

THE POLITICISATION OF THE NIGERIAN MILITARY 1960-1965

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Abstract

From 1960 to 1965 the Nigerian military was politicised along partisan, ethnic, regional, and geopolitical lines. The struggle among the emerging and rival political elite for the control of the military occasioned the introduction of regional quotas, and geopolitical and partisan considerations in the recruitment, training, appointment, and promotion of officers and men. The adoption of regional balance, geopolitical calculation, and political consideration, instead of seniority and merit, as criteria for the selection, training, appointment, and promotion of personnel bred regionalism, ethnicity and a North-South sentiment within the military. Officers took to lobbying and aligning with politicians and appealing to regional, ethnic, and political sentiments in order to secure promotions, appointments, and nominations for higher training. These developments and the use of the military in the settlement of politically oriented crises and disputes, the lopsided concentration of military formations in the Northern Region, as well as politically and ethnically instrumented interference in its internal administration, virulently politicised the military. The politicisation of the military in this manner prepared it for the historic *coup d'etat* of 15 January, 1966.

Introduction

On the eve of independence in 1960, Nigeria was a conglomerate of multifarious ethnic nationalities, brought together under British rule. It was, administratively, divided into large, powerful regions - the Northern Region, Western Region, and Eastern Region - dominated by three ethnic nationalities - the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo respectively. The regions, which were also identified by these ethnic colorations, competed with mutual antagonism for political dominance as decolonisation was progressing towards independence. The major political parties which were formed for a peaceful and democratic transfer of power from the British to indigenous Nigerians were the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), based in the Northern

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Region; the Action Group (AG), based in the Western Region; and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), based in the Eastern Region. In addition to being regionally based, these parties were also ethnically propelled, with the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo dominating the NPC, AG, and NCNC respectively.

Regional, ethnic, and political differences were complicated by the existence, both in notion and reality, of a dichotomy between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria. The dichotomy was officially introduced at the pristine of the colonial administration, when the territory that eventually became Nigeria was administered separately as "Northern Nigeria" and "Southern Nigeria" until their amalgamation as one country in 1914. In spite of this seminal unification, the North-South dichotomy persisted as a divisive issue in post-independence Nigeria. The North-South sentiment, along with regional and ethnic particularisms, was reflected in the shrewd competition for political power, dominance, and control of colonial institutions, among which was the Nigerian military.

In the period under focus, 1960-1965, the Nigerian military was made up of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Nigerian Army is the oldest of the three arms. It dates back to February, 1863, when Henry Stanhope Freeman, who was the Governor of Lagos Colony, recruited about 25 men to form the nucleus of the colonial force that developed into the Nigerian Army.¹ The Nigerian Navy was established much later in 1956. It did not, however, perform any categorically defined role until the 1964 Navy Act spelt out its functions.² Recruitment into the Nigerian Air Force was commenced in 1962; but the instrument establishing the force was officially released in 1964 because of the need to wait for the training of its officers in Ethiopia, India, Canada, U.S.A., and West Germany.³ Thus, the Nigerian Army antedated the Navy and Air Force for well-nigh a century. For this reason, it was the main force on which imperial and colonial military responsibilities devolved in the 19th and 20th centuries. This also accounts for the leading position of the army within the Nigerian military, especially before 1966.

The Nigerian military was trained and disciplined in the best British tradition. The British were confident and proud of the high standard of discipline and professionalism of the Nigerian military they left behind after independence. They occasionally referred to the Nigerian military as a model, different from the mutinous militaries of such countries as Egypt in

1952, Algeria in 1962, and Togo in 1963, which rose up in rebellion against their governments. The British were certain that no such rebellion would occur in Nigeria, which was regarded as the most hopeful country that had established its "image as the stable and democratic star of independent black Africa."⁴

Ebullient as it was, the British confidence in the Nigerian military was shattered on 15 January, 1966, when a group of young army officers, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, rose up in a bloodshedding mutiny against the military and political establishments. This culminated in the military takeover of the governance of the country. This development, astonishing and seemingly isolated from the norm, was not a clean break from the past. It was simply a stage in the post-independence politicisation process of the military. The burden of this paper is to demonstrate empirically how the Nigerian military was politicised along partisan, ethnic, regional, and geopolitical lines, especially from 1960 to 1965, and thereby establish a link between the politicisation process and the military coup of 15 January, 1966.

The Military in the Web of Politics

On 1 April, 1958, as Nigeria moved towards self-government, the United Kingdom Army Council relinquished control of the Nigerian Military Forces to the Nigerian government - a development which subordinated the General Officer Commanding (GOC) the military forces to the Prime Minister's office in Lagos. In March, 1959 when Nigeria attained complete self-government,⁶ she appointed Major-General Norman Leslie Foster⁷ as the GOC of her military forces. Being the Prime Minister's subordinate, Foster was expected to take final instructions from Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, under whose ultimate control the military was. Foster arrived and assumed work in Nigeria in May, 1959. At the time of his arrival, the distribution of the officer corps was 50% Igbo, 25% Yoruba, and the remainder - 25% - was shared between Northerners and other groups.⁸ On the other hand, Northerners made up about 80% of the infantry, while about 20% was divided between the rest.⁹ Enmeshed in the traditional British view of the military as a non-political organisation, and keeping professional efficiency in mind, Foster decided to leave this composition intact.

However, following the victory of the NPC in the federal elections of 1959, Northern politicians began to mount pressure on General Foster to

redress the imbalance in the ethnic and regional composition of the officer corps in favour of the North. Foster resisted, but soon gave up to, the political pressure from the North. He lamented the situation in these words:

Indeed my last two years in Nigeria were to a great extent spent in fighting a losing battle against the first Nigerian Minister of Defence, Alhaji Muhammadu Ribadu and his Northern appointees to the senior civil posts in the Ministry, in their determination to seek every possible advantage for the North.¹⁰

Foster did not know that Muhammadu Ribadu's pressure on him was rooted within the trajectory of a plan, which was conceived before Nigeria's independence. Indeed, thoughts and plans by Northern politicians for the control of the Nigerian military must have started in about 1956, when it became obvious that Nigeria was irreversibly moving towards independence within the next few years. It was then foreseen that the North, given its numerical advantage, would take the political leadership of the country and would, therefore, require to control the military in order to safeguard its political position and interest. Moreover, Sir Ahmadu Bello wanted a military that would be amenable to the control of the Northern political elite in order to avoid the horrendous experience of Syria, where in 1956 the Prime Minister and some top government officials were tied to military vehicles and driven round the city of Damascus. One of the strategies he used to achieve this desire was to prompt the Northern political elite and aristocracy to encourage their children to enlist in the military.¹¹ Another was to ensure the establishment of a military structure, composition, and leadership that would be favourably disposed to Northern political interest. The pressure from such a deep-seated plan was what General Foster could neither understand nor resist for too long. He began, under the weight of the Northern political pressure, to consider regional balance as a criterion for military recruitment, and by 1962 the recruitment of the officer corps on regional quotas had become an established order in the Nigerian military.

Thus, when Major-General Christopher Welby-Everard took over the general command of the army from Foster in February, 1962 he inherited a government policy which clearly required an officer corps with 50% of the personnel from the North, 25% from the East, and 25% from the West. The same policy was eventually applied in the composition of the rank and file. While this policy was hailed by Northern officers, it was detested by officers

from the South, who saw it as discriminatory and began to think in the direction of a military *coup d'etat*.¹² This came to be on 15 January, 1966 Southern officers, especially of the army, rightly associated the policy with "undue political interference in the military corporation, and raised acute suspicion that similar principles might be applied to the appointments and promotions of officers already in the army."¹³ The policy also reinforced the North-South dichotomy among the officers, who began to align and identify themselves with either of the geo-political divides.

The apprehension that the political pressure which led to the application of quota in military recruitment could also influence appointments and promotions was soon confirmed when political considerations began to affect military appointments and promotions. The political leaders of the NPC, having secured a dominant quota for the North, began to scheme for rapid and undue promotions for military officers of Northern origin. Generals Foster and Everard were restlessly pressurised either to bend laid down professional requirements or prematurely send Northern officers for further training and courses in order to secure for them rapid promotions and appointments. It seems, indeed, that political considerations did lead to exceptionally rapid promotion of some Northern officers. David Akpode Ejoor has narrated his experience in this regard in his *Reminiscences*. He recalled:

I was sent on course to Staff College, Camberly, while I was a Major. As of that time I was senior to Yakubu Gowon. At the end of my one year course I returned to Nigeria in 1963. I discovered that Yakubu Gowon was already promoted Lieutenant Colonel and had thus become my senior. I mention this case ... to demonstrate the kind of problem which the army faced...¹⁴

Similarly, Alexander Madiebo, an army officer at the time, wrote:

Thus, a course mate of mine, just for coming from the privileged part [North] of the country, was able to attain the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and to attend all available courses in military training colleges in Britain without even bothering to take the compulsory local "Captain to Major" promotion examination in Nigeria. At the same time his colleagues who trained with him in the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst were still Captains.

This situation forced some southern officers who were politically conscious to identify themselves openly with political parties and

politicians, in order to gain military promotions and appointments without any hindrance. Junior officers joined the bitter struggle for military success through politics...¹⁵

Indeed, by 1964 military promotions had become so politicised that a Southern based political party - the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) - deemed it politically expedient to make the following categorical provisions for the military in its manifesto for the federal elections of that year:

UPGA will accelerate the training of the Nigerian officers in the Armed Forces....Recruitment and promotion of members of the Services will be divorced from tribalism and based strictly on merit and qualifications.¹⁶

Complaints of discrimination and corruption in promotions deriving from ethnic and regional differences were also rife in the Nigerian Navy. Such complaints were keenly discussed in the House of Representatives. They were articulated by a member of the House of Representatives in these lines:

In the Nigerian Navy nepotism and discrimination are the order of the day.... Promotion in the Navy is not based on merit. An Ibo officer will only promote his brother who may happen to be a very junior member of the staff. A Yoruba officer will also prefer promoting a Yoruba man to promoting an Ibo man or Hausa man, and the same goes for a Hausa Officer. As a result men who really deserve promotion are still at the bottom of the scale and those who are not qualified for promotion have been promoted.¹⁷

The politicisation of military promotions and appointments was more visible with regard to the appointment of an indigenous officer to take over the general command of the Nigerian Army from General Everard, whose tenure was to expire in February, 1965. Four officers were in the race for the position. They were Brigadiers Aguiyi Ironsi, Samuel Ademulegun, Babafemi Ogundipe, and Zakariya Maimalari. For political consideration the NPC initially insisted on getting the appointment for Maimalari. But he was later withdrawn from the race as Ribadu tried in vain to persuade the outgoing British General Everard to recommend Maimalari for the command. Everard considered recommending Maimalari unrealistic because he was too junior for the position.¹⁸ Brigadier Ogundipe appeared to have resigned from

the competition at the early stage. More prominent in the race were Ademulegun and Ironsi, each of whom lobbied the politicians for the post. Ademulegun sought the support of Sir Ahmadu Bello, leader of the NPC, with whom he associated closely.¹⁹ On the other hand, Ironsi was sponsored by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and his NCNC. The Prime Minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, supported Ironsi not only because he was the most senior among the competing officers but also because of the political coalition between the NPC and the NCNC, which he wanted to preserve.

The politics of the supreme command infested the army and divided it between the competing interests. While Brigadier Maimalari, who had withdrawn from the competition, supported Ironsi, Southern officers were divided into two opposing camps which favoured Ademulegun and Ironsi, respectively. In the end, Ironsi won the contest and was appointed the General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army in March, 1965. Thus, as N.J. Miners has accurately remarked,

...the appointment of Ironsi was not only an acknowledgement of his long-standing seniority in the Army; it was also a political gesture of conciliation, a part of the package which had resolved the 1964-1965 election crisis.²⁰

Although Ironsi was, by seniority and political barometer, qualified, his appointment was made against the balance of professional military opinion, which weighed considerably in favour of Ademulegun.²¹

Outside the military, Ironsi's appointment evoked political sensation and emotionalism which swept across the nation and created a polarity of political opinions between the NCNC and the NPC supporters. The respective opinions were most clearly articulated by the Nigerian press. While the NCNC press hugged the appointment of Ironsi "with exultant gratitude",²² the *Nigerian Citizen*, a Northern based newspaper, paraded the following commentary:

Today I am weeping because the North has forgone all its advantages brought to it by its natural position - majority in population, expanse of land and majority in parliament... The head of the Police Force goes to Eastern Nigeria, the Navy also goes East. Where is the Army now? Eastern Nigeria has captured it too... what has the Northern alliance gained from winning the election? Two UPGA men who should not be ministers are there. Why? DR. Mbadiwe and Chief Okotie-Eboh are Sir Abubakar's

personal friends. The opinion of all elites in the country is that Sir Abubakar should be recalled home to Bauchi if he cannot carry out the great task devolving upon him.²³

So politicised was a singular military appointment that the military was dragged into a deeper acquaintance with partisan politics.

The Tiv Riots of 1964 also exposed the military to political influences. In February, 1964, the Tiv people of the Middle Belt embarked on a series of disturbances to oppose what they considered as NPC misrule in the area. The disturbances, which lasted up to 1965, were given different explanations. The United Middle Belt Congress interpreted the disturbances as a reaction to some NPC arbitrary policies, which were adopted to force the Tiv to support the NPC in the impending elections. The NPC, on its part, saw the riots as inspired and sponsored by the NCNC.

These were the two major views held on the crisis when on 18 November, 1964 the Prime Minister ordered the deployment of the 3rd Battalion of the Nigerian Army and the Recce Squadron on Tiv land. The battalion and the squadron, which were respectively commanded by Lt.-Col. Pam and Major Anuforo, were instructed to put the situation under control and ensure a restoration of normal life in Tiv land. Owing to the fact that the different political opinions held over the Tiv Riots had penetrated the already politically conscious military, the deployment of troops in the crisis area was suspected in military circles to be more of a move for political aggradisement and intimidation than a military solution. Given their politicised nature, the riots divided the military politically and brought officers and men into closer contact with partisan politics. As Lindsay Barrett rightly disclosed:

The Tiv Riots ...were debated quietly but intensely [within the Nigerian military] and there were allegations that during the Tiv Riots some Nigerian Army officers had overstepped the bounds of their authority and made certain arrests on the instigation of interested factions in the dispute.²⁴

Another event which brought the military into a closer interaction with politics was the Western Region parliamentary election crisis of 1965. The western region election, which was held on 11 October, 1965, was characterised by rigging, abduction, bringandry, thuggery, and related irregularities. The election was contested on the opposing platforms of the Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) and the United Progressive Grand

Alliance (UPGA)²⁵ led by Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola and Alhaji Dauda S. Adegbenro respectively. As a result of the unbridled irregularities associated with the election, the results were not acceptable to both parties. While the NNA declared itself winner with 71 out of 88 seats, the UPGA made a counter claim, insisting that it actually won the election with 68 seats. The disagreement, which ensued, led to kidnapping, murder, arson, looting, and general unrest in the Western Region, with a resultant breakdown of law and order.

The federal government ordered, as a last resort, the occupation of the Western Region by the 4th Battalion of the Nigerian Army, with which it charged the duty of bringing life in the region to normalcy. The battalion, which was commanded by Col. Abogo Largema, did not discharge its duty with the impartiality expected of a national army. It is suggested by contemporary evidence, that Colonel Largema lay his sympathies with the NNA to whose members he gave "secret" military support. He was alleged by a soldier, who stood trial at a court-martial, to have kept Akintola in his official quarters, trained him and some NNA political thugs in musketry, and issued self-loading rifles to them to enable them hold their own in the crisis between them and members of the UPGA.²⁶ Conflict of interest developed within the army as many of the soldiers also demonstrated their support for UPGA. By the time the 4th Battalion was eventually withdrawn, the Western Region crisis had sharpened existing political divisions and tension within the army and brought into reality the inseparability of the Nigerian military from partisan politics.²⁷

The military was also drawn into a constitutional crisis of a political nature in 1964. In the federal elections of that year, the NPC, in alliance with the Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP), recorded an overwhelming victory. The results of the elections were, however, rejected by the UPGA, the majority of whose members boycotted the elections on the allegation that it was not free and fair. From his own interpretation of the Nigerian Constitution, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the President of Nigeria, thought that he had the right to declare the election results null and void, take over executive powers, appoint a care-taker government with a prime minister of his choice, and conduct fresh elections. But the Prime Minister, Sir Balewa, disagreed with Azikiwe on this position, arguing that any disagreement over election results ought to be settled in the law courts. It was at this point that Azikiwe, intent on carrying out his decision, solicited the support of the military

against Balewa. He held a meeting with Major-General Everard, Commodore JEA Wey, and Inspector-General Louis Edet, who were heads of the Army, Navy, and Police, respectively. Azikiwe indicated his intention to take over the executive powers of the government. He requested that they should cooperate with him by recognising his authority over the command of the armed forces by virtue of his position as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. However, the heads of the armed forces unanimously rejected Azikiwe's request, knowing that although he was the Commander-in-Chief, the operational powers of the armed forces were constitutionally vested in the Prime Minister.²⁷

This constitutional crisis was keenly debated by a group of Lt.-Colonels in the army, some of whom opted to intervene militarily. The Lt.-Colonels in question were Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, Victor Banjo, Yakubu Gowon, and David Ejoor. The first two officers insisted that a military intervention in the Balewa government was necessary and approached Gowon for collaboration. Gowon declined.²⁸ About the same time, Lt.- Colonel Ojukwu had a private meeting with President Azikiwe on whose behalf he was apparently scheming for military intervention. He urged Azikiwe "to assume emergency powers and form a provisional government. The army, Ojukwu assured the president, would not arrest him, and some of his officer colleagues would back a provisional government."²⁹ But Azikiwe, realising that he had no *sui juris* to form a provisional government and apparently unsure of the workability of Ojukwu's scheme, declined the offer of military support. This development demonstrated, in very obvious and practical manner, the extent to which the military had been politicised before 1966.

The location of military establishments and formations did not escape the hurly-burly of post-independence politics. Muhammadu Ribadu, representing the interest of the NPC, fought tooth and nail to ensure that military establishments and formations were concentrated in the Northern Region. He mounted pressure on General Foster to give the North foremost consideration in the location of military institutions and formations.³⁰ Indeed, by 1966, the location of military units had become so politicised, that out of twenty existing viable military establishments, sixteen were located in the North, three in the West, one in the East, and none in the Midwest - Nigeria's fourth region, created in 1963. Two of the military establishments in the West were transferred there from Kaduna in 1965, following the political

coalition between Sir Ahmadu Bello's NPC and Chief Akintola's NNDP.³¹ Some Southern military officers alerted Southern politicians to this lopsided distribution of military units and tried but in vain to check it. This unfair concentration of military establishments in the North, which they could not check, engendered in them a political grudge against the NPC-dominated federal government and did, certainly, account for the Southern-led military putsch of 15 January, 1966 and the consequent military takeover of the Balewa government.

The application of disciplinary measures within the military was also politicised. At one time, Ironsi was found to have "attempted fraud on a travelling claim" in connection with the 1959-1960 military operations in the Cameroons.³² Under military law, Ironsi should, by his act, have been court-martialled. But he was not because, according to one flabbergasted British officer, "it was politically not possible!"³³ Owing to politically inspired ethnic loyalties and distrust, some disciplinary measures within the military were politically questionable, even where they were appropriately applied. The experience of Alexander Madiebo can be recalled in further demonstration of the situation:

In 1964 [Madiebo] sentenced a Northern soldier to 14 days imprisonment for being drunk on duty. The soldier wrote a petition to the Minister of State for Army - a Northern Nigerian - accusing me of victimisation. It took me well over six weeks to clear myself by justifying the punishment.³⁴

Although cases such as those of Ironsi and Madiebo may not have been rampant, they were symptomatic and indicative of an incongruous matrimony between politics and military professionalism.

The politicisation of the military was more evident in the Nigerian Army, which was the most developed of the military forces and where professionalism and merit were quickly losing grounds to political, ethnic, and regional sentiments in the appointment, promotion, and training of officers. The infestation of the army with politics and the disillusionment associated with it were aptly indicated by Philip Efiog, a commissioned officer by 1956, when he said:

After my service in the Congo, I was posted to the ordinance; by then I realised that the Army had changed - politics had crept into the Nigerian Army and those of us who came from this part of the world [Southeastern Nigeria] know that godfatherism became a very

important factor if you were to make progress and people like myself who had no godfather, I thought it [sic] wise to leave the Army then but this was not allowed because it was going to create a delicate situation.³⁵

There can be no doubt from the foregoing, that the Nigerian military had been sufficiently politicised by 1966. The military *coup d' etat* of 15 January, 1966 was but the practical expression and climacteric of the politicisation process that was taking place within the Nigerian military.

Conclusion

At independence, Nigeria's political landscape was marked by regionally based and ethnically oriented political parties, which were engaged in fierce competition for power and control of vital and strategic colonial institutions. The politicians at the centre stage of Nigerian politics were preoccupied with the struggle to maintain their ethnic bases and project their regional interests. Thus, decisions and actions taken at the centre reflected parochial interests and regional agenda rather than the pursuit for national goals.

The Nigerian military, a very most strategic institution, targeted for control in the power play of the politicians, was in no time after independence flooded with the murky waters of Nigerian politics. A policy which emphasised regional balance, geopolitical calculation and political considerations in the recruitment, training, appointment, and promotion of military personnel, was introduced into the military. This policy, together with the controversial concentration of military establishments in the Northern Region and the politically and ethnically animated meddlesomeness in the internal and professional affairs of the military, divided and polarised it into contending regional, ethnic, geopolitical, and partisan cleavages. These changes set in motion within the military a politicisation process, the summit of which was the military *coup d' etat* of 15 January, 1966.

In spite of this event, the politicisation of the military had become irreversible. Following the *coup d' etat*, the military got directly involved in the politics and governance of Nigeria for nearly three decades and became more politicised. It also continued the recruitment, training, promotion, and appointment of its personnel along the lines which the leaders of the *coup d' etat* sought to reverse. Although the regions were abolished and the country

restructured into states since 1967, state quotas, decided on the principle of equality of the states, have continued to be the basis for intake of personnel in the Nigerian military. Political and ethnic interests³⁶ have also continued to influence the enlistment, progression, and appointment of military personnel against the need to depoliticise and professionalise the military.

Notes

¹CO 147/4, Freeman to Newcastle, 31 December, 1863. For more details on the origin of the Nigerian Army, see Ibiang Oden Ewa, "A History of the Nigerian Army 1863-1966", Ph.D Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, University of Calabar, 2010. pp.17-32.

²T.A.Imobighe, "The Nigerian Navy - Evolution and Modernisation", in T.A. Imobighe, ed., *Nigerian Defence and Security: Issues and Options for Policy*. (Kuru, Nigeria: National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies 1987), pp.72-82.

³M. Yahaya, "The NAF and the Development of Air Power", in Imobighe, *Nigerian Defence*, pp.83-102.

⁴John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), p.29. Zdenek Cervenka, *A History of the Nigerian War 1967-1970*. (Ibadan, Nigeria: Onibonjo Press, 1972), p.1.

⁵Father Alberic Stacpoole, "The Nigerian Military Force under Federal Control", in *the British Army Review*. No. 8, March, 1959, p.60.

⁶The Eastern and Western regions had already been granted self-government in 1957, and in 1959 the Northern Region became self-governing, thereby completing the process of self-government in Nigeria. See *Nigeria Year Book* 1984, p.51. 1984, p.51.

⁷General Foster certainly had good intentions. But his conception of an ideal military clashed helplessly with Nigerian politics.

⁸Major-General NL. Foster (Retd.) "Nigeria 1959-1962", private paper, 1982.

⁹Major-General Foster, interview with the author, Aldershot, England, 7th November, 1988. Okon Eminue, *Military in Politics*. (Uyo, Nigeria: Soulmate, 2006), p.113.

¹⁰Foster, Nigeria, 1982.

¹¹Cover Story, "Taming the Nigerian Military", *The Nation*. Sunday, March 7, 2010, p.18.

¹²Major Adewale Ademoyega enlisted in the Nigerian Army in this atmosphere in November, 1961. He bitterly complained and condemned the policy of the regional quotas. The desire to put an end to the policy and bring to book the politicians who were responsible for it motivated his leading role in the military coup of 15 January, 1966. See his *Why We Struck: the Story of the First Nigerian Coup*. (Ibadan, Nigerian: Evans Brothers, 1981), pp.23-24.

¹³Robin Luckham, *The Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt 1960-67*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 231.

¹⁴David Akpode Ejoor, *Reminiscences*. (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press, 1989), p.19.

¹⁵Alexander A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. (Enugu, Nigeria: Forth Dimension, 1980), pp.10-11. Madiebo was a Lt.-Colonel in the Nigerian Army by 1966. When the Nigeria-Biafra War broke out, he took sides with the Republic of Biafra, where he rose to the rank of Major-General and became the General Officer Commanding the Biafran Army.

¹⁶*Daily Express*, December, 1964 as quoted in N.J. Miners, *The Nigerian Army 1956-1966*. (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 139-140.

¹⁷See House of Representatives Debate, 22 August, 1962, Col. 2617, as quoted in Miners, *Nigerian Army*, p.120.

¹⁸Major-General Sir Christopher Welby-Everard, interview with the author, Lincolnshire, England 25 October, 1988.

¹⁹About Ademulegun's friendship with Ahmadu Bello, wrote: "The height of political maneuvering among he military came when the commander of the First Brigade, Brigadier Samuel Ademulegun, a Yoruba, closely identified himself with the Northern Peoples Congress in 1964, hoping by this move to achieve his ambition of becoming the first indigenous General Officer to command the Nigerian Army on the departure of the last British General. In his eagerness to demonstrate his loyalty to the party, he consented to the request of the Northern Nigeria Premier, the Sardauna of Sokoto [Ahmadu Bello], for troops to be sent to the Tiv Division to quell the political riots without clearance from the Army Headquarters in Lagos." See his *Nigerian Revolution*, pp.11-12.

²⁰Miners, *Nigerian Army*, p.149.

²¹Assesing the three competing officers - Ironsi, Ademulegun, and Ogundipe. Major Melvin Cruickshank of Auchreoch, a British officer, who

served in Nigeria as a Brigade Major and Deputy Commandant and Chief Instructor, Nigerian Military College in 1964, said this in an interview (London, 14 December, 1988) with the author: "In my opinion, Ademulegun was the best among the three. He was a good and efficient leader with a tremendous amount of energy and a sense of humour." General Foster (Interview) said: "I would never have thought Ironsi capable of heading the army. He was not intelligent.... Ademulegun was the cleverest of the three senior army officers." In his interview with the author, General Everard said: "Judging from their professional ability, the other two were better than Ironsi. I considered Ironsi militarily incapable of commanding the army." On the Nigerian side, the cream of revolutionary officers, who plotted the 15 January, 1966 *coup d' etat*, described Ademulegun as a "first-class soldier, immensely talented and versed in military strategy and tactics...", while Ironsi was considered to be "both inept and inefficient - hardly the calibre of officer to command an army." For these remarks, see Ben Gbulie, *Nigeria's Five Majors*. (Onitsha, Nigeria: African Educational Publishers, 1981), p.53. A.M. Mainasara, *The Five Majors -Why They Struck*. (Zaria, Nigeria: Hudahuda Publishing Company, 1982), p.25. However, another Nigerian officer, General David Jemibewon (rtd), made a completely different assessment of Ironsi, stressing as follows: "He [Ironsi] was very, very good, a great personality, was jovial and he had everything you want in good military officer. I had the opportunity to be under his command in Congo. I think he was a good military officer." See David Jemibewon, "Ironsi and Fayuji were Great Personalities", *Times Week*, August 5, 1991, p.18

²²Miners, *Nigerian Army*, p.149.

²³See *Nigerian Citizen*, 3 March, 1965, as quoted in *Ibid*.

²⁴Lindsay Barrett, *Danjuma: The Making of a General*. (Enugu, Nigeria: Forth Dimension, 1979) p.36.

²⁵The NNA was a merger between Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola's Nigerian National Democratic Party and the NPC, while UPGA was a coalition between Action Group (AG) and NCNC. See Frederick Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafran Story*. (New York: Penguin Books Ltd, 1977), p.31.

²⁶Ruth First, *The Barrel of a Gun*. (London: Allan Lane The Penguin Press, 1970), pp.166-167.

²⁷For more details see Luckham, *Nigerian Military*, pp.237-238. First, *Barrel of Gun*, pp.164-165.

²⁸*Ibid* of Luckham, p.238. *Ibid* of First, p.165. Miners, *Nigerian Army*, p.147. Gowon's refusal is understandable. Being a Northerner, he was not likely to incline to a plot against the Northern and NPC - led government, especially if the plot was initiated by Southern officers who were generally sympathisers of UPGA. Moreover, Gowon was personally and politically aligned with Balewa, "his political hero", whose government he had great admiration for. See J. Isawa Elaigwu, *Gowon*. (Ibadan, Nigeria: West Books, 1986), p.80.

²⁹*Ibid* of First.

³⁰Foster, private paper, 1982.

³¹For this and a comprehensive list on the allocation of military establishments, see Madiebo, *Nigerian Revolution*, pp.9-10.

³²R.H.L.O. (Rhodes House Library, Oxford) R.W.A.F.F., MSS. Afr. S. 1734, Box 2, (119), 1959-62, Col. Matthew J. Davies, private paper, 1984.

³³*Ibid*.

³⁴Madiebo, *Nigerian Revolution*, p.11.

³⁵Philip Efiang, "My Being in Biafra Saved Lives", *The Punch*, Friday, December 21, 1990, p.13. For more details on the politicisation of the army in particular see Ewa, *Nigerian Army*, pp.492-510.

³⁶See an instance of this in Tangshak Ayuba Larab, "Disempowerment and Marginalization of the Igbo after the Civil War: An Assessment of the 3Rs", in Amstrong Matiu Adejo, ed., *The Nigerian Civil War Forty Years After: What Lessons*. (Abuja, Nigeria: Aboki Publishers, 2008), p.309.