

THE AFRICAN POSITION ON THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR 1967-1970 IN THE BRITISH GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER

Dr. Ali Najeh Muhammad

Researcher Tayseer Ali Faisal, Anbar University - College of
Education for Human Sciences, Iraq.

DOI: [10.17605/OSF.IO/6C9DZ](https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6C9DZ)

Abstract

The Nigerian crisis received wide attention at the African level, as African countries stood by the federal government in its war with the eastern region, except for five African countries, namely Tanzania, Zambia, Ivory Coast, Gabon and Sierra Leone, which supported the secession of the east and provided it with military aid against the federal government. Basically African countries within the framework of the Organization of African Unity, which and the role played by its president at the time, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie, as the Organization of African Unity feared the occurrence of separatist tendencies in some African countries, such as the eastern region of Nigeria, so it sought with all its energies to internationalize the Nigerian crisis as soon as possible, but it failed at that.

The Nigerian civil war 1967_1970 received wide attention at the African level, as the presidents of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania met on the eighth of July 1967 in the city of Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, and called for an end to the fighting and urged the warring parties to start conducting peace talks between the two parties to ensure the cessation of the fighting ⁽¹⁾, as well as On the sixteenth of July 1967, the Government of Ghana sent two planes that contributed to the evacuation of foreign nationals from the port of Port Harcourt to Lagos⁽²⁾, and appealed on the twenty-seventh of August 1967 to both sides of the Nigerian civil war to realize the futility of fighting and to sit at the conference table to preserve their lives and said "This is a war that no side can win, and the lives lost in it will prove to be cruel in the long run" ⁽³⁾.

In this context, the Organization of African Unity held a meeting on the twentieth of July 1968 in the Nigerian city of Niamey in the presence of representatives of the parties to the Nigerian conflict, but those discussions were unsuccessful because Ojukwu changed his mind about the agreement in which he confirmed his willingness to accept the organization's appeal regarding allowing the entry of relief supplies to Biafra through a corridor from Nigeria, and this disturbed the federal government and they confirmed that Ojuku's goal was to buy time, but the Organization of African Unity was hoping to persuade both sides to accept a demilitarized zone through which international relief organizations could move freely to provide food supplies, but Jowon warned international organizations against interfering in the Nigerian crisis under the pretext of humanity⁽⁴⁾.

On September 3, 1967, African foreign ministers proposed holding the fourth summit conference of the Organization of African Unity to discuss developments in the Nigerian civil war⁽⁵⁾. From 11 September 1967, its sessions continued until the fourteenth of September, during which the Nigerian issue was discussed in the presence of U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, who urged the Organization of African Unity to take its leading role in settling African disputes and use its authority to achieve this, and the conferees decided to send a mission to Lagos to mediate for Ending the fighting between the two parties, however, the federal

government showed its dissatisfaction with the decisions of the conference after it considered its case a purely internal affair⁽⁶⁾.

But after strenuous efforts and continuous follow-up by the Organization of African Unity, the Nigerian federal government agreed on the fifteenth of September 1967 to allow the peace mission to visit Lagos⁽⁷⁾, but the mission of the mission was difficult, especially after it was imposed on the federal government, because it insisted even after the end of the conference. However, the Nigerian crisis is an internal matter, while the eastern region considered the decision of the Organization of African Unity a victory for it. Besides, the failure of any African country to recognize the Biafra government was explained because they wanted to give Nigeria an opportunity to preserve its integrity and unity on the basis that history always designs nations according to reason, but After the control of Biafra over the Middle West, African countries were convinced that the Ibos were determined to stand firm and keep their new state⁽⁸⁾.

On the twenty-third of November 1967, the Organization of African Unity Committee called on the government of Biafra to renounce its secession⁽⁹⁾, as the Ghanaian president denied it on the twenty-fourth of November 1967 traveled to Nigeria with the authorization of his last blessing to open direct contacts with Ojuku⁽¹⁰⁾, but the latter denounced the organization Pan-Africanism, as he believes, is a tool for the reactionaries, and he said that the committee that searched for a way to end the Nigerian civil war is doomed to failure⁽¹¹⁾.

Biafra showed a kind of flexibility towards crystallizing the crisis more than the union side, as it proposed on the eighth of December 1967 that Britain, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Organization of African Unity play the role of mediators. Peace talks, according to its terms, impeded the work of the committee, because Biafra offered the federal side to join the Nigerian Federation with common services and a common market, but the federal government stressed the need for Ojukwu to abandon separation as a prerequisite for sitting at the dialogue table⁽¹²⁾.

Within the context of regional efforts to resolve the Nigerian crisis, Addis Ababa hosted, on the thirtieth of July 1968, talks to resolve the Nigerian crisis under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity, as Inahuru, the representative of the federal government, issued a statement expressing his concern at the failure of the talks if Biafra insisted on its position, which it committed to in the talks. Kampala, which previously collapsed, and indicated that the peace formulas issued by "Mojoku" the Minister of Internal Affairs of Biafra on the same day in London appeared to be the position practiced by Biafra in Kampala, and that it departed from the Addis Ababa actions agreed upon in Niamey, especially those related to permanent settlement arrangements, In addition, Inahuru stressed that the only solution for Nigeria lies in the formula of a one-nation state in terms of what the constitution of that country is and how many countries should be the Nigerian Union, and that is what must be decided not in Addis Ababa but in another constitutional conference, and Inahuru opposed the idea of holding a referendum In Biafra, he also stressed that in the event of the failure of the talks, the federal forces would authorize their army to seek final victory over the forces of Biafra⁽¹³⁾.

The Nigerian civil war entered a more important stage after the start of talks between the two sides in Addis Ababa, which were chaired by Emperor Haile Selassie. Ojuku, who headed the Biafra delegation on August 3, 1968, declared his insistence on an

"honorable and just" settlement. He also announced a truce in the fighting for the duration of the conference. Reactions to the armistice decision by the federal government were cool, and it announced its intention to impose its control on the lands under the control of the Ibo in the event of the failure of the talks. For a political settlement, however, Ojukwu was not ready to give up on the Igbo's desire for secession and it is certain that the unionist side would not be willing to negotiate except on the basis that any political settlement within the framework of a united Nigeria⁽¹⁴⁾.

The discussions centered on three main points for ending the civil war, which are the settlement arrangements, the terms of the cease-fire, and relief in the areas ravaged by the war. However, the start of the procedures was delayed due to the late arrival of the Biafra delegation on the one hand, and because of the special dialogue between Haile Selassie and the delegations of the federal government and Biafra⁽¹⁵⁾. The federal government headed by Inahuru on August 7, 1968 made a peace offer that consisted of several points to end the civil war, but it maintained its insistence that Biafra give up its secession, as well as other matters, including the disarmament of Biafra's forces, and a pledge not to interfere with the federal forces in the region unless there was a breach For order and law and the appointment of a military government in the region by Jowon⁽¹⁶⁾.

"Ene Ngoku," one of the members of the Biafra delegation to the peace negotiations in Addis Ababa, stated that the peace proposals of the federal government were unrealistic and proposed seven ways for a permanent settlement of the civil war, including the acceptance of Biafra as an independent and sovereign state, and that there be economic cooperation between Nigeria and Biafra, the endowment the immediate lifting of the economic blockade imposed by the Federal Government on Biafra, the withdrawal of troops beyond the pre-war borders to enable the refugees to return to their homes, arrangements to ensure the cessation of hostilities by means of a force of African states, as well as a referendum in the disputed areas within And outside Biafra to determine the wishes of the people, and finally the immediate agreement to transfer immediate supplies of foodstuffs to Nigeria and Biafra⁽¹⁷⁾.

After his arrival in Paris on August 8, 1968, Azekwe, the political advisor to Colonel Ojuku, refused to make any statement about the possibility of Biafra resorting to military aid from outside the country, and indicated that Biafra rejected the peace plan put forward by Inahuru, head of the federal delegation to the negotiations, which focused on the necessity Biafra ended its secession, because it declared its independence through that separation after the marginalization it suffered from, and that it sought its independence to protect the life of the Ibo after the great massacres that it suffered, and that there is no guarantee that such things will not be repeated in the future, and that there can be no room To disarm what Inahoro called "rebel forces" because Lagos is the aggressor⁽¹⁸⁾, Azekwe's refusal came in accordance with the instructions Ojukwu ordered him before leaving the country, which included not accepting any arrangements that detract from any form of full internal and external sovereignty in any way⁽¹⁹⁾.

The talks between the two sides reached a dead end without reaching a result that guarantees an end to the fighting, and thus the task of Emperor Haile Selassie became more important after his diplomatic representative in the negotiations had to continue the negotiations and thus try to stop the attack towards the heart of the Igbo. Neither Biafra nor the federal government showed the slightest hint of budging about The main

issue, as the head of the Biafra delegation, "Ani Njoko" in his recent proposals, asked for "acceptance of Biafra as an independent and sovereign state", although he left the door open to the future with fading bitterness and growing mutual understanding, and urged maximum economic cooperation and joint services, and suggested An immediate cease-fire, an end to the economic blockade, the return of troops beyond pre-war borders, the monitoring of a ceasefire by an international commission, and the people must vote on whether they want to be in Nigeria or Biafra, the proposals of the head of the federal delegation, Anthony Inahuru, required an end to the secession of Biafra before anything else, but he may be willing to offer a face-saving formula for the Biafra who need not give up the secession in words as long as they do so in reality⁽²⁰⁾.

The official position of Biafra has become more extreme than it was in the Kampala talks, especially after one of the members of the delegation, "Louis Mbanefu," indicated the possibility of negotiating flexibly with Lagos once the fighting stopped, as this means that after the cease-fire even sovereignty was negotiable if it was Nigeria is able to make concessions to allow the Ibo greater autonomy within a new form of the Nigerian Federation. Indeed, there are indications that Ojukwu's uncompromising stance caused serious doubts among other Biafra leaders who questioned their military resilience⁽²¹⁾.

The Addis Ababa talks on the twenty-fourth of August 1968 reached an agreement in principle on Sending relief supplies to Biafra, and this came with the efforts of Emperor Haile Selassie, who insisted on the need to come out with a formula that guarantees the delivery of the necessary food and medical supplies to Biafra through the simultaneous use of the mercy, land and air corridors. Thus, relief flights were resumed by the International Red Cross after a two-week hiatus⁽²²⁾.

African efforts continued to resolve the Nigerian crisis, as an African summit conference was held in Algiers on the twelfth of September 1968, which was the last chance for Ojukwu, especially since he was left with only rural areas and the cities of Umuahia and Owerri, as the conditions were tragic for the Ibo population after it reached and their deaths of nearly 6,000 people per day due to famine, and the apparent desperation of Ojukwu's cause led some of his foreign friends to implore him to surrender and urged him to move towards a compromise by offering to join a Nigerian confederation, but Biafra won international sympathy, as well as the position of the French president "De Gaulle" and other sympathy in Western Europe and Scandinavia prevented that⁽²³⁾.

"Tele Tele", Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity, put the cease-fire and the need to alleviate hunger before reaching a political solution in the order of his priorities, and asked the members of the Organization of African Unity to press for a compromise between the two parties, and stressed that any solution to Nigeria's problems must be done Before the occurrence of undesirable consequences, which leads to the continuation of the fighting in one form or another for many years, and even if it is possible to amend the borders of the proposed eastern state "Igbo" in its favor, it does not work, because the obvious alternative is the alternative proposed by President de Gaulle, which was accepted by Biafra but rejected by Lagos⁽²⁴⁾.

The Algiers summit conference on the fifteenth of September 1968 resulted in reaching a resolution by 33 votes against four rejecting votes: "Gabon, Ivory Coast, Tanzania and Zambia", which are the countries that recognized Biafra, and Rwanda and Botswana abstained from voting. The resolution condemned the secession of

Biafra and called for an end to the rebellion. The decision recommended declaring a general amnesty if Biafra agreed to cooperate with the federal government, and also demanded general cooperation to facilitate the arrival of food and medical supplies to those who need them, and stressed that all members of the Organization of African Unity refrain from any actions that would affect the territorial integrity of Nigeria⁽²⁵⁾.

Despite the decisions reached by the Algiers Summit, but they were not actually implemented on the ground, the regional efforts reached within the framework of the Organization of African Unity a cease-fire, especially after it sought a secret initiative to search for peace in Nigeria, as President Inahuru The Nigerian Commission for Information and Action visited Algeria to attend the Pan-African Festival, and during that there was confirmed African pressure on both sides of the need to reach a solution to the crisis, as well as pressure to include the Nigerian conflict on the agenda of the United Nations meeting to be held⁽²⁶⁾. Within the same context, the Organization of African Unity held a meeting on September 7, 1969, attended by U Thant, Secretary-General of the United Nations, as he stated that the Nigerian crisis is a serious humanitarian crisis due to the increasing losses, destruction, famine, and loss of life resulting from the fratricidal conflict, and stressed that despite the bitterness of In Nigeria, there must be hope that enables the parties to pursue negotiations to end the conflict. During that, Ojukwu sent a letter to Lord Brockway, Chairman of the British Committee for Peace in Nigeria, in which he suggested steps towards ending the war, and said that Biafra was ready to accept a three-stage approach as a first step. Should nations friendly to both parties meet to clarify and establish common ground, this could be followed by a meeting of representatives of Biafra and Nigeria, and finally a meeting of managers who would be in a position to commit themselves to their sides⁽²⁷⁾.

The Organization of African Unity, during the meeting of heads of government held in Addis Ababa on the ninth of September 1969, reached a resolution that called for a cease-fire and peace attempts to end the Nigerian civil war on the basis of a united Nigeria. I urged the two sides to accept the immediate cessation of hostilities and the opening of negotiations without delay with the aim of restoring reconciliation and peace in a manner that guarantees reassurance to both parties, as this required ending the separation of Biafra along with guarantees from the federal government to preserve the rights of the Igbo in Biafra, and to reassure them of their fears of genocide, and demanded at the time The same international organizations to stop any action that endangers the efforts of the Organization of African Unity⁽²⁸⁾, however, the federal government has stated that there is no opportunity for a cease-fire before reaching a peaceful settlement based on Nigerian unity⁽²⁹⁾.

President Nyerere explained that the main reason for attending the recent summit was his desire to reach a cease-fire in Nigeria, and despite granting four of the 41 countries of the Organization of African Unity official diplomatic recognition of Biafra (Tanzania, Zambia, Gabon, and the African Sahel), but Nyerere is The only one among these four pro-Biafra chiefs who came to Addis Ababa, Nyerere confirmed that his main concern was to persuade the federal side to accept the cease-fire, after that the Tanzanian president announced that he had received a telegram from General Ojukwu in Biafra in which he pledged to "go anywhere." To hold talks with the federal system on the condition of a cease-fire, Nyerere confirmed that Biafra had shown more willingness to abandon secession if effective guarantees were given for their safety inside Nigeria, and confirmed that Tanzania was ready to withdraw its recognition of Biafra if this was achieved, but this did not receive the attention of the Gowon government, which She

affirmed that she could not separate the issue of cessation of hostilities from the general issue of the unity and territorial integrity of Nigeria⁽³⁰⁾. It turned out that the Tanzanian president, despite his recognition of the government of Biafra at the beginning, changed his position and showed his willingness to abandon that recognition, because he felt that Nigeria had become on the brink of the abyss with the continuation of military operations and the increasing human suffering in it, but the federal government did not heed his call and that returned Naturally, the feeling of distrust and relief towards President Nyerere because he had previously supported Biafra with arms against the federal government.

The Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa failed to find a new formula for peace in Nigeria. In fact, the conference of heads of government, which lasted for five days, had the effect of increasing the lines of division between the two sides, because the organization's decision called on the two parties to the conflict to meet at the negotiating table and discuss peace terms within the framework of a united Nigeria. Thus, the Gowon regime obtained the support of the organization for the third time in a row, so Biafra condemned the conference's decision and considered it unrealistic and biased. President Gwon asked Ojukwu to seek sound negotiations and send a delegation to negotiate with a real will to overcome the crisis⁽³¹⁾. On September 12, 1969, Biafra accepted a Nigerian offer to conduct peace talks, and at the same time asked the federal government to name a friendly country to help determine the time and place for the talks. This came two days after Nigerian President Gowon said that Biafra was welcome to attend the peace talks anywhere without conditions. Prefix⁽³²⁾,

A spokesman for the federal government stated on October 16, 1969 that only Emperor Haile Selassie was authorized to inform her of any proposals for peace talks by Ojukwu. This statement came after rumors circulated in Gabon that Ojukwu had agreed to negotiate personally with the federal government without Preconditions, and the spokesman indicated that any peace talks must be within the framework of a united Nigeria. On the same day, reliable sources in Gabon stated that Ojukwu had commissioned the President of Tanzania, "Nyerere" to visit the Pope in the Vatican to urge him to mediate for peace in Nigeria. Ojukwu also sent a message To the President of Gabon, "Bongo," in which he expressed his readiness to negotiate without preconditions with the federal government and to participate personally in the talks, and suggested that the talks be accompanied by a cease-fire, but "Bongo" did not respond to that letter⁽³³⁾.

On the twelfth of December 1969, Emperor Haile Selassie called on the conflicting parties to send their representatives to Addis Ababa to discuss the political crisis. The proposal and the arrangements for the conference. In contrast, the Ethiopian government waited for similar measures to be taken from Biafra. After that, Biafra sent an official acceptance to attend the conference and invited other parties to communicate and intervene in resolving the problematic Nigerian crisis. The Prime Minister of Canada sent Trudeau as his representative to bring the views of the two together. The parties to the war were also present, as was the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Arnold Smith, who held talks with the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone, Siaka Stevens, as the latter was the link between Emperor Haile Selassie and Biafra to prepare peace talks⁽³⁴⁾.

Emperor Haile Selassie faced a problem in persuading the two parties to the conflict to attend the peace conference that was supposed to be held during the Christmas

holidays. The federal government wanted the talks to take place within the framework of the Organization of African Unity, but Ojukwu stated that he did not accept any conference in which the emperor acts in his capacity or calls for a conference in the context of the decisions of the Organization of Unity. The previous African years (1967/1968/1969), and in the midst of that, Lord Carrington, the conservative leader in the House of Lords, confirmed that there was no immediate hope of ending the Nigerian civil war⁽³⁵⁾, The peace talks collapsed in Addis Ababa due to the lack of agreement between the two parties on the negotiation mechanism, as the federal government saw that the talks as a reintegration of the small eastern-central state in Nigeria, while Biafra saw that it was working to establish a relationship between the form of the eastern region as a unit that had its weight and political size in Nigeria The reason for the problem that contributed to the failure to reach a fruitful result regarding the conflict is the belief of the two parties that they are able to make their way through military means, deliberately relying on the volume of military supplies that reach them from external parties, and this affected the creation of peace in the region⁽³⁶⁾.

Hopes for peace in Biafra faded in the face of the new military offensive launched by the federal forces on the fourth of December 1970, and in the face of those circumstances, all new diplomatic initiatives for a cease-fire were doomed to failure, but despite that, Siaka Stevens, the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone, sought, in coordination with Haile Selassie To strenuous attempts to gather representatives from both sides, but to no avail, and despite Biafra's enthusiasm for unconditional peace talks, it excludes receiving⁽³⁷⁾. Haile Selassie sought to bridge the views between the two parties to the conflict, so he asked the federal government and Biafra on December 5, 1970 to secretly send two representatives each to Addis Ababa in an attempt to reach an agreement on a date and arrangements for substantial negotiations, and the hope was that the representatives would come to the capital Ethiopian, but that did not happen either, and despite that, the Nigerian Chargé d'Affairs in Paris confirmed that he was optimistic about their arrival and indicated the possibility of holding the meeting in Cameroon, but as a result, Emperor Haile Selassie's attempts to make peace collapsed due to the misunderstanding that occurred with the Biafra delegation, who confirmed that Haile Selassie acted In his personal capacity and not on behalf of the Organization of African Unity⁽³⁸⁾.

It became clear to us that Britain and the Soviet Union continued to provide military support to the federal government, and that France, even after the end of de Gaulle's rule, continued to support the government of Biafra. As for the United States of America, it remained neutral, but it was inclined in its policy towards the federal government. As for the Organization of African Unity, it feared From the occurrence of separatist tendencies in some African countries, such as the eastern region of Nigeria, so it sought with all its energies to internationalize the Nigerian crisis as soon as possible, but failed to do so.

Referance

- 1) The Observer, 9 Jul 1967, p1.
- 2) The Guardian, 17 Jul 1967, p7.
- 3) The Guardian, 28 Aug 1967, p7.
- 4) The Observer, 21 Jul 1968, p5.
- 5) The Guardian, 4 Sep 1967, p7.

- 6) The Guardian, 15 Sep 1967, p9.
- 7) The Guardian, 16 Sep 1967, p7.
- 8) The Guardian, 15 Sep 1967, p8.
- 9) The Guardian, 24 Nov 1967, p15.
- 10) The Guardian, 25 Nov 1967, p7.
- 11) The Guardian, 27 Nov 1967, p9.
- 12) The Guardian, 9 Dec 1967, p7.
- 13) The Guardian, 31 Jul 1968, p 7.
- 14) The Observer, 4 Aug 1968, p5.
- 15) The Guardian, 6 Aug 1968, p7.
- 16) The Guardian, 8 Aug 1968, p1.
- 17) The Guardian, 10 Aug 1968, p7.
- 18) The Guardian, 9 Aug 1968, p4.
- 19) The Guardian, 12 Aug 1968
- 20) The Observer, 11 Aug 1968, p5.
- 21) The Guardian, 12 Aug 1968, P9.
- 22) The Observer, 25 Aug 1968, p 1.
- 23) The Guardian, 13 Sep 1968, p8.
- 24) France suggested that the current twelve countries meet in four federations, each within a confederation. This could satisfy the three major tribes, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo among the minorities. The minorities of the Middle Belt - the non-Muslim north - and the Midwest might form a fourth federation within the confederation. The non-Igbo in the east within an eastern federation owe allegiance to both Enugu and Lagos. Look: The Guardian, 13 Sep 1968, p8.
- 25) The Guardian, 16 Sep 1968, P1.
- 26) The Observer, 3 Aug 1969, p2.
- 27) The Guardian, 8 Sep 1969, p3.
- 28) He was referring to the International Red Cross and religious charities that bring supplies to Biafra. Look: The Guardian, 10 Sep 1969, P2.
- 29) Ibid.
- 30) The Guardian, 10 Sep 1969, P2.
- 31) The Guardian, 11 Sep 1969, p2.
- 32) The Guardian, 13 Sep 1969, p1.
- 33) The Guardian, 17 Oct 1969, p3.
- 34) The Guardian, 13 Dec 1969, p2.
- 35) The Guardian, 18 Dec 1969, p2.
- 36) The Guardian, 19 Dec 1969, p8.
- 37) The Guardian, 5 Jan 1970, p2.
- 38) The Guardian, 6 Jan 1970, p2.