

# **Nigeria Civil War and Non-State Actors: Case of the Organisation of African Unity, 1967-1970**

**Professor Siyan Oyeweso & Yemisi Olawale,**  
Department of History and International Studies,  
Osun State University, Osogbo.

## **Abstract**

One major consequence of the early years of Nigeria's independence is the eruption of the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970). The war can be described as an international conflict through indices such as the roles of foreign policy relations, humanitarian assistance, international press, and international organisation among others. Interestingly, scholarly works have emerged on the causation, implications, international dimensions, and humanitarian operations before, during and even after the conflict. The article examines the role of the Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U) in the Nigeria Civil War. Without a doubt, between 1967 and 1979, the war featured in the scheme of African affairs through conferences, summits, diplomatic roundtables among African leaders and the O.A.U. However, the effectiveness and efficiency of the O.A.U in the peaceful settlement of disputes has long been a subject of debate. Drawing on the use of content analysis and interpretation of secondary data, the article shows that the performance of the O.A.U during the war cannot be deemed ineffective. It argues that factors such as the O.A.U charter, mandates, and principle of non-interference, complexities of internal actors, methods of settlement of disputes (persuasive diplomacy) and the role of external proved to be the major obstacles to a concrete intervention process.

## **Introduction**

The establishment of the Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U) on 25 May, 1963, was borne out of the need to forge a new strength for the emerging or newly independent African states. Part of the aim of the organisation was geared towards ending colonial rule and the economic and political forces that strengthened it. The role of the O.A.U in conflict resolution is codified in Article XIX of the organisation's charter. The article contains a pledge contracting parties "to settle all disputes among themselves by peaceful means and to...conclude a separate treaty establishing a Permanent Conciliation Commission which was to become an integral part of the Charter."<sup>1</sup> Article III and Article XIX of the charter on peaceful settlement of disputes among the African States established an institutional and legal framework known as Protocols on the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation,

and Arbitration through which the organisation discharges her security duties. The protocol was approved by the supreme organ of the organisation, the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, in Cairo, in July 1964.<sup>2</sup> The protocol established three options for settlement of disputes namely negotiation, mediation, and conciliation or arbitration, which defines the clause of “peaceful means”. Article XVIII of the Protocol permits the employment of an “investigation or inquiry” but only within the context of the above-mentioned three methods of settlement. Despite its commitment to the settlement of disputes, the performance of the O.A.U has been a subject of debate. On the issue of internal conflict, the O.A.U has been accused of being a total failure,<sup>3</sup> particularly regarding the Congolese crisis of 1964.<sup>4</sup> Amar Tekre notes that the record of conflicts that have been settled by the O.A.U, either directly or indirectly, through the efforts of African leaders acting on behalf of the organisation is far greater than the O.A.U is credited for.<sup>5</sup> Attempts to explain the incapacity and structural inadequacy of the O.A.U has been altogether legalistic and unhistorical. If there is any pattern, it is that the O.A.U has been more effective in handling inter-state disputes than internal conflicts, and its incapacity concerning the latter is attributed to the constraining force of Article III (2 and 3) of its Charter.<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, the O.A.U generally has been a poor instrument of resolving inter-state disputes because the Commission on Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration that was set up in 1964 did not have a mandatory jurisdiction.<sup>7</sup>

In the case of the Nigeria Civil war, it has been argued that the O.A.U’s “greatest failure [was its] inability to make a positive contribution during the nightmare years of civil war in Nigeria.”<sup>8</sup> The O.A.U has been accused of not being up to the task in its handling of the conflict in Nigeria<sup>9</sup> such that the ‘impotence’ was due to the provision of its charter and the lack of independent thinking among African leaders.<sup>10</sup> The O.A.U had a genuine desire to bring about peace, and to stop the war in Nigeria<sup>11</sup> but finds it convenient to hide under the non-interference provision of its charter to avoid facing up to the difficult issues raised by secessionist conflict.<sup>12</sup> The above controversies, therefore, make a study of this nature more compelling.

### **Prelude to the Nigeria Civil War: The Aburi Accord in African Affairs**

The events that led to the Nigeria Civil War have been well articulated in several bodies of work that need no repetition in this article.<sup>13</sup> For record purposes, however, the events can be grouped into remote and immediate causes. Among the remote causes include constitutional factors, the intense political suspicion among the major and minor ethnic groups, inter-personal conflict among the elite, the Action Group Crisis of 1962, the Census Crisis of 1963 among others. The immediate factors that prompted the Nigeria Civil War include the military coup and counter-coup of 15 January and 29 July, 1966 and the Igbo Pogrom in the North which contributed to the secession of the South-eastern part of Nigeria on 30 May, 1967.<sup>14</sup>

Before the declaration of secessionist independence, Governor of the Eastern Region, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Chukwuemaka Ojukwu and General Yakubu

Gowon met in Peduase Lodge, Aburi, Ghana, under the Chairmanship of the Ghanaian Head of State, General J.A. Ankrah. The Aburi Accord (4-5 January, 1967) represents a mediation phase and an attempt to broker peace between the two actors, Ojukwu and Gowon. The British Roving Ambassador, Malcolm MacDonald and British High Commissioner in Lagos, Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce, contributed immensely to the facilitation of the Aburi Accord.<sup>15</sup> The Aburi Accord places the Igbo Pogrom and the rising tension of secessionists' agenda on the watch of the international communities, African states and Pan-African leaders. After the Aburi Accord agreement, the Gowon government refused to implement the terms of the Accord. This is said to have occurred because the extent of autonomy gained by the Eastern region by the provisions decided in Aburi was not fully grasped by Gowon and his delegation at the time and, therefore, refused to implement the accord.<sup>16</sup> While Ojukwu reiterated his stand over the implementation,<sup>17</sup> the federalists resulted in adopting economic measures which culminated in an economic blockade of the Eastern region.<sup>18</sup>

Gowon took further steps by restructuring Nigeria's four regions into twelve component states on 27 May, 1967, while Ojukwu, in turn, formally declared Biafra independence. This and the subsequent measures towards diplomatic relations by the Biafra state with the international community was considered by Gowon a threat to Nigeria's sovereignty. He specifically wrote to state and non-state actors to desist from any formal or informal relationship or recognition of Biafra. As succinctly put by Stremlau:

When secession was declared Gowon immediately issued a pro formal public call to all countries and international organisations to respect the territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This same message along with a warning that any attempt to recognise the so-called Republic of Biafra as a sovereign state will amount to interference in the internal affairs of my country and will be regarded as an unfriendly act, were conveyed in identical notes to the secretariats of the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity for distribution among all members of both organisations.<sup>19</sup>

For Ojukwu, his agenda was directed towards providing legitimacy for the newly established state, providing justification for Biafra's secession, promoting Biafra identity, and building Igbo unity beyond the borders of the secessionist state. The Nigerian government, on the other hand, appealed to African and Western State governments, International Organisations (the United Nations and the Organisation of African Unity) to intervene in the crisis because of their potential ability to affect the outcome of the conflict. It is necessary to emphasize that Biafra's appeals were aimed to prompt international supervised unconditional negotiations which to effect, recognises the status of Biafra as an equal party to dispute and, thus, provide Biafra with de-facto recognition.

It is also important to note that the Biafra government, in the early period of secession, was preoccupied with matters relating to the internal affairs of the new

state. Among these include defence (police and domestic security matters) and information through the Ministry of Information and the Directorate of Propaganda. As noted by Stremlau, the “Biafra government were initially concerned with ‘foreign concern’ rather than foreign policy.”<sup>20</sup> By foreign concern, the leaders of the secessionist state assured the international community that the newly independent state will both conform to all international treaties and obligations negotiated under the Federal Government of Nigeria and will be respected, that is, the O.A.U and United Nations (UN). The Biafra government also established the Biafra Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Commonwealth Relations. Despite the constraints of establishing a robust foreign policy relation, the Ministry maintained an international network of six tiny but active offices in Lisbon, London, Paris, Geneva, New York, and Dar-es-Salaam by 1967.<sup>21</sup>

### **Nigeria Civil War, O.A.U and Peace Talks Revisited**

The Nigeria-Biafra war quickly made a significant influence in Africa. Biafra, at the early stage of the civil war, sought diplomatic and regional alliances among the East African states and on the floor of the O.A.U. The Biafra envoy, Professor Chike Obi and Austin Okwu made significant diplomatic efforts to represent the emerging Biafra state in East Africa by discussing the injustice perpetrated on the Igbo peoples by the Nigerian government and seeking diplomatic support. Initial success was made in East Africa through the personalized nature of African foreign policy relations. Austin Okwu, a seasoned diplomat, made formal contacts with Tanzania president, Julius Nyerere.

The efforts of African states towards prevention of the Nigeria-Biafra conflict was pioneered by the East African states under two Pan-Africanist and Commonwealth statesmen, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia and President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, with the utmost intention of “preventing the United Nations or the big powers from intervening in Nigeria.”<sup>22</sup> The East African initiative led to the East African Summit designed to address the post-colonial challenges and abate the conflict. Stremlau noted that the objectives of the East African Summit were received amidst confusion by the Nigerian government.<sup>23</sup> Before the conveyance of the meeting, federal troops launched their first major offensive against Ogoja and Nsukka within Biafra territory on 6 July, 1967. The effort of the East African leaders to address the situation at the initial stage proved abortive. The East African Summit was among the first series of attempts to Africanise the conflict through the effort of Kaunda of Zambia, Nyerere of Tanzania, Milton Obote of Uganda, and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya.

The second stage of internationalization of Biafra secession in Africa occurred at the floor of the O.A.U, whose official involvement did not commence until the Kinshasa Summit of 11-14 September, 1967. At the O.A.U Summit, Nigeria’s goal was to prevent any form of Biafra recognition or discussion of the Nigeria Civil War which the country considered an “internal affair” while the Biafra government argued that peace talks and diplomatic activities could only occur if Biafra’s sovereignty was recognised.<sup>24</sup> Despite the mandate of the organisation to resolve security matters affecting member states through peaceful settlement, the non-

recognition of secessionism in its member states was also a standing objective.

The Kinshasa Summit was met with stiff resistance over discussions on the Nigeria civil War on the floor. At the Ninth Ordinary Session of the O.A.U Council of Ministers, the civil war was not included in the agenda. Also, Nigeria's representative, Dr. Okoi Akripo, insisted that under no circumstance will the Nigeria-Biafra issue be discussed at the O.A.U platform. The federal government delegation emphasized its position "to stand rigidly on Article II (2) of the Charter, would threaten to walk out or even withdraw from the O.A.U if the crisis were inscribed on the agenda, and would welcome – but not press for – a general resolution condemning secession in any form."<sup>25</sup> At the home front, General Yakubu Gowon reiterated that there was no alternative to a Federal Union of Nigeria while Ojukwu, on the other hand, sent a powerful delegation to Kinshasa to present the Biafra case to the African Heads of State. At the early phase of the Summit, the Nigerian government experienced difficulty in preventing the conflict from being listed on the Summit agenda.

As a result of the challenges experienced at the initial phase of the Summit, Dr. Arikpo's capacity to address further bureaucratic challenges and diplomatic manoeuvres on the floor of the O.A.U was doubted. As a result of this difficulty, Gowon delegated Chief Obafemi Awolowo to represent him at the Summit. Chief Awolowo's goal was to prevent the civil war from being placed on the official agenda or in any way become an issue of formal consideration at the Summit. On the other side of the divide, Ojukwu had managed, probably with the help of the Zambians or Tanzanians, to provide each head of state with a formal letter of appeal supported by another Biafra White Paper.<sup>26</sup>

On the floor of the O.A.U Summit, the only reference to the war was made by Emperor Haile Selassie at the opening session of the Summit and expressed the hope that "there will soon emerge a lasting solution which will serve the interests of the Nigerian people as a whole and the entire Continent of Africa."<sup>27</sup> At the end of the Summit, Awolowo agreed to participate in an Ad-hoc consultative mission of the Seven Heads of State (President Mobutu, Tubman, Kaunda, Ahidjo, Diori, Emperor Haile Selassie and General Ankrah).<sup>28</sup> The choice of a Consultative Mission was adopted as against Mediatory Committee to carve their participation in an advisory capacity in the search for a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

The Kinshasa Summit was a diplomatic triumph and advantage for Nigeria because it not only supported the cause but also affirmed Nigeria's position that the Nigeria-Biafra conflict was an internal problem/domestic issue. On the other hand, the Kinshasa Summit for the Biafra secessionist was a monumental setback, particularly from the hindrance faced on the floor of O.A.U to discuss the position of Biafra on the civil war up to the choice of Consultative Committee.

#### **Diplomatic Crisis at the Commonwealth Space: The Kampala Peace Talks (1968)**

Biafra's objective to enhance its legitimacy and credibility as well as influence international concerns over its cause took another turn in the Kampala Peace Talks of 1968. By then, Biafra propaganda shifted from political self-determination to

genocide.<sup>29</sup> The genocide thesis has been described as a calculative attempt to portray the survival of the Igbo people and an attempt to seek international alignment and enhance Biafra foreign policy relations, relationship strategies, foreign exchange, humanitarian support and purchase of military weapons.<sup>30</sup> Ojukwu intensified its campaign to awaken international concerns to the plight of the Igbo civilian population and to convert this growing interest into political pressure that would force Nigeria to accept an unconditional ceasefire and thereby halt the federal military offensive.<sup>31</sup>

Between May and August 1968, the federalists and the Biafra secessionists were engaged in peace talks in Kampala, coordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Before their formal meeting in Kampala, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith and the Secretary of State for Commonwealth, George Thomas, initiated a successful discussion between the warring parties to meet and discuss a lasting solution to the conflict. At the end of the meeting, a communiqué issued stated that both parties have agreed to meet at Kampala, Uganda, on 23 May, 1968.

The Kampala parley was the first diplomatic peace talks that tacitly acknowledged Biafra's de facto independence of federal authority, and has been identified as the high point of Biafra's attempt to penetrate the international system. The warring parties presented a civilian representative for the Kampala discussion. The federalist side was represented by its Commissioner for Information, Chief Anthony Enhaoro while Sir Louis Mbanefo represented the Biafra government. The Kampala peace talk was, however, thwarted by some issues. One, before the peace talks, four members of the O.A.U – Tanzania, Gabon, Ivory Coast and Zambia – immediately recognized Biafra as a sovereign state. It is pertinent to note that this recognition did not spur immediate formal diplomatic relations or the establishment of embassies between these countries and Biafra. What it did rather was to incite worries because it tended to generate more international support. In addition, items on the agenda of the peace talks namely cessation of hostilities, arrangement of a permanent settlement of the conflict, and issue of foreign observers, presented immediate controversies. In addition, controversy brewed between the federal government delegation that pressed for the Biafra secessionist to accept the twelve-state structure and the Biafra delegation which insisted that any peace talks must centre on a ceasefire and peaceful settlement. As a result of these controversies, Mbanefo, considering the Biafra stakes at the peace talks, announced a withdrawal.<sup>32</sup> The collapse of the Kampala peace talks marked the end of the Commonwealth initiative.

#### **The O.A.U Consultative Commission in Niamey and Addis Ababa**

After the collapse of the Commonwealth peace talks in Kampala, the Consultative Committee of the O.A.U which had adjourned its meeting on 23 November, 1967, resumed its sitting on 16 July, 1968, in Niamey under the leadership of President Diiori of the Niger Republic and held preliminary talks with both Gowon and Ojukwu. The Niamey talk was initiated based on two reasons. The first was centred on food supply, relief materials, starvation, and famine ravaging the Biafra

military and civilian population. At Niamey, Gowon reiterated its position on the unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria. Ojukwu's position was based on the cessation of hostilities, immediate removal of the economic blockade and withdrawal of military troops from occupied territories. Despite the controversy that accompanied the talk; some common grounds were reached.

The Consultative Committee at the end of the meeting issued a six-point communiqué with the establishment of a Mercy Corridor that guarantees safe delivery of relief materials to the military and civilian personnel. As documented in the communiqué issued by the O.A.U Consultative Committee on Nigeria, the two warring parties agreed to "make arrangements for a permanent settlement; initiate terms for the cessation of hostilities, and provide concrete proposals for supplies of food and medicine to the civilian victims of the war."<sup>33</sup> The Niamey talk has been considered successful compared to the Kinshasa and Kampala talks and marked the first time both parties agreed on a sensitive issue among which was the arrangement of a permanent settlement/solution to the conflict. As noted by Bello, the O.A.U Consultative Committee in Niamey made the warring parties realize the cost of conflict and the need for continental stability, considering the early stages of Africa's independence.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the successes recorded by the O.A.U at the Niamey talks, the Consultative Committee organized another peace talk in Addis Ababa in August 1968. According to Oyeweso, "If the Niamey talks gave hint on a possible solution to the conflict, the Addis Ababa dashed such hopes and expectations with indices of how difficult negotiating a peace settlement is."<sup>35</sup> At the Addis Ababa Conference, the two warring factions failed to shift grounds to achieve a peaceful settlement. Ojukwu argued that it would agree to any resolution of the O.A.U as long as it did not tamper with the survival of the Igbo and the secessionist agenda. The federal government maintained that any settlement must be within the context of a united and sovereign Nigeria. The federal government's representative, Anthony Enahoro, put forth a nine-point proposal to put the conflict to an end. Part of the resolution includes; to allow mainly Igbo police units to carry out normal security functions in rebel-held areas; the use of an international force to reassure Igbos of their safety; the inclusion of Igbos on the executive council of the new military government; a general amnesty for most people; re-absorption of a fair share of Igbos in the federal public service and representation of Igbos at the future constitutional conference.<sup>36</sup>

Gowon's refusal to attend the Addis Ababa conference also influenced Ojukwu's decision to return to Biafra. Gowon's reason for not attending the conference could be construed in this context. If he had shown up, there might be a serious confrontation between the Biafra and the Nigerian delegations which would disrupt the O.A.U's programme. Gowon's reason for not attending the meeting was later published in a regional newspaper, *West Africa*, on 24 August, 1968. In it, Gowon affirmed that "I cannot enter discussions on equal terms with a man who, even before he became a rebel, was only one of my military governors."<sup>37</sup> The Biafra representative, Prof. Eni Njoku, also presented its proposal at the O.A.U conference. The proposal includes Nigeria's acceptance of Biafra's sovereignty;

maximum economic cooperation and common services between Nigeria and Biafra among several demands. The demands of Prof. Njoku were rejected by the federal government.

There is no doubt that the 1968 conference in Addis Ababa was a failure in the resolution process. The failure of Gowon to attend and the rejection of Prof. Njoku and Enahoro's proposal by both sides brought the resolution to a stalemate. The issues of the conference were based on secession. Biafra's position and resilience at the conference were strengthened by the recognition accorded to it by Tanzania, Gabon, Zambia and Ivory Coast, and the promise of aid by France and Portugal.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Nigeria's position was strengthened by the military victories it recorded between February and October 1968. In February, Onitsha was captured, Abakaliki and Afikpo were captured in April, Port Harcourt in May, Owerri in September, and Okigwe in October. A major achievement of the Addis Ababa conference was the agreement by both sides on the composition and function of international observers. The only challenge that accompanied this agreement was the composition of the international observers.

#### **The Algiers and Monrovia Conference 1968 and 1969**

Beyond the 1968 Addis Ababa Conference, further efforts were made, too, most notably at the Algiers summit in September 1968, and the Monrovia meeting of the O.A.U Consultative Committee in April 1969. At the Algiers summit made up of the O.A.U Consultative Committee under the chairmanship of the Algerian President, Houari Boumedienne, the resolution of the summit was strongly in favour of a 'united Nigeria'. The resolution appealed to the Biafra delegate to cooperate with federal authorities toward the restoration of peace and unity to end the war. The resolution also tasked the federal government to declare a general amnesty and cooperate with the O.A.U. The Summit also tasked the O.A.U Consultative Committee to continue in its effort toward finding a permanent solution to the war. Nigeria, at the Algiers summit, scored another diplomatic victory when the summit resolution was put to a vote. At the voting session, thirty-three African states supported Nigeria. Rwanda and Botswana abstained from voting but Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast and Gabon recognised Biafra and voted against Nigeria.<sup>39</sup>

The support received by the Federal side can be viewed within the broader context of protecting Africa's territorial integrity and unity. Several African countries were faced with similar challenges in the early years of independence. By implication, Biafra's success could spur those 'minorities' under their control toward agitations for secession. Another rationale for such an outstanding display of solidarity for Nigeria was because Biafra's success could set off similar conflicts in their own countries, many with similar tribal and ethnic problems, was a powerful influence on the minds of nearly all delegates to the Algiers Summit.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, safeguarding Nigeria's boundary and keeping the nation united was a prerequisite to maintaining peace and stability on the continent.<sup>41</sup> The Algiers Summit was a success because it presented, for the first time, the opportunity for African leaders to declare openly their positions on the conflict through voting. The Algiers Summit also allowed



O.A.U to reiterate before Biafra and its supporters that its position declared at Kinshasa had not changed. In short, this resolution was like Kinshasa's, only for its "wording and phraseology".<sup>42</sup>

The Monrovia (Liberia) Mission of April 1969 was a continuation of the Algiers Summit to discuss issues regarding relief and ceasefire. The mission was chaired by Haile Selassie. The Monrovia Committee issued a resolution in line with Kinshasa and Algiers. The resolution, though served as a reconfirmation of O.A.U's support for Nigeria, further revealed the importance of keeping Nigeria's political boundaries intact. The O.A.U Consultative Committee unanimously agreed that the two parties should accept, in the overriding interest of Africa, a united Nigeria which ensures all forms of security to all citizens.<sup>43</sup>

The last involvement of O.A.U in the conflict was in the Summit of September 1969 organized for all African heads of state to attend but the four African countries that had declared support for Biafra and Sierra Leone<sup>44</sup> shunned this gathering. The absence of the four African countries (Gabon, Ivory Coast, Zambia and Tanzania) must have been informed by their collective belief that their presence at the gathering would not change the minds of the O.A.U and other African leaders to make decisions that would favour Biafra at the expense of Nigeria. Their absence, however, did not prevent the participants from discussing the conflict and making further recommendations. The O.A.U advised all governments, international organisations, humanitarian institutions as well as political, moral, or religious bodies in the world<sup>45</sup> to desist from any action that could frustrate its efforts toward finding a lasting solution to the Nigerian crisis. Furthermore, to demonstrate its commitment to a united Nigeria, it appealed to the warring parties to preserve, in the overriding interest of Africa, the unity of Nigeria and accept immediate suspension of hostilities.<sup>46</sup> In December 1969, Emperor Haile Selassie also tried to use his influence to effect a peaceful settlement with the warring parties. The attempt met with a colossal failure because both sides could not agree on the status of the meeting.<sup>47</sup>

### **O.A.U and Nigeria Civil War Reconsidered**

From the previous discussions, it is clear that the O.A.U played an important role in securing a lasting peace between the two warring factions. The article earlier revealed scholars' submission on what has been termed 'ineffective performance', 'failure', or 'impotence' of the O.A.U in dealing with the challenges arising from internal conflicts in Africa. The present study argues that the O.A.U's role in Nigeria's civil war and other internal conflicts arising especially during the 1960s and 1970s have been hindered by several stumbling blocks. However, the O.A.U should be credited for the interventions made towards ensuring peace in African affairs.

At the inception of the organisation in 1963, the testing ground for the protocol on mediation, conciliation, and arbitration started with the Algerian-Morocco crisis (1963-1964), the first inter-state dispute that the O.A.U responded to barely four months after the birth of the organisation.<sup>48</sup> It is very significant to note that the

performance of the O.A.U in conflict resolution cannot be measured with the yardstick of the United Nations, the birth of which witnessed the transfer of the collapsed League of Nations structures which it was built upon. The O.A.U at the Bamako Conference held on 29 October, 1963, was attended by Algerian Head of State, President Ahmed Ben Bella and King Hassan of Morocco with Emperor Haile Selassie and President Modibo Keita acting as mediators.<sup>49</sup> The O.A.U has been able to deal with inter-state conflicts in Africa. The apparent success recorded can be attributed to Article III (4) which declares as one of the principles of the O.A.U the peaceful settlement of disputes by negotiation, mediation, conciliation or arbitration. However, while the organisation was legally empowered to intervene in inter-state conflicts and did deploy its resources (even though not the Commission on Mediation, Conciliation, and Arbitration) to achieve a peaceful settlement of disputes, it was weakest and at its most disappointing when it comes to dealing with serious internal problems of its member-states. From the nature of the Nigeria-Civil War described as an “internal conflict,” barricade the nature of intervention which could be employed by the organisation towards achieving peace.

The most immediate challenge of the O.A.U's intervention in internal affairs of African states is the Charter itself, specifically the so-called domestic jurisdiction clause. According to the logic of this argument, Article III (2), with the supportive III (3), prescribed “non-interference in the internal affairs of states” and “Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state and its inalienable right to independent existence.” The Jurisdiction Clause in the charter was prompted by the conservative nature of the organisation which made her anti-secessionist, anti-interventionist and anti-border changes.<sup>50</sup> However, if the O.A.U had been barred from interfering in the internal affairs of member-states, why did the organisation intervene in the Nigeria Civil War? According to Rechner, the O.A.U's involvement in the Nigerian conflict merely “seemed to demonstrate a wavering from the strict principle of non-interference in internal state affairs that its Charter advocated.”<sup>51</sup>

The complexities of Nigeria's Civil War and the nature of the O.A.U intervention is another major obstacle. Oyeweso observes that the O.A.U has engaged the use of mediation more than arbitration and conciliation. However, the civil war involves a multiplicity of actors including western powers such as France, Britain, Israel, and Portugal among others. Since the process of mediation involves several parties, the O.A.U employs only diplomatic methods. The success of diplomatic processes includes the prestige of the actors, the morality and the logical consistency of the arguments made. The success of diplomatic mediation also depends on the disputants for the outcome of the efforts. Since the O.A.U is not equipped to impose a settlement or judicial precedents, the question of its success or failure was up to the disputants themselves. Thus, the response of the disputants towards the O.A.U's initiatives becomes a very important determinant of its effectiveness or ineffectiveness in a given situation. This exactly describes the involvement of the O.A.U in the Nigeria-Biafra conflict. The role of external western states also contributed to the nature of the conflict.

It will be farfetched from historical objectivity to describe the intervention of the O.A.U in the Nigeria Civil War as a failure. Given the obvious fact, the organisation was not established to prevent conflict or future wars like the United Nations. Amoo argues in a similar perspective that the O.A.U was not “a collective security body”<sup>52</sup> neither its Charter nor practices portrayed it as a security organisation. The O.A.U was “a collegially governed, intergovernmental organisation whose essential task has been to encourage, coordinate, and harmonize voluntary cooperation and compliance among its members.”<sup>53</sup> Despite the establishment of the protocol on mediation, conciliation, and arbitration, the organisation lacks the capacity, structure, and institutions to drive peace and security goals. The O.A.U does not appear to deal strictly with security matters but rather on “anticipation and prevention of conflicts”, after which it “undertake peace-making and peace-building functions” where conflicts had broken out.<sup>54</sup> The ineffective performance and impotence thesis does not hold water considering the birth of the organisation and the roles it played without any biases for abrupt success. The establishment of a Consultative Committee and the effort to bring Gowon and Ojukwu to discuss the way forward through several summits and peace talks are bold steps. However, the study agrees with the submission of Munya<sup>55</sup> and Ashafa<sup>56</sup> that one prime success of O.A.U in the Nigeria Civil War was the non-recognition of secessionism which in turn doomed Biafra in the eyes of the international community and guaranteed Nigeria’s unity.

### Conclusion

The article examined the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970) through the interventions of the O.A.U towards finding lasting solutions to the conflict. It looked at the prelude to the war as an African affair through the Aburi Accord and the East African Initiative. The article also identified some of the summits, conferences and peace talks organized under the platform of O.A.U to resolve the conflict. The findings in the article reveal that the intervention of the O.A.U in the conflict cannot be described as a failure or ineffective performance. Rather, its role was hindered as a result of the organisation’s charter, identity as a cooperative rather than security organisation, the nature of the diplomatic and mediation process, and the complexities of several actors in the conflict. The article contends that because the main goals of peaceful settlement of the conflict were not achieved does not prove the intervention of the O.A.U as a total failure.

### Endnotes

1. Oyeweso S., *O.A.U and Conflict Resolution: A Case Study of the Nigeria Civil War (1967-1970)* (Free Enterprise Publishers, 1997), 3
2. Elias T.O., The Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration of the Organisation of African Unity, *British Yearbook of International Law* (1964): 336-354.
3. Joseph. S.N., *Peace in Parts: Integration and Conflict in Regional Organisation* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1971); David B.M., “Intraregional Conflict Management by the Organisation of African Unity,”

- International Organisation*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1974): 345-337.
4. Pradhan R.C., "O.A. U and the Congo Crisis," *Afrika Quarterly*, Vol. 5 (1965): 30-42.
  5. Amare T., "The Organisation of African Unity at Twenty-Five Years: Retrospect and Prospect," *Africa Today*, Vol. 35, Nos. 3/4 (1988): 13.
  6. Ehimika A.I., "The O.A.U, AU and the Response to Conflict: De-Linking Domestic Jurisdiction and the Capacity to Intervene," in Olaniyan R. and Ehimika A.I., ed. *Contemporary Issues in Africa's Development: Whither the African Renaissance?* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2018), 283.
  7. Harshe R., "Reflections on Organisation of African Unity," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 8 (1988): 375.
  8. Colin L., "The Organisation of African Unity - Success or Failure," *International Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (1975): 212.
  9. Cythani K., "The O.A.U: Hurrying Nowhere," *Africa Today*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (1968): 1-2.
  10. Cythani, "The O.A.U: Hurrying Nowhere," 1-2.
  11. Agibi O., *The Organisation of African Unity and African Diplomacy, 1963-1979* (Ibadan: Impact Publications, 1936), 69.
  12. Onyeonoro K., "Secession and the Right to self Determination: An O.A.U Dilemma," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 31 (1974): 346.
  13. See, for instance, Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigeria Coup* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers, 1981).
  14. Oyeweso S., *Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War*, (Lagos: OAP Publications, 1992).
  15. Stremlau J., *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 39.
  16. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 46.
  17. Abubakar D., "The North and the Nigerian Civil War," in Osaghae E.E., Onwudiwe E. and Suberu R.T., eds. *The Nigerian Civil War and Its Aftermath* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd, 2002), 257.
  18. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 47.
  19. A Statement by the Head of the Federal Military Government on May 30, 1967, reprinted in Nigeria, Faith in Unity, 57; Text of a Letter from the Head of the Federal Military Government to the Secretary General of the United Nations, released by the Federal Ministry of External Affairs on 30 May, 1967. See Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 67.
  20. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 115,
  21. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 76.
  22. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 84.
  23. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 84.
  24. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 86.
  25. Oyeweso, O.A.U and Conflict Resolution, 7.
  26. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 87.
  27. *Daily Times*, 9 August, 1967.
  28. Stremlau, *The International Politics*, 91.

29. For full discussions on the genocide argument, see Lasse H. and Dirk A.M., "The Nigeria-Biafra War: Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide," *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 16, Nos. 2-3 (2014): 169-203.
30. Stremmlau, *The International Politics*, 127.
31. Stremmlau, *The International Politics*, 127.
32. Zdenek C., *The Organisation of African Unity* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger 1969), 203.
33. Zdenek, *The Organisation of African Unity*, 209-210.
34. Bello T., "In Search for Peace in Africa: Organisation of African Unity and the Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970," *Journal of Humanities and Social Policy*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (2017): 25.
35. Oyeweso, O.A.U and Conflict Resolution, 13.
36. Zdenek C., *The Unfinished Quest for Unity: Africa and the O.A.U* (London: Julian Friedman, 1977), 95-96.
37. *West Africa*, 24 August, 1968.
38. Suzanne C., *The World and Nigeria: A Diplomatic History of the Nigerian Civil War*, (London: Sidewick & Jackson, 1972).
39. Godfrey M., *Africa, 1960-1970: Chronicle and Analysis* (Dar es Salaam: New Africa Press, 2009), 420.
40. Zdenek, *The Organisation of African Unity*, 217.
41. Edward S., "House of Lords Debate", Vol. 297, 5 November, 1968, 125-218.
42. Godfrey M., *Africa, 1960-1970: Chronicle and Analysis* (Dar es Salaam: New African Press, 2009), 421.
43. Zdenek, *The Unfinished Quest for Unity*, 105.
44. Zdenek, *The Unfinished Quest for Unity*, 105.
45. "Resolution on Nigeria (AHG/Res.58/Rev. 1 (VI), 6.
46. The O.A.U Resolution at the Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government, 6.
47. Oyeweso, O.A.U and Conflict Resolution, 13
48. For a detailed study of the Algerian-Morocco armed dispute see Patricia W., "The Organisation of African Unity and the Algerian-Moroccan Border Conflict," *International Organisation*, Vol. XX, No. I (1966): 18-36.
49. Zdenek C., "The Role of the O.A.U. in the Peaceful Settlement of Disputes," in Y. Assin El-A Youty ed., *Africa And International Organisation* (Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, Netherlands, 1974), 53.
50. Ali A.M. and Hasu H.P., *Africa in World Affairs: The Next Thirty Years* (New York: The Third Press, 1973), 68.
51. Jonathan D.R., "From the O.A.U to AU: A Normative Shift with Implications for Peacekeeping and Conflict Management, or just a Name Change?" *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (2006): 549.
52. Samuel G.A., *The O.A.U and African Conflicts: Past Successes, Present Paralysis and Future Perspectives*, Working Paper 5 (Fairfax: George Mason University, 1992), 9.
53. David B.M., "Intraregional Conflict Management by the Organisation of African Unity," *International Organisation*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (1974): 350.

54. Declaration of the Assembly by Heads of State and Government on the Establishment within the O.A.U of a Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, AHG/DECL. 3 (XXIX), par. 15.
55. Mwetii P.M., "The Organisation of African Unity and its Role in Regional Conflict Resolution and Dispute Settlement: A Critical Evaluation," *Boston College Third World Law Journal*, Vol. 19, Issue 2, (1999): 42
56. Ashafa A., "The Nigeria Civil War, 1967-1970: Historicizing the International Dimension," in Armstrong M., ed. *The Nigeria Civil War: Forty Year After* (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2008), 469.