technological initiatives, particularly on the part of the unfortunate and defeated Biafra, who, through their science and technology unit—the Research and Production Organization of Biafra (RAP)—manufactured lots of arms and ammunitions within the period of the war. Such manufactured technological initiatives were described as Biafra-made arms, which include different types of Ogbunigwe. For instance, the Biafran Beer Ogbunigwe was a tightly corked bottle filled with explosive chemicals, shrapnel, and gunpowder that exploded after having impact with an object.⁶ The foot-cutter Ogbunigwe consisted of various-shaped pipes as high as the length of a human knee, upon which, when connected together with a line of gunpowder, were set ablaze to cut the feet of Nigerian soldiers who got within range.⁷ He further maintained that in clarity, the foot-cutter Ogbunigwe was more of a weapon of incapacitation than a weapon of death. Similarly, the Coffin Box Ogbunigwe was more or less a land mine made up of a coffin-like metal box, cast iron, lead balls, shrapnel, explosives, broken bottles, and nails meant for another war objective during the war.⁶ Again, the Flying Ogbunigwe was a multi-faceted mine that was deployed as a ground-to-ground weapon or a ground-to-air weapon from a launching pad.⁷

Furthermore, considerable advances were also made in the “fabrication of armoured vehicles from agricultural tractors, bulldozers, and harvesters”.⁶ The above-observed fabrications were popularly called *the Biafran Red Devil and Genocide*. Commendably, the Department of Research and Production (RAP) unit established by the Biafra army administrators was one of the remarkable things

that happened with the birth of the Biafra nation. The people’s overwhelming patriotism, often described as the hallmark of the Biafran dream, led to the initial success during the war. All this patriotism, hard work, and ingenuity added strength to the struggle, upon which all the experts, best brains, scientists, engineers, researchers, labourers, educators, and others from various schools contributed towards the progress of the war.⁹ Research has it that the Research and Production Unit (RAP) of the Biafran army was described as an epitome of ingenuity, production, and development in the progress of the war. In the same vein, apart from the amazing technological initiatives by the RAP, the local villagers often “picked, collected, and assembled old and discarded iron rods, iron sheets, scrap tins, parts of abandoned vehicles, stones, and broken bottles and sent them to collection centres and headquarters located at Dikenafai, Nkwere, Okwele, and Abba”.⁹ Through which the Biafra scientist army engineers would use for more weapon productions

However, the non-utilization of these amazing technological initiatives not only led to overdependence on foreign nations for weapons to fight aggressions of all kinds but also resulted in huge military expenditure, as much purchase was often made in order to equip the country armory. This, therefore, is affecting the country’s GDP, as much attention is given to the defence budget of the country. For instance, according to Omenma¹⁶, Nigeria as a nation had spent huge amounts of money on furnishing its defence unit for decades. They further contend that between 2014 and 2018, the country spent not less than US\$3.9 billion on arms procurement. The above amount, which is about N3.3 trillion with the current dollar exchange rate in the country, would have been used in solving other national issues if the Biafra-made arms were utilized. Similarly, the country’s annual budgetary shows that much attention has been bestowed on the defence department. For instance, the Table 1 below shows the Nigerian yearly military (defence) budgetary (expenditure) since the return to democratic rule in 1999.

Table 1 Nigerian yearly military/defense expenditure (budget), 1999-2019

Year	Amount in US\$	Current exchange rate	Amount in Naira
1999	490,000,000	93.95	46,035,500,000
2000	370,000,000	102.1	37,777,000,000
2001	570,000,000	111.93	63,800,100,000
2002	900,000,000	121	108,900,000,000
2003	590,000,000	129.3	76,287,000,000
2004	640,000,000	137.76	88,166,400,000
2005	670,000,000	133.11	89,183,700,000
2006	780,000,000	129.93	101,345,400,000
2007	970,000,000	128.37	124,518,900,000
2008	1,620,000,000	117.72	190,706,400,000
2009	1,500,000,000	146.59	219,885,000,000
2010	1,990,000,000	150.33	299,156,700,000
2011	2,380,000,000	152.57	363,116,600,000
2012	2,320,000,000	161.31	374,239,200,000
2013	2,420,000,000	156.96	379,843,200,000
2014	2,360,000,000	160.23	378,142,800,000
2015	2,070,000,000	181.78	376,284,600,000
2016	1,720,000,000	197	338,840,000,000
2017	1,620,000,000	305.2	494,424,000,000
2018	2,040,000,000	305.78	623,791,200,000
2019	2,150,000,000	306.85	659,727,500,000

Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, Suleiman.^{17,20,21}

The provided table illustrates the annual defense (military) budget allocations in Nigeria, showcasing a consistent and unavoidable upward trend from 1999 to 2019. This escalation can be attributed to the pressing need to enhance military capabilities in the ongoing fight against prevalent terrorism in the country. Notably, activities such as Boko Haram’s terrorism in the northeast, the rise of militancy in the southeast, armed banditry in the northwest, and various kidnapping cases across the nation have necessitated increased military expenditures. These security challenges often involve the utilization of sophisticated or modern military hardware, as well as weapons and ammunition in their operations.¹⁷

However, such huge military expenditure thus opens up loopholes for corruption and embezzlement. For instance, Abiodun *et al.*,¹⁷ observed that “Nigerian military spending in the last decade is quite high and, in most cases, unnecessary; the reason is that, in most cases,

what is often considered military expenditure is not actually directed for defence against external aggressions or enemies but rather against internal dissent, which in any case led to the poor economic conditions of people through ineffective governance.” In consonance, Omenma¹⁶ noted that between 2014 and 2019, Nigeria spent over US\$3.9 billion on arms procurement; however, more than US\$2 billion of such a budget was siphoned into personal coffers in the process. Therefore, one may align his argument with that of Julius,¹⁷ who maintained that “military expenditure has not usually been connected to economic satisfaction in macroeconomic analysis; as evidence abounds, military spending is to a significant extent well taken to mean defence of security expenditure.” In this context, military budget or expenditure, often used interchangeably with defence budget, refers to the allocated financial resources sanctioned by the state or nation for the support and maintenance of the armed forces. This encompasses a wide range

of essential needs dedicated to defence purposes, including but not limited to firearms, military aircraft, military hardware, logistical support, and funding for special missions.¹⁸ The above corruptions and embezzlements are apparently one of the founding pillars for the obvious and unprecedented abandonment of the Biafra-made weapon initiatives during the civil war in 1967-70, thus leading the country into total dependence on the western nations for weapon procurement, through which huge spending is inevitable in the process. Synoptically, the Nigerian postwar government was not knowledgeable enough in discarding the Biafra-made arms and ammunitions manufactured during the war. Akin to the above, Ndiokwere⁹ contends that “these best Igbo Black brains could have placed Nigeria in an enviable position to compete with countries like India, Korea, and China today if they were reabsorbed into the system.”

Ojukwu-buckets/airstrip; and aggression/terrorism in Nigeria

The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970, between Nigeria and the marginalized Biafra, led to an obvious, unforgettable trademark of indelible injuries, particularly on the part of the defeated Biafra. Upon this, the war was described as an unfortunate eyesore in the history of Nigeria. While the Nigerian side was headed by Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon, the Biafra counterpart was also led by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu on the other hand. Thus, the boiling and compelling issue that compounded the war was the desire of Nigeria to prevent Biafra from seceding to form an independent Republic of Biafra, this followed by a series of post-independence political and ethnic crises between 1960 and 1967.⁶ Hence, with the eruption of armed hostilities in 1967, the military capabilities of both sides underwent a substantial and undeniable test. It is a well-established principle in military history that the sophistication of weapons plays a crucial role in determining success in any war, as the outcome is heavily dependent

on the effectiveness of the weaponry employed.⁶ Unfortunately, from the outset and throughout the conflict, Biafra’s military strength did not measure up to that of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This discrepancy was primarily due to the Biafran side’s relative isolation from the rest of the world, marked by persistent federal blockades that hindered external arms supply and economic assistance from the international community.¹⁰ As a result, studies confirm that the Nigerian side enjoyed a significant advantage over Biafra in terms of both conflict capital (arms) and conflict labour (soldiers). The ratio of federal fighting forces to Biafra’s was reported as 120,000 to 40,000 men, highlighting the overwhelming predominance of the Nigerian side.¹⁴ This outrageous and unprecedented imbalance in military arsenals thus posed unparalleled responsibilities, obligations, and opportunities for Biafra to solve at improvising, which significantly induced an unprecedented breakthrough in arms fabrication on the part of Biafra.⁶ Such an opportunity for arms fabrication was to complement the available military material; upon this, an infant arms industry was developed, which indeed enhanced the Biafran war efforts.⁶ As a result, different types of mass-destruction bombs (Ogbunigwe), particularly the most popular and credible Ojukwu-Buckets, were produced by the Biafran science and engineering groups in order to sustain the pressure of the war. The Ojukwu buckets were quite outstanding due to their effectiveness in the purpose at which they were made and could sustain for days before breaking down.¹⁴ Likewise, the Nigeria-Biafra civil war demonstrated the resourcefulness of the Igbos, as they managed to construct an airstrip that played a crucial role in withstanding the pressure exerted by the Nigerian side.⁶ Each time the airstrip was bombed or attacked, they repaired it in record time. Worthy of note, the said Uli airstrip was constructed from an abandoned passenger’ plane. The Figure 1 below are pictorial evidence of the Biafran-made airstrip during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war, 1967-70.



Figure 1 The pictures of the Biafran manufactured Uli airstrip during the civil war, 1967-70.

Source: Williams²²

However, after the civil war, such amazing talents and wonderful initiatives of the Biafrans were quite undermined and relegated to an unjustifiable background for no just cause. Such manufactured and effective Ojukwu buckets for land mines, which were made up of a coffin-like metal box, cast iron, lead balls, shrapnel, explosives, broken bottles, and nails for multipurpose use, thus would have assisted in the current unprecedented incessant aggressions internally and externally facing the country. Empirically, since the return to democratic rule in 1999, Nigeria has faced significant security challenges. Notably, there have been unjustifiable activities by Boko Haram terrorists in the northeast, persistent farmers-herders attacks across the country, an upsurge of militancy in the southeast, and more recently, armed

banditry and kidnapping in the northwest. But today, it is obvious and on record that Nigeria is spending huge amounts of money on arms and ammunition procurements in order to equip the security agencies for the confronted security aggressions in the country. More precisely, in 2021 the federal government of Nigeria spent huge amounts of dollars in procuring a number of 12 A-29 Super Tucano fighter jets from the United States¹⁹ in order to enhance air fight against terrorism. Of course, if the Nigerian government had been wise enough to have utilized the then Biafra-made Uli airstrip, which perhaps would have served the same purpose as the A-29 Super Tucano jet fighters acquired from the U.S. In relation to the above,⁶ knowledgeably contends that:

War has often been argued to induce technological stimulation, promote the acceleration of scientific discoveries and technical innovation; since its earliest days, technological innovation has been associated with war. Indeed war has a major influence on the scientific community permitting men to stretch their technological limits. War or the threat of war is known to force states to restructure social systems along lines most conducive to producing and developing weapons.

Similarly, Ndiokwere⁹ contend that the amazing technological initiatives of the popular Ojukwu-buckets and the Biafra-made airstrip would have placed the country in an enviable position through which it could compete with the global community in terms of weapon manufacturing on one hand and also would have assisted the Nigeria Air Force in the fight against Boko Haram terrorists on the other hand. Therefore, the true recognition of the talents or natural ingenuity or contributions of the Igbo rebels appears worthless in Nigeria's definition, while in the global observation, such was rated an amazing breakthrough in science and technology by Biafrans, but within Nigeria they were worthless, "for a prophet is not acknowledged in his own village".^{9,20-22}

Conclusion

Obviously, the corporate existence of Nigeria has its etymological trace to 1914, when the British government forcefully amalgamated various ethno-religious groups of Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa-Fulani into an entity called Nigeria through a British colonial governor, Fredrick Lord Lugard, in 1914 for easy colonial administration. That therefore marked the origin of the unhealthy ethnic/tribal struggle in the country even after the political independence in 1960; upon this, every national interest emerged and contested for along regional and tribal lines. This situation prompted the establishment of different political parties aligned with ethnic and regional interests. Notable among these parties were the United Progressive Grand Alliance, consisting of the NCNC and AG, which had a predominantly southern influence. Conversely, the Nigerian National Alliance, comprising the NPC and NNDP, was characterised by a northern dominance. These developments contributed to a series of crises, including the Kano Riot in 1953, the Census Crisis of 1962, the Federal Election Crisis of 1964, and the Coups and Counter Coups of 1966, ultimately culminating in the Nigeria-Biafra civil war from 1967 to 1970. Pitiably, after the civil war, the injuries sustained and animosity that led to the war not only continued but also led to the abandonment and non-utilization of the military initiatives of different types of Ogbunigwe and other arms and ammunition manufactured by the Biafran army during the war on one end, thus undermining indigenous weapon development on the other hand.

The study also revealed that the abandonment of Biafra military initiatives, such as Ogbunigwe, Biafra-made arms and ammunition, Ojukwu-buckets, and airstrips, among others, undermined indigenous weapons development in Nigeria, thus leading to high dependence on weapon purchases and huge military expenditures on other countries of the world. Therefore, it is recommended, amongst other things, that the Federal Government of Nigeria should revisit the Biafran War Museum in Umuahia, Abia State, and set up a special committee of inquiry in order to revamp it for technical military training/studies, and that the government should genuinely be committed to the unity and integration of the Nigerian peoples in acknowledgement of the fact that Nigeria is a pluralistic society and that, if well utilized, remains indisputably her strength and beauty in Africa and the world at large.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

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