

## **BIAFRA: BEYOND THE REALM, SABOTAGE AND DEARTH OF INTEL IN THE BIAFRA/NIGERIA DEBACLE, 1967-1970**

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### **Abstract**

*War, as the last stage of diplomacy and peace, requires a strategic sequence to be effected. The Biafran Republic once declared on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1967, was welcomed, protected and propelled by natural pride of the groups that made up Eastern Nigeria as well as resourcefulness and jealousy-guarded patriotism, triggered by the preceding litany of organized pogrom meted against the Easterners. From start, many Eastern Nigerian soldiers and police personnel serving with the Nigerian armed forces, swiftly changed sides and fought on the Biafran side. With unequalled vigour, and common cause of able commanders stationed in different places were psyched up by the Biafran propaganda machinery to defend the newly taken freedom with iron and blood. At the initial stages of the war, Biafran successes were tremendous; however the headache on the Nigerian army over these successes was short-lived owing to sabotage, divisiveness and paucity of military tactical intelligence which when strategically synthesized could silence the impact of lethal weaponry; all these played discordant tunes on the Biafran high command. This work contends that the importance of signals, its interpretation and analysis necessary for the prosecution of modern warfare was highly undermined by the Biafran high command; it was complicated by viable selfish interests which paved way for the Biafran loss of the war. The need for historical objectivity and analysis in this study, has underscored the reliance on primary information and research, even into classified documents*

**Keywords:** *Military intelligence, Sabotage, Signals, Communication*

### **Introduction**

The noisy clatter of machine guns and the deafening noise of deadly explosives and projectiles undoubtedly help in packaging sceneries in stable modern war theatres. Designate troop movements, weapons' deployment and

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application in warfare is guided by definite objectives, momentarily supported by trusted information. Information drives strategy, and when deciphered and synthesized drives tactical missions and maneuvers, hence remains one of the primary propellers in warfare. From the earliest time, historical annals are inundated with the numerous roles played by spies, town criers and traditional whistle blowers and even broadcasting on the spot details emergent on the battlefield, to the consumption of engaged warriors in the field and even those afar off. Over the ages, selected high-rise trees, hills and man-made towers have provided viable platforms to ensure clarity of vision, objectivity and safe haven for such information providers. Herein lies the background from which the contemporary military intelligence and communications evolved, and has not only continued to prove its importance, but has remained an orthodox primary accomplice in not only military circles, but the countless relations existing between various individuals, and sovereignties on the global stage. Intelligence and communication aid countries to execute wars at least with limited costs, and equally help on the other hand in preventing over reaction and consequent collateral damage. Delving a little into the field military intelligence and communication, command and control may help throw more light and properly elucidate, the positional depth of this study *vis a vis* the challenges of sabotage and communication as witnessed in Biafra while the war lasted.

Military intelligence and communications represent all activities, equipments, techniques and tactics used by the military during hostility and in hostile areas of the world to generate, collate, transmit and interpret information on land, in the sea, or on air. It should be noted that the attributes of classical subtleness, untrustworthiness and selfishness imbued in, and manifest in basic human nature, did drive even the earliest of human societies whether in Asia or traditional African communities to encrypt such information being transmitted, thereby secluding it from adversaries. This tactics came to be tagged-**signal**, hence signals and signalers became a highly distinct military occupation dealing rather with general communication methods, than with weapons. Intelligence, aids command and control through communication (**military comms**). Moreover, through the help of tactical signals, operations remain focused, packaged and proactive. After the successful invention of the first military-based equipment mounted inside an automotive vehicle in 1934 in the Soviet Union, the spy world went berserk with hi-tech communication satellites, air crafts, automated drones, sonic network attacks and operations. This brings us into the purview of military command and control as a product of intelligence analysis and organization.

Command and Control (C2) in a military organization can be understood as the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commanding officer over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of a mission<sup>1</sup>. Command and control functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating and controlling forces and operations in the execution of a mission. (C2) consists of several aspects and sub-domains, which are represented by derivative terms hereunder explained.

1. C2I - Command, Control & Intelligence
2. C2I SR - C2I Plus Surveillance
3. C2I STAR - C2 plus 1STAR: Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance
4. C3 - Command, Control & Communication (human activity focus)
5. C3 - Command, Control & Communications (technology focus)
6. C3I - 4 possibilities; the most common is Command, Control, Communications & Intelligence
7. C3I STAR - C3 plus 1STAR
8. C3I SREW - C3SR plus Communication and Electronic Warfare
9. C5I - Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Combat systems and Intelligence, among others.

In this context, command is the exercise of authority relative to certain knowledge and aimed at a definite objective, while control entails the verification and management of activity such that the objective or goal of command is accomplished. Communication is the ability to exercise the necessary liaison between tactical or strategic units, while intelligence includes collection as well as the analysis and distribution of information. Once intelligence is gathered through the interception of signals **SIGINT**, it becomes communication intelligence - **COMINT**; when such signals involve an electronic gadget (Electronic Intelligence **ELINT**) or the combination of the two. Intelligence cycle management involves the use of cryptanalyst to trace the origin, content and designation of such signals. All defensive signals intelligence demand appropriate encryption against content interception, most especially when the belligerent is a formidable opponent, who could detect the signal. The Biafra country, while it lasted, wholesomely embarked on defensive program, which had it completely exposed to the threat and capabilities of its enemy, who largely relied on highly variable transmission schedules with transmitting frequencies using a spectrum spread technique connecting overhead monitoring air crafts. (Russian MIGs.)

It may be recalled that the January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1966 military putsch marked the first official meddling of the Nigerian army into civilian governance of the country. It was followed by some significant developments for instance, - the massive civil riots in May, 1966 which took the lives of over 3,000 Eastern Nigerians, quickly followed by a military counter-coup and pogroms, also directed against the same people at an estimated cost of over 50,000 lives,<sup>2</sup> all weighted down and helped to finally cascade the country into a bloody three-years war.

Even as the Eastern Nigeria government was engaged with the General Gowon led Federal Government at the center on the plight of Easterners in different parts of Northern Nigeria, there remained no viable information link sustaining and feeding aggrieved and agitated minds in Eastern Nigeria. This not only created room for a costly gap, but was mischievously exploited to promote confusion most especially against the Easterners. It must be said, that before now, General Ironsi's Decree 34 accompanied by numerous intended appeasement have helped in liquidating and decimating the biggest pro-active and dynamic Eastern ethnic organization, the **Igbo Union**, which cared for, duly informed and homogenized the Igbo people both within and outside Nigeria.

With the ominous dark clouds speedily gathering on the national horizon, in the Eastern region, there persisted a dangerous atmosphere of eclipse of fraternal confidence between the military government, the surviving returnee senior military officers, the politicians, the civilian think -tank and some now released young officers who took power in the January Coup, who felt betrayed by these senior officers.<sup>4</sup> This situation became so bad that even as the Nigerian military has been polarized between the East and the rest of Nigeria, added to the hot exchanges and verbal agreements between the authorities of both sections, the Aburi deliberations and altercations in the Eastern region, the remnants of these returnee army officers felt side tracked in that no singular attempt or opportunity was spent in either seeking for their suggestion or even detailing them with Eastern policy decisions as dictated by the Biafra Executive Council. By mid-April, 1967 this explosive development assumed a dramatic dimension with the impromptu cancellation of all military drills in the East by the Military Governor as a counter measure to avert an 'impending *coup*' to unseat Ojukwu<sup>5</sup>. This marked the beginning of a dangerous trend even before the declaration of the Biafran nation; reliable or not, but that which cumulatively and constructively contributed to the physical demise of a peoples spirited attempt to be free. Call it *coup* or sabotage, it simply remained a portent distraction, which brought with it disorder and lack of common action for common cause. Punitively, Major

Nzeogwu and a host of other military officers were suspended from performing military duties<sup>6</sup>, at a time when the East should rather be putting its house in order, fully aware of the progressive heightened crescendo of insecurity against it. Raw suspicion and accusation of disloyalty and planning to overthrow the Eastern Regional Government was even done with recklessness that Colonel Njoku, the Eastern Regional Army Commander's insistence to be allowed to sit at the Executive Council meetings was not only misconstrued as a threat to the Governor's office, but his personality came under assassination soon afterwards throughout the East, as one with vaulting ambition and doubtful loyalty<sup>7</sup>. One may not help observing with putation, the high level of acrimony and distrust subsisting in the Eastern Region even at a period when myriads of wounded Igbo pogrom survivors needed organized attention, more so when the declaration of the Republic of Biafra has not even taken place. On the other hand, apart from the crisis of confidence enveloping the Eastern Region's Government, the many accounts of returnee Igbo army officers and the civilian population, created strong base for multiple unfounded rumors which fanned curiosity, anxiety, fear and tension, hence un-conditioning the region for a meaningful resistance against any invading force. While the Eastern Regional police largely proved wanting in the provision of adequate and corporate information in tandem with the voracious demand of such in the period, recourse was rather taken to extant rumors and musings from border-inhabited communities. Such intelligence posed challenging synthesis and coordination.

### **Reflections**

Though mandated by, and acting in accordance with the dictates handed over by the **Eastern Nigeria Consultative Assembly**, Colonel Ojukwu, equally irked by the people's euphoric demands for freedom, and apparently threatened and taunted by variegated endogenous and exogenous challenges, finally declared the Republic of Biafra on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1967. Mere declaration of an intention or a status is simply a far cry from achieving and sustaining it, more so where resources with regards to the enabling mission appear intractable. Agreed, secession on the part of Biafra, given the subsisting circumstances was made to appear inevitable, but on the other hand, the young republic has no right to underestimate the impending federal reaction and response, fully aware that the existing political and strategic nomenclature in Nigeria grandiosely tilted against it. Apart from the 'unreliable pathology' of the Yoruba culture group, one may not be reminded that British overbearing influence on Nigeria, even at this period, was unquestionable. Moreover, the British foreign policy on Eastern Nigeria,

evolve from a hideous past, and a continued relationship, where it perceives the Eastern Nigerian Igbo as a portent exploitative competitor, and an inhibiting octopus to its continued selfish desires within its political contraption. That Britain, Russia, Egypt and a host of other groups militarily later aided the Nigerian forces against Biafra that was left with about 240 professional soldiers, technicians and tradesmen inclusive, after the exit of large numbers of Northern soldiers from Enugu in August, 1966 fully with their weapons<sup>8</sup>, may not be the thrust of this study. However, the conclusion one must draw is that, penultimate to the final declaration of the Biafran state, the Eastern region operated bereft of equitable intelligence and information. Where lies the reason and objective on the part of the Eastern Region's Governor to have acceded to having a separate agreement with General Gowon, whereby the Northern soldiers serving in the East were repatriated with all their assigned weapons and equipment, whereas the few surviving Easterners (soldiers) were not allowed to migrate back, in consonance with national directives<sup>9</sup>.

One may equally recall and question the reason for the self-imposed state of anomie, which the Eastern regional government assumed between January and May 1967, while intensive recruitment into the Army was ongoing throughout Nigeria except in the Eastern Region, where Gowon warned against such an exercise<sup>10</sup>. Fully aware of the continued estrangement of the Eastern Region under the emerging scenario, planning and acting in tandem with the demands and dictates of covert and overt information and actions would have occupied Colonel Ojukwu and his high command, rather than basking in heightened propaganda and unguided optimism, with little or no attention for pre-emptive military preparations, even when the information was made public in a national daily that Major O. Appolo had successfully paid for a large catchment of armory in Europe, meant for the Nigerian Army<sup>11</sup>. This study is of the view that Biafran authorities never took time to evaluate the weight of the gathering clouds, not until the actual inundation took off. This cumulatively led to the eventual massive drafting and exposure of the first greater number of the untrained Biafran recruits, ill-armed and anxious for vengeance (the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Biafran battalions) into putting up resistance at the hands of the Federal fighting patrol detachments, which attacked specific Eastern Regional outposts towards the ending days of May 1967. It is important to note that, on the part of the Biafran high command, faced with dire logistical challenges, even at the early stages of the conflict, coordinating both battalions from Enugu headquarters, and reaching out to Nsukka and Port Harcourt respectively along Biafra's contiguous borders, became a daunting task.

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How could one explain the incident which took place on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1967 in *Obollo Afor* during the earliest phase of the war, where lack of intelligence communication even under some seasoned Biafran officers ( Colonels Madiebo and Eze) the 'A' and 'B' companies inflicted heavy casualties on Biafran 'D' Company<sup>12</sup>. This incident finally happened since no precaution was taken to ameliorate apparent warnings on the disconnect between the 51<sup>st</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> Biafran Brigades. The *Obollo Afor* incident was significant enough, for apart from its innumerable human loss through friendly fire, it played out that between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> August, when it became glaring to the Federal Forces that there was either a lacuna or nonexistent intelligent coordination of the Biafran resistance in this area, they simply utilized four days of intensive shelling without the application of any infantry to take the area<sup>13</sup>. One may have to contrast this with what happened on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, 1967, when the federal troops attacked *Garkem* (30 miles from *Ogoja* town). Here, the 7<sup>th</sup> Biafran battalion operating without any wireless communication confirmed the Nigerian/ Biafran war to have really started, only when it saw the first set of Biafran casualties being brought in. Soldiers of this battalion had comfortably assumed that what they had been hearing from 2am in the night was simply heavy thunder accompanying rainfall in the neighboring community<sup>14</sup>. Devoid of wireless communication in military operations and most especially on deep penetration, control of troops is absolutely impossible. Moreover, understanding the dramatic events that finally culminated in the Biafran loss of *Ogoja* Province would further expose both the dangerous depth of the sabotage challenges and the intelligence disconnect within the Biafran operational high command. This study in tandem with professional historical objectivity having relegated terms like luck, mistake, disaster and "miracle" to the background, remains entirely agreed that the entire Biafran military operations (MILOPS) in the *Ogoja* Province of the Biafran country wholesomely collapsed due to paucity of battle field military intelligence. *Ogoja* province hosting at the same time, the antagonistic forces of Nigeria's First Division and Third Marine Commando against Biafra's First Battalion, starved not only the clash of elitist military engagements from both sides, but the accomplishment of Nigeria's tactical offensive on a Biafran strategic hub at a timely period<sup>15</sup>. A field participant, *Odonna*, who fought on the Biafran side recounted how there was practically no effective intelligence feedback mechanism not up to 48hours into the *Ogoja* imbroglio. According to him, poor relations amongst other things between the subsisting Biafran troops with the indigenous inhabitants did not help matters. Just as the local coordination and purposeful MILOPS were absent on

the battle field, so also the emergent dangerous disconnect which unfolded within the third day of the invasion of Gakem between Enugu and Ogoja.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the paucity of wireless communication gadgets on the Biafran side, a proactive centrally-controlled intelligence unit able to send tactical signals in tandem with the changing contours and demands of the various war theatres was inexistent. This easily often busied the Biafran army in tactile and tangled mess, creating unhealthy dangerous openings for egocentric inordinate ambitions, which was the least expectation and engagement a people under siege needed. Within the first four months of 1967, when it became increasingly clear that the Biafran army could hardly holdback the Nigerian offensive inferno, the need arose to fall back and reorganize the militia under the command of Brigadier Effiong into an effective and disciplined force<sup>17</sup>. This move appear justified, since the militia provided ready source of manpower reinforcement to the regular army; assisted in military administration behind enemy lines and ran the propaganda engine which sustained the war. The Biafran militia (intellectuals, businessmen and professionals) largely in-coordinate as it were, quickly split into two powerful and opposing factions (the Enugu and Port Harcourt groups). All attempts at reconciliation, even under Police Commissioner Chinwuba, proved abortive, and as clear as it ran its cause, the army always took time to steer clear of its affairs<sup>18</sup>. Howbeit that an ill-equipped army, with poor administrative support, surviving on a life line of always overstretching itself trying to actively defend the amorphous fragile Biafran boundaries would rather than unite and propel a common approach, prefer to engage in unnecessary dangerous divisiveness. In falling back and resorting to strategic defense, Biafran military leaders simply lost sight of the fact that by defending everywhere, Biafra could not possibly be strong anywhere; after all, one does not need to capture everywhere in order to win a war. Defensive battles alone cannot win wars. The vulnerability of the flanks always renders defensive positions unsafe and unprotected.

Surprise still remains one of the most portent strategies which go a long way in deciding the eventual outcome of any conflict. However, in order to achieve surprise, intelligence must guide and guard flexibility, timing, strength, precision, conduct and force, or the formidability of designate operations. Efficiency suffers when experience is alienated; military orders are better discussed, debated and not simply issued. It could be nostalgic to reflect on Biafra's lightning break on the Midwestern parts of Nigeria on the night of August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1967, and the motive behind its wasteful three days delay and diversion into *Sapele* and *Warri* towns, rather than its designated 'liberating'

push into *Ibadan* and *Lagos*. How could the Biafran high command toy with this operation, by having it commanded by Colonel Banjo, whose orientation; utterances and actions since the botched January 15<sup>th</sup> Nzeogwu *Coup*, have remained controversial. It may be recalled that Banjo for one, though a Yoruba, was not officially cleared from attempting a fatality on General Ironsi's life<sup>19</sup>. Regardless of the cumulative propelling details of such invasion on the Biafran side, considering its tactical advantages, it does equally appear that the intricate reprisal consequences of the failure of such a mission were not duly weighed. The Midwest invasion finally turned out to be a disastrous political miscalculation by Biafra which dissipated sympathy for it in the Western/Midwestern Regions. While it caught the Nigerian army off guard and shot it out of complacency, it also gave some non-Easterners the impression that Biafra's objectives were not limited to self-defense, but harbored territorial expansion as its cardinal ambition<sup>20</sup>.

By the early months of 1968, just as purposeful objectives and intelligence streamlined Nigerian army's offensive on strategic Biafran towns and establishments, such was not the case in the East. In the course of most wars and conflicts, positions of negotiations and bargaining in proposed punctuating conferences or armistice meant for belligerents, are often better approached from battle field gains and advantages. Very much eager to adversely reduce Biafra's import capability and economic base towards sustaining the war, and further weakening its bargaining positions at the proposed May 25<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> 1968, Nigeria/Biafra conference in Kampala, Uganda, the Nigerian army actually dug in and succeeded in capturing Bonny and Port Harcourt just some days before that conference actually held. Such amazing success couldn't have been gotten and sustained if not for the active use and deployment of local Niger Delta indigenes (civilians) as intelligence officers by the Nigerian army<sup>21</sup>.

Apart from the many fatalities and losses which the Biafran army entertained sequel to the lack of cumulative basic intelligence on the path of the Biafran high command, this study still finds it difficult to fully estimate the cumulative damage and the financial chasm which the January 1968 Nigerian Currency change created on Biafra. Disorganized in stable structural organization, and in dire need of all basic human needs, including the 'lack of weapons' challenge, Biafra was made to lose above fifty million pounds<sup>22</sup> in the middle of an ongoing defensive war. Undoubtedly, adequate intelligence would have averred the Biafran authorities of this move on time, so as to have planned and braced up for it. A good financial base not only bequeaths confidence and focus on parties engaged in conflict or war, but enables needs

accessibility. The enabling factor or 'steam' was removed from Biafra after Nigeria's currency change.

Moreover, the gruesome and atrocious application of hunger as a strategic potent weapon of war as propounded by Obafemi Awolowo, (the Nigerian finance minister in the war period) and wholesomely executed by the Nigerian government against the Biafran enclave under siege conclusively drove the death nail which finally decimated whatever remained of the Biafran resistance. Amongst belligerents, most especially on the battle fields, planning predates execution, and proper planning elicits intelligent information as regards enemies' engagements, or else pre-emptive calculations and suggestions take the upper hand. Biafran women married or not, in order to beat hunger and support their families at this austere time, took up the option of cohabiting with the soldiers of the "victorious" Nigerian army as mistresses or wives. Espionage, whether involuntarily done as a strategic emergent trading initiative meant to support/sustain survival (*ahia attack*), or voluntarily drawn into such venture as to "trade sex" with the occupying force, one issue is obviously certain, a process of give and take is not only trivially important but institutionalizes foundations of battle field trust and conviviality across enemy lines.

Some of these "unholy relationships" were hurriedly contrived and concluded as the exigencies of the frontlines demanded, while others were sustained over prolonged period, so long as the "supplier" and the "consumer" still placed value on the "product" and services. The imbroglio started manifesting glaringly from the closing months 1968, and in the Biafran country it grossly disaffected,, disrupted, distorted and dismembered what was left of the Biafran compact resistance and wartime intelligence. Call them *Yakambaya* or *ora-okpu* (prostitutes) in their nefarious strides, these women turned into potent spies, espionage handmaids, dangerous traders and controversial breadwinners depending on which angle one chooses to see them. A risky exercise indeed, conducted mostly at night under the atmosphere of dangerous hostilities, most of those women strove to gain maximally from both sides. Engaged and entangled in such risky conduct, they largely competed among themselves on each successive trip as regards food and financial gratification and strove to build and sustain relevance, admiration, value and credibility to the Nigerian troops by trading other products more than intangible beauty; logistics and prospects. The weighty implications of divulging such sensitive information at the primary source would always remain phantomable to the uninformed, and a gainful venture to the transacting medium, after all naturally, the women folk appear fashioned and

formulated to bend either way as talebearers ever ready to feed the uninterested ears.

Slightly related to this was the part played by the **Biafran Food Directorate** throughout the duration of the war. It simply operated on false strength returns, with meal periods ill-timed against that of military operations, just as cooking houses dispersed and took several days to reassemble and re-establish in another location, each time the army lost ground<sup>23</sup>. As the war progressed, and Biafran territory shrank, food producing zones were lost in sequence, and faced with the unavailability of fiscal power; many soldiers became exposed to prolonged and intensive hunger. The army lost flexibility and surprise unless one was ready to forgo some meals. Severally, the Biafran army and the Food Directorate fell apart with counter accusations of malpractices, cheating and deceit, hence by the middle of 1969, the cumulative amount of food the army was collecting from the Directorate onwards to the soldiers operating actively on the frontlines, amounted to a meal in four days<sup>24</sup>. While the war progressed, the siege on Biafra continued to develop into an economic squeeze hence hunger drove a good number of the Biafran soldiers into fraternizing with the Nigerian troops, in the hope of getting presents of tinned foods and cigarettes. This scenario was witnessed in many locations, and the cumulative damage on Biafran intelligence was calamitous<sup>25</sup>. It may appear right to say, the **Biafra Joint Planning Committee (JPC)**, which came into being by 1969, was rather too late since it was merely to satisfy the long outstanding demand of the people for an organized and collective planning of the war. The committee worked without necessary facts and achieved absolutely nothing. Emergent situation was that each time a major decision was taken in Biafra, the Army thought the civilians were responsible for it, while the civilians thought the reverse was true<sup>26</sup>. When heightened propaganda remains extremely contradictory over a longtime from the realities on the ground, most especially where recalcitrant and inordinate objectives appear to polarize the realization of a definite cause, resistance become chequered, after all, 'the sound produced from the mouth as the bitter kola is being masticated is quite different from its real taste.'

From the beginning to the end of the war, Biafran army remained comparatively severely handicapped in weapons acquisition, and armed with such vital information, the Nigerian forces generally successfully resorted to bulldozing their way through Biafran resistance with heavy armor, artillery and Russian/Egyptian-backed airpower first, before sending in the infantry if need be. These Russian Migs could afford to fly even below tree tops, selecting their targets, since the Biafran army had no radars, and extremely

few anti-aircraft guns<sup>27</sup>. Proper and effective espionage or spy network could have afforded the Biafran High Command with privileged intelligence that would equip it with the tactical weapon of **surprise**, since physical strength (weaponry) was a far cry. Surprise has an edge over strength, and pre-operation discussions and detailing if any, could have educated the disadvantaged but determined Biafran infantry to adopt more of a flanking move rather than a head-on collision against armor, which was a recurrent incident.

The cumulative lack of basic intelligence, Battalion indiscipline and in-harmonization, the reliance and preference to spiritual and esoteric directives and solutions most especially from 1968, primarily contributed to the fall of *Aba* and *Umuahia*, and the destruction of the Biafran 12<sup>th</sup> Division and 'S' commando Division, thereby exposing the rear of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division operating in *Okigwe* sector. It was simply easier for the Nigerian 3<sup>rd</sup> Marine Commando under Brigadier Adekunle (Black Scorpion), operating from the South to join up with the First Division descending from the North (Enugu). Consider the scenario that emerged, when armed with detailed and accurate information, the 12<sup>th</sup> Division was exposed to sustained aerial and land bombardment; it took a runner 24 hours to inform the Biafran 12<sup>th</sup> Division headquarters at Mbawisi from Ebiri of an attack going on, and 48 hours for the Biafran Army headquarters (Enugu) to obtain such vital information<sup>28</sup>, in order to re-plan and take contingency steps, just because of the unavailability of vehicles and wireless link. Faced with such appalling challenges, hopelessness and failures on the battle field, the Biafran Army easily found itself villainised and vilified by no less than an angry civilian populace, who were traumatized by the unfolding negative realities.

Perhaps, the greatest singular element that preyed on, and psychologically sowed viable discordant seeds, hence contributing to the eventual Biafra's loss at the war was the controversial problem of '**sabotage**'. As the war began, just after the initial deadly clashes and setbacks on Biafra's northern sector, as unfolding development and outcome appeared to challenge proper reasoning, preparation, calculation and expectations, accusations went rife and realistic or not, the sagacious garb of sabotage provided a pragmatic escapade. The word sabotage, having been cast like an infested spell on the young Biafran nation, clung tenaciously and with rapacious momentum, permeated, disorganized, weakened the primary base and collective motivational Igbo spirit. In this subsisting scenario, rumor-peddling took a viral momentum, hoodwinking even those in the commanding heights of the defence of the motherland. The depth of this problem could be evaluated only when one is

apt to realize that this development even affected the few mercenaries that fought on Biafran side, to the extent that they easily resorted to dictating their terms (financial gratifications), whenever they were called upon to assist in any operation<sup>29</sup>. This blackmail dangerously sprouted and created negative hiccups here and there, like during the *Aba* and *Owerri* invasions of July, 1968<sup>30</sup>. On the part of these mercenaries, the setting was right, since the whole lot of the Biafran Civil and Military population found it hard trusting one another's suggestions, intentions and actions.

This study is not apt to debunk all sabotage accusations and claims that pathologically cling to the historical annals of the Nigerian/Biafran war, but cannot either willfully overlook some libelously - obvious cases, which appear purposefully directed 'to give the dog a name, in order to hang it'. It may be recalled that under the atmosphere of crisis of confidence and personality clash, some days before the war actually started, the military Governor of the Eastern Region, Col. Ojukwu, had to suspend some Igbo army officers, including Major Nzeogwu from performing military duties, and continued to bar Colonel Njoku, the 1<sup>st</sup> Biafran Army Commander from participating in Executive Council meetings<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, when it became obvious that Njoku's every move and suggestions continued to attract increasing anxiety, controversy and suspicion, Colonel Ojukwu, poised to safeguard his personality cult, had to place him and his battlefield experience under protective custody, till the end of the war<sup>32</sup>. Suffice it equally to say that Major Nzeogwu even died under implicating and controversial circumstances within *Opi* axis, having operated with his personal reconnaissance commando unit successfully for some time. He may have fallen through organized friendly fire. Factually, abundant supporting evidence show that almost all professional Eastern Army Officers that fought on the Biafran side had at one time or the other, during their various engagements, come under the 'sabotage tag'. While some were unlucky to have been surreptitiously mobbed and killed, others were either saved by providence or finally executed through the firing squad, in accordance with the dictates of an official military tribunal.

Once the word **sabotage** is mentioned, with due regards to the historical account of the Nigerian Biafran war, and so long as the details emanate from the Biafran angle, the names of Colonels Banjo and Ifeajuna would always continue to ring a bell. Colonel Banjo is of Yoruba ethnic stock, while Ifeajuna hails from Onitsha. Colonel Ifeajuna had to face the firing squad, having been found guilty of plotting to overthrow Ojukwu's government during the war. On the Biafran high command, one maybe bound to believe that what was

intended to be an offensive surprise liberation operation, freeing the Midwest, Lagos and Ibadan, and totally changing the existing focal structure of the war got intentionally sabotaged even before the start of this operation on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 1967. In the words of Egbuachor, Banjo's complexities and inexcusable actions lay in his unexplained delays, even by the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, when all allotted militia, soldiers and commando unit designated for this operation, were already concentrated in Onitsha<sup>33</sup>. According to him, we practically met no serious opposition up till Benin city, where we were regimentally kept without army details, until the fourth day, when serious commotion started and continuously came from our 'A' frontline invasion unit, who had earlier on permeated *Ore* axis, and were now beating back speedily. We lost all military composure and tactical retreat as a force, resorting to individual survival skills, since troop and regimental command and control simply and suddenly collapsed<sup>34</sup>.

Researchers on the Biafran account of the war are still puzzled by the real reasons behind Colonel Banjo's three days delay in Benin, the strategic need of diverting at all into *Sapele* and *Warri*, whereas such veritable Biafran units detailed here, would have been drafted towards Ibadan. Some fellow officers dismissed his activities as clouded with unnecessary secrecy and mystery. A 'high sounding nothing' as it would first appear, even imbued with his talismanic trait, it often would hit the dust<sup>35</sup>. In any war situation spying and espionage activities remain and occupy a proactive tool which drives intelligence and course of action. Fore knowledge and even pre-empting enemy intentions is always a good advantage. However, it is rather critical when the sabotage scare not only suffices for long, and rather than diminishing by the day, grows in leaps and bounds.

Perhaps the biggest collateral damage done to Biafran intelligence application over a detailed period was systematically orchestrated by lieutenant colonel Emmanuel Ieajuina, who hails from Onitsha a science graduate of University of Ibadan who led many student Union protests there and along the line relate in closely with Chirstopher Okigbo, J.P Clark, Chike Obi and Emeka Anyaoku. In 1954, he won commonwealth gold medal in high jump. Primarily interested deeply in revolutionary Politics and with an undying penchant and passion of practicing it, he left his teaching job at Ebemeder Anglican Grammar School, Abeokuta and became one of the first graduates to enroll in the Nigeria Army in 1960. By 1966, he has not only reached the rank of major, but has met and developed an intimate relationship with Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu. Though both shared the same revolutionary solution to Nigeria's decadent political solution then, Ifeajuna appeared to be the greater driving

factor covertly maintaining political linkages with some close aides to President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana\*. It is still believed that Ifeajuna killed the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari (his commanding officer), Lieutenant General A. Largema and the finance minister, Festns Okotie Eboh. With the failure of the coup through Ironsi and Ojukwu's intervention, Ifeajuna fled to Ghana and was hosted by Nkrumah, who was shortly overthrown through a military coup. After reassurances from Ojukwu about his safety, he returned to Biafra at the onset of the Nigerian-Biafra war and actively got involved with Victor Banjo, Philip Alale and Samuel Agban in a secret negotiation with some Nigerian officials through certain British elements, hoping to bring about a cease fire to 'save civilian lives'. This involved a plan to eliminate both Ojukwu and Gowon, so as to enthrone Chief Obafemi Awolowo as President and secure prominent positions for themselves. Ojukwu uncovered this plot and got them eliminated after a court martial, through a firing squad on 25<sup>th</sup> Sept, 1967, having been convicted of treason. The Biafran Capital was captured by the Nigerian army two days later, courtesy of overwhelming destabilizing intelligence from Ifeajuna and his compatriots.

Admitted, as the war progressed, many Biafran soldiers and militia members for one reason or the other, at one time or the other defected over the Nigerian side. As they moved, of course intelligent information moved. Some culture groups like the Ikwerre in Rivers State, among others, made the success of the Biafran cause, at least in their area, an impossible mission. What of the divisiveness in the Biafran army in the face of such glaring sabotage? How could one possibly explain the fact that a Biafran Commando Unit was officially applied in the destruction of the robust Biafran 12 Division, at a time when all available hands and ideas were needed to resist the fall of *Aba, Ikot Ekpene* and *Umuahia*<sup>36</sup>. Moreover, it is still enigmatic to some military historians, the remarkable coincidence and the resulting confusion which was played out on the battle front, as the men of the 14<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Nigerian army and the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Biafran army got mixed up for more than six hours during the battle over Port Harcourt. Just as both exhibited the number '14' on their arm tags simultaneously, as expected, before the Biafran army could buy time in order to sort out this confusion, the invading army has already inflicted irreparable damage on it<sup>37</sup>. How could such scenario have successfully happened, even within the Biafran territory, to the advantage of the invading army? If not sabotage, it is mere irresponsibility of the Biafran command structure that is imbued with lack of intelligence and signals management. In laying credence to the non-availability of well-established and functional intelligence-gathering unit system, and

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subsequently substantiating the prevalent sub-standard apparatus on the ground servicing the Biafran army, young hungry orphans were recruited into 'Boy's brigade; haphazardly instructed and used to infiltrate area under the effective control of the Nigerian army. When tactical reconnaissance took the form of 'rekking' and 'combing', as it was termed in the Biafran enclave in the period; when hunger, operational disconnect, unprofessionalism and vicissitudes of battle field operations challenge these intelligence recruits, ones guess may not be hard to make.

## **Conclusion**

That the Eastern Region opted for secession was circumstantially Lt. Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu's political decision, treacherously-driven by General Gowon's subtle selfish and oligarchic tantrums. Once the Nigeria Federal Government lost its candor, goaded by an odious British foreign policy on Eastern Nigeria evolving from a hideous past, secession resulted, and fighting became inevitable-an armed clash between sections of a broken army. Secession was for Ojukwu a hanging apple, just as for Majors Nzeogwu and Ifeajuna -their revolution still have a chance, and for Madiebo, Njoku, Kuruobo among others who survived the Northern pogrom-there was need to redeem their honor as professional soldiers. On the part of the Biafran civil population, propelled by a tacit belief in divine help and justification in defending their freedom right in their motherland, they practically threw everything in. The Biafran high command, the army and the civilian population appear to have approached and carried this struggle rather with inharmonious parallel objectives that were largely withdrawn from the common major danger that stared them on the face. The loss of one key town followed another in the Biafran country, and apart from its physical and psychological impact on the fighting force and the civilian population, it equally denigrated Biafra's status and position in the **Kampala Peace Talks**, among others.

The nascent Biafra never realized that to simply defend, dissipates enormous energy, since coordination and sustenance must remain a continuum. Moreover, running a war simply with reliance on 'walkie talkies' and the remnants of what was left of the Nigeria Postal and Telecommunications equipments in the besieged Biafra, negates proper thought sequence. The need for informed and structured channels of signals and feedback in any human endeavor cannot be underrated. However, veritable information deliberately handed over to the enemy covertly, is classified under rational human thinking as a sabotage action. Copious information abound in the Biafran war archive which lay credence to the position of this study; that

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elements of secrecy, surprise, intelligence and coordination were scarcely employed by Biafra right from the beginning of the war, till its end. Military and operational intelligence and signals, lubricates, drives and sustains the vision and mission of a belligerent entity, though unfolding developments would always appear sour and unorthodox wherever vital information about an adversary is deliberately leaked to an opponent. Defection and sabotage as unethical conducts and behaviors would always suffice as potential human attributes. It is only when studies of this nature is painstakingly done succinctly, that facts and objectivity would reveal not only what led to the final outward result, but create a benchmark and salient indices for plausible historical lessons. Propaganda considerations took precedence over cold realities, while methodical calculations were persecuted on the altar of hopeful interpretation and wishes.

### **Endnotes**

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5. Alexander Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and The Biafran War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), p. 88.
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10. Michael Stafford, *Quick kill in slow motion: The Nigeria Civil war* (Marine Corps and Staff College, 1984) 25
11. James Calaghan, "Prelude to war", *Daily Times*, March 8<sup>th</sup>, 1967,p. 7
12. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War...*p. 87
13. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War...*p. 90
14. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War...*p. 97
15. Alfred Egbuacho, c.76, Biafran war veteran who was later absorbed into the Nigerian Army. During the war initially operated first as one of the coordinators of the "Boys Brigade" guerilla group and afterwards admitted into the controversial Biafran commando unit that operated majorly around the riverine Anambra area. Also, he actively participated in the Midwest

- invasion. At the time of this writing, he is the traditional ruler of Amesi Kingdom of Anambra State, Nigeria
16. Paul Odonna, c.78, a native of Ogoja who operated at different periods both on the Biafran and Nigerian side during the war.
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  18. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*...p. 83
  19. Max Siollun, *Oil, Politics and Violence: Nigeria's Military Coup Culture (1966 - 1976)* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009) p. 162
  20. Godwin Alabi - Isama, *The Tragedy of Victory* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited , 2013),p. 97
  21. Cervernka Zdnek, *A History of the Nigerian War*, (Ibadan: Onibonoje Press, 1972) p. 58
  22. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, p. 48
  23. Patrick Anwunah, *The Nigeria - Biafra War 1967 - 1970: My Memoirs* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2007) p. 48
  24. Cornelius Agbodike c.77, a Professor of History. He actively participated in the Nigerian /Biafra war as a soldier. He operated under the 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade that covered Ihiala/Uli axis
  25. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, p.48
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  36. Emma Udeagbaja interview cited