

A Post-Mortem Assessment of General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi's Contribution to Nation Building Efforts in Nigeria, January-July 1966

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DOI: [10.36348/sjhss.2021.v06i12.002](https://doi.org/10.36348/sjhss.2021.v06i12.002)

| Received: 02.09.2021 | Accepted: 06.10.2021 | Published: 30.12.2021

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Abstract

Over fifty years after his assassination, there still hovers over Nigeria, a picture that leaves within the horizon the impression that the regime of the first Military Head of State in Nigeria was boring and unproductive. Similarly, there is a seemingly maliciously propagated impression that the Supreme Military Council under General Ironsi had no clear-cut agenda and policy for the economically disarticulated Nigeria in 1966. Contrary to these, researches have revealed that General Ironsi's regime laid a good foundation for not only the peaceful coexistence of Nigerians, but also for the economic, political and diplomatic progress of the country. Using mostly primary and secondary sources of historical data, this study undertakes a post-mortem assessment of General Ironsi's contributions to nation building efforts and concludes that, if properly followed, General Ironsi's policies and achievements in the political and economic sectors in Nigeria were to serve as stimulants, as well as springboards for successive military and democratic leaders in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the obvious culture of discontinuation of policies by successive African leaders exerted ugly consequences on Nigerian citizens whose socio-political conditions became worse than it was between January and July 1966. The General's sincere effort to create an integrated and unified nation laid the foundation for other laudable political, economic and diplomatic reforms of the regime and in turn, created a background for understanding the propitious implications of the recent call for a restructured Nigeria.

Keywords: General Ironsi, Nigeria, Social, Political, Economic, Development.

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's first military regime, headed by General Johnson Thomas Ummakwe Aguiyi Ironsi publicly accepted for its objective, which was chiefly to correct the anomalies of the Nigerian State from colonial times to 1966, was known to have made an impressionable mark on the society. Fifty years after General Ironsi's assassination, the Nigerian social and political space remains a fertile ground for political upheavals, ethnocentrism, corruption and underdevelopment. Successive military regimes had initiated policies aimed at not only enhancing economic development and national integration but also improving Nigeria's image and bargaining power within the international community. Unfortunately, most of these policies and initiatives saw the nation still wallowing in its old ethnic, economic and diplomatic problems. In fact, it is important to stress that since the collapse of the first military regime, several Nigerian governments have made serious efforts to propagate policies and programmes that are geared towards national integration and economic development.

Despite these policies and programmes, Nigeria's unity and economic progress have continued to be plagued and threatened by ethno-cultural, ethno-religious and socio-political problems. These gave rise to the generalisation that all military regimes in Nigeria failed in their various efforts aimed at national progress. It is these impressions that have necessitated the need to study the landmark achievements of Nigeria's first military regime headed by General Aguiyi Ironsi. The regime's policies and plans, though truncated, were to correct the anomalies of the First Republic government as well as chart a new course for the rapid development of Nigeria politically, economically, and diplomatically. This paper takes up the assignment of revealing the contributions of General Ummakwe Aguiyi Ironsi between January and July 1966. Its various sections respectively look at the political, economic, and diplomatic reforms of the regime.

Political Reforms

Upon the introduction of the Unification Decree as a mode of political administration of the

country by the Supreme Military Council (SMC) in 1966, dissidence enveloped the political space. Northern elements in the army secretly planned a coup that led to the murder of General Ironsi. The position of the dissidents was partly that:

- a) Unification was a way of subjecting the predominantly Muslim north under subservience to the Federal Government then headed by a southerner, an Igbo and a Christian.
- b) The unitary system of government was a ploy to expose the north to the unfavourable competition with the south in public life, resource allocation, employment, land use and other general or public facilities.
- c) Unitarianism was completely impracticable in a heterogeneous political entity like Nigeria where the binding force was the former colonialist's consideration for administrative and economic convenience and not the people's generally agreed will and consent to live together as one.

The unitary system introduced by Decree No. 34 of 1966 was rejected by northerners. There was seemingly an overwhelming agreement among the northerners that a strong centre to which all regions and group of provinces owed allegiance was unacceptable and unattainable. To this end, foreign hands collaborated with local capabilities to effect a toppling of the unitary government. Subsequently a "federal" system [1] was reintroduced. The Gowon's regime formally announced a reversal to federalism albeit with the establishment of a centralised military command structure. It is doubtful how the former would co-exist with the latter.

Ironically, about fifty years after the formal proscription of a unitarist system, Nigeria has consistently remained a unitary democracy masquerading as a federal system. There is an obvious deficiency of the basic elements of federalism. Nigerians, especially southerners, have called for a re-introduction of true federalism through restructuring and political reforms. The north usually disagrees with this position, arguing that the current near unitary state of Nigerian federalism is ideal and does not require any form of restructuring. They argue that the supremacy of the federal government over supposedly coordinate federating units is a panacea for peaceful coexistence. This claim runs directly contrary to the position of the north during the unitary government of January – July 1966, when they viewed federalism as antithetical to the heterogeneous co-existence of the country. To understand better the position of the north in 1966 and

¹ It is in practice impossible for any military government to run a federal system. Considering the command structure of the army, it is inconceivable that any unit of government can have the level of autonomy required in a federal system.

its contrariwise position 50 years after, vis-à-vis the southerners' call for restructuring, it is most proper to take a look at Nigerian federalism from conceptual and historical perspectives. We may do this by examining some concepts below:

The concept "Federalism"

K. C. Wheare defines federalism as the method of dividing powers so that central and regional governments are each within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent [2]. Wheare's conception of the term is not without criticism, chief of which is that it is legalistic and rigid. To Lord Haldane, the literal interpretation of "federal" confines its application to cases in which states while agreeing on a measure of delegation to a common government, yet in the main, continue to preserve their original constitution" [3]. W. Riker corroborates the above by emphasising the existence in a federal state of two kinds of government and their separate ability to make some decisions independently of each other [4]. It is therefore apt to agree that federalism implies the division of jurisdiction, powers and authority between at least two levels of government [5].

Features of Federalism

1. **Written constitution:** A federal state must possess a written supreme constitution. This is the grund norm or the fundamental law according to which a particular state is governed. For a federation to be established there must be a written set of laws establishing how the union would be run. The constitution outlines which areas are exclusive, concurrent or residual.
2. **Autonomy of each government:** The federal system must have independent units and levels of government. Each level should be coordinate and not subservient to the other. The equality and autonomy of these coordinate units marks the uniqueness of the federal system. Similarly, no region should be higher than the other. The federal level equally interacts with the regions without bias in ranking.
3. **Financial autonomy:** Financial autonomy is a basic feature of federalism. Financial dependence is antithetical to the sustenance of federalism in the sense that it does not allow for independent units and divided powers.

² K. C. Wheare, *Federal Government*, 3rd Edition. (London: Oxford Press, 1953), 6-9.

³ Lord Haldane quoted in E. O. Abah and P. M. Nwokwu, "Restructuring the Nigerian Federalism: The Proposed Form and Shape," *Middle East Journal of Scientific Research* 25, no. 7 (2017): 1518 -1526.

⁴ W. Riker, *Federalism, Origin, Operation and Significance* (Boston: Little Brown, 1964), 7-9.

⁵ Abah and Nwokwu, "Restructuring in Nigeria," 3.

Federalism in Nigeria

Federalism was introduced in Nigeria by the British colonial government with a view to effecting co-existence of the diverse ethnic groups that made up the colonial political entity [6]. Nigeria's heterogeneous character was the major prompting factor for the introduction of federalism. Lord Lugard's amalgamation of 1914, preceded by the 1906 amalgamation of the south and the Lagos colony culminated in the unification of people of different cultural, religious, traditional and sub-geographical backgrounds into a political union that equally necessitated creating ways of ensuring peaceful co-existence. The nucleus of the idea of a federation emanated from the defined regional arrangements enshrined in the Richards Constitution of 1946. The 1946 constitution established the existence of three regions viz: the Hausa-Fulani-dominated north, the Igbo-dominated east, and the Yoruba-dominated western region. These regions were to emerge as federating units in the subsequent constitutions of MacPherson and Lyttleton. The latter (in 1954) gave a complete federal structure to the Nigerian state.

As in the conceptual discourse above, the federal system adhered reasonably to the various features of federalism. In the arrangement, emphasis was on the principle of derivation which allowed each region to retain 50 percent of revenue generated in its domain. This practice stimulated near-isolated development among the regions. It equally gave room for competition (healthy and unhealthy) among the regions. Most of all, it enabled each region to develop according to areas of comparative advantage and endowment. This trend was sustained from the 1950s up to the first five years after independence. By 1966, a military government altered the on-going democratic system. This in turn truncated the federal structure in place of a unitary system, ostensibly to enable the efficient running of a military hierarchical command structure. Added to this was the regime's belief that regional divisions over the years entrenched ethno-nationalism. The introduction of a unitary system thus abolished the regions and pooled all powers in the national military government. Authority therefore flowed from the Supreme Military Council headed by the Supreme Commander, down to the Governor and Prefects in the groups of provinces. This alteration equally dovetailed into altering other features of the federal state including suspending the Constitution, altering the financial autonomy of the regions, cancelling the equality of powers between the regional

government and the federal government, and altering the status of autonomy of each government.

Six months (29th July 1966 to be precise) into the unitary system, the Head of State, Aguiyi Ironsi, was killed in another coup that ushered in another military regime that disagreed with the unification policies of its predecessor. The regime agreed completely that federalism was practicable in a military regime. For this, it re-enacted federalism by proscribing unification. This administration was succeeded by yet another military regime that drafted a constitution for a democratic regime that was toppled after four years. Another military regime resumed in 1983 and was subsequently succeeded by few others until 1999 when democracy was reinstated. These changes in government came with changes in structures and forms. Also, they altered the federal system in different forms. This assumption may leave one to believe that the last time Nigerians heard the truth about the nature and mode of government practiced in their own country was when Ironsi openly proclaimed that Nigeria had become a unitary state. It is impossible for a military regime to practice federalism. This presupposes that successive governments in Nigeria had thrived in false declaration that Nigeria is a federal state. This claim suffices an analysis and re-assessment of the features of Nigerian federalism in the post-Ironsi era.

Written Constitution

Nigeria practices a system where there is a written Constitution. In it are the specified systems and structures of government and governance. It also provides for the division of powers among the different levels of government, including how these levels relate with one another. In the Nigerian case, there is only one Constitution for the different levels and units. This is contrary to the basic feature of federalism recommended by Lord Haldane, which among other things, states that "a federal government confines its application to cases in which states, while agreeing on a measure of delegation of powers to a common government, yet in the main continue to preserve their original constitutions" [7]. He maintains that it is wrong for the federating units to subjugate all their powers to the centre for the formation of a federal constitution. Rather, he advocates that they should surrender just some parts of their laws to the centre while retaining others in their individual constitutions. This empowers the federating units to retain some laws through promulgating their own constitutions that detail how their own affairs will be run. Contrary to this, Nigerian federalism in the post-Ironsi era, with a single Constitution, contravenes the position that "a federal system is an arrangement between separate autonomous

⁶ See Tekena N. Tamuno, "Nigerian Federalism in Historical Perspective," in *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria*, ed. 'Kunle Amuwo, Rotimi Suberu, Adigun Agbaje and Georges Héraul (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1998), 13.

⁷ Lord Haldane quoted in Abah and Nwokwu, "Restructuring the Nigerian Federalism," 1521.

governments” [8] which implies separate constitutions for each coordinate government. For instance, the American and Austrian federalism enables the constituent States to retain a Constitution while delegating some powers to the federal Constitution. This therefore informs that the Nigerian case is a clear departure from the ideal situation. It still retains the unitary vestiges and relics, those same excuses for which Ironsi was murdered.

Autonomy of each Government

One of the basic principles of a federal state is the act of possessing autonomous units. Put differently, it is wrong for any unit to be an appendage or subordinate of another. Rather, each should exist as autonomous entities with the liberty to effect the administration of their affairs devoid of external intervention. It is for this reason that advocates of federalism believe that it is wrong for any of the units to assume more powers than the other units. Concentration of power on one component unit will lead to an overbearing exercise of authority and raw power on others [9]. This will equally lead the more powerful part to dominate, dictate and interfere in the affairs of other levels or units. This is seen in the case of Nigeria where the post-Ironsi military regimes and democratic constitutions vested enormous powers on the federal government. This also includes vesting in the federal government, the singular power to appropriate national resources. This situation gives the federal level the power to dictate for, interfere with and even subjugate the federating states. The Constitution vests in the federal government so much powers that depict a unitary state where all powers, authority and resources are centrally controlled and appropriated based on the desires of the government at the centre.

Equality of Federating Units

This advocates that the federating units and entities are to interact with one another on equal basis. It holds further that the relationship among the constituent units with the federal or central government should also be on equality basis, implying that each unit will relate as a partner with one another and no unit should assume itself superior to others while none is inferior. Corollary to this is the supposition that the federating units should be devoid of significant disparity in size, population and wealth. Supporting this position, Wheare proposes that there should be some semblance of balance in area, population and wealth. These, he avers, will eliminate dependence within their areas of influence. It will equally eliminate or reduce

tendencies of domination of one federating unit by another [10]. The federal system in Nigeria is a significant contravention of this feature. Beginning from Gowon’s State creation to subsequent State proliferations in Nigeria, the federating units are markedly unequal in terms of size, population, area and wealth. For instance, the northern region has over 75 per cent of the country’s land mass and over 60 per cent of her population [11]. The preponderances in area and population have given the north advantage over the south. These advantages span through revenue allocation, political offices and electoral positions. It has equally reinforced the powers of the central government more often controlled by northern elements. Similarly, these advantages diminish the bargaining power of the other federating units, leaving the usually northern-controlled central government to assume a near unitary form.

Financial Autonomy

Fiscal autonomy is a key feature of a federal state. It is central to the functionality of federalism, however defined. For Wheare, “financial subordination would definitely mark an end to federalism no matter how carefully the legal forms may be preserved” [12]. The federal state should be fashioned in a manner that the finances of the federating units are adequate to cater for the needs of these units. This will enable them to maintain the assigned autonomous status, without which they will resort to depending on the centre. This is premised on the supposition that the federating units should have adequate access to control their own financial resources. They should also have appropriate constitutional coverage to generate revenues and appropriate same in a reasonably agreed formula that encourages autonomy. The post-Ironsi Nigerian federation has completely derailed from this norm. The Decree No. 9 of 1971 gave 100 percent of the offshore mining rents and royalties to the federal government. Similarly, the Gowon regime jettisoned basic tenets of federalism in Nigeria when he declared that:

As from the 1st April 1975, all portions of customs and excise duties formally payable to the state government on the basis of derivation would be payable to the Distributive Pool Account (DPA), the percentage of royalties payable to state governments on the basis of derivation would be reduced from 45 to 20 percent and the federal government will surrender its entire share of both on-shore and off-shore royalties into the distributive pool account.

¹⁰ *ibid*, 33

¹¹ Nasir Ahmed El-Rufai, “Next Generation in Nigeria: What is Restructuring and does Nigeria need it?,” African Programme meeting Transcript, Chatam House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 21 September, 2017.

¹² K. C. Wheare quoted in Abah and Nwokwu, “Restructuring in Nigeria,” 5.

⁸ A. E. Obidinma and E. O. C. Obidinma, “Restructuring the Nigerian Federation for Proper Functioning of the Nigerian Federalism,” *IISTE Journal of Public Policy and Administration Research* 5, no. 9 (2015), 147 – 157.

⁹ Wheare, *Federal Government*, 19.

This decree became the crux of States' dependence on the federal government and was buttressed further by Section 42(3) of the 1979 Constitution which transferred ownership of mineral resources from any parts of the country, together with revenue accruing therefrom, to the federal government [¹³]. These laws more or less transformed the supposedly federal state into a seemingly unitary one where the centre had sole powers of revenue control. Similarly, the post-Ironsi federal structure, in spite of its problems in the area of financially subjugating the component units, has often created financially weak states that can hardly survive without allocations from the centre, thereby reinforcing the unitary streaks for which Ironsi was killed.

Lingering Quest for Political Reform

General Ironsi's effort to politically reform Nigeria to a form adequate for military leadership was understood out of context and allegedly became a reason for his death. Successive governments' failed efforts at reforming the country have since given room for agitations for restructuring. This is mostly on grounds that enormous powers still reside at the centre, a situation that can adequately be termed *quasi*-unitary system of government. Proponents of restructuring in Nigeria often argue that:

- a) The federal government has too much powers and too much responsibilities,
- b) Powers should be devolved to component units,
- c) Fiscal autonomy should be granted to the units,
- d) States should control their resources, and
- e) Areas of exclusive rights of the federal government should be reduced to specific and well defined areas that are not beyond states capabilities.

These agitations go a long way to place doubts on the claim that Ironsi was killed because he transformed Nigeria to a unitary state. Evidently, the post-Ironsi governments retained most unitary features established by the Ironsi regime. Unitary system was practiced by successive regimes that financially subjugated component states into a perpetual dependent status, sufficing the supposition that the conspiracy against Ironsi was shrouded in ethno-nationalism than it was for the proclaimed reasons. There are indications from the foregoing that the quest for political hegemony and the hunger to retain power were the underlying reasons for Ironsi's death. These factors also militate against efforts to restructure the country, even 50 years after Ironsi. It seems therefore that the continued practice of a unitary system has remained an advantage to the sections of the state for which reason the agitations for restructuring remain unattractive.

¹³ See 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Section 42 (3).

Economic Reforms

The administration of Nigeria between January and July 1966 was acclaimed to be "corrective." The regime assumed itself an interventionist government whose primary role was partly to correct the anomalies of the First Republic's economy which in the words of Claude Ake was disarticulated and incoherent [¹⁴]. It was an economy replete with corrupt public officials whose stock in trade was primitive accumulation of wealth to satisfy personal, tribal and kinship sentiments, with little or no consideration for patriotic national agenda. It was this category of politicians that Nzeogwu referred to when he asserted that:

Our political enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand 10 percent; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers and VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds [¹⁵].

This was the stature of Nigerian politicians which reflected the comatose nature of the economy inherited from them by the first military regime whose ignorance of the affairs of governance reflected in its attitude to the situations confronting it. Faced with the challenges of correcting the national economy as promised by the regime, General Ironsi, the Head of the Military Government, began with a few reforms. The regime armed itself with the consideration that the previous regime, in the form it was constituted, consisted of a conduit pipe for financial waste. For this and other political and economic reasons, the General reformed the public service. There was from this point, a unified civil service wherein duplication found in the preceding regional arrangement was jettisoned. A unified civil service was assumed to possess discreet and precise channels of fund disbursement as it would make for easy accountability. In the same vein, the military government sought, in its consideration for economic prudence, a unified country in which the federal government apportioned resources and functions to areas that constituted the country, with special consideration for the avoidance of waste through duplication of offices. This was partly the spirit behind the unification policy.

General Ironsi's regime sustained the National Development Plan of the First Republic which was said to have the agenda of "growth and development of the country." The regime's effort marked an impressive rise in Nigeria's Gross National Product (GNP). Olatunde

¹⁴ Claude Ake, *A Political Economy of Africa* (Ibadan: Longman Group Limited, 1981), 110 – 112.

¹⁵ Statement issued by Chukwuma Nzeogwu over Radio Kaduna on 15 January 1950.

observes that in Nigeria, between 1964 and the civilian part of 1966, the GNP level was \$4.2 billion. He argues further that during the first regime in 1966, the GNP rose above the projected figure [16] to approximately \$4.8 billion, which were figures above what was obtained a few months earlier. This translated to a little below \$100 per capita [17]. Also, the regime was known to have sustained Nigeria's pride in agriculture by encouraging, through its economic development programme, the production of crops like peanuts, cotton, rubber, yams, cassava, sorghum, millet, corn, rice and cocoa. The American Intelligence Secret File described the Nigerian economy in June 1966 as self-sufficient [18]. With the exports of cocoa in late 1965 and crude petroleum from which proceeds fell into the more austere hands of General Ironsi, Nigeria had a surplus in its balance of payments of some \$33 million dollars, the first surplus in 11 years [19]. Similarly, the regime inherited the previous regime's aspirations and efforts to increase oil production in the Eastern and Midwestern regions.

The economic improvement in Nigeria had tremendously encouraged investors in early 1966. This manifested in the investment of \$442 million in foreign capital within the period. Similarly, in the spring of 1966, the World Bank, encouraged by the promising economic activities of the existing government, assured a loan of \$100 million to fund the six-year development plan which was scheduled to span between 1962 and 1968 for which Ironsi held that:

I wish to assure you however that the government is actively engaged with the formulation of plans for a 5-year development programme which will ensure rapid industrialisation, increased food production, increased diversification of the economy and more equitable distribution of income [20].

This money was slated to be released within a 12-month period. It was to be followed by an annual and a four medium-term development plan, to be drawn up for 1968 – 1988. To further increase the scope of Nigerian economic activities through opening diverse sub-continental and international avenues for trade and investments, General J. T. U. Ironsi had by June 1966 concluded arrangements for association with the European Economic Community (EEC). This

precedent-setting relationship was expected to take effect by 1967 [21]. The regime was further saddled with the issue of decline in Nigeria's productive capacity due largely to over-importation of European and American goods, most of which endangered local productive capacity. In this wise, it sought to protect domestic industries and internal trade through such measures as increase in protective tariffs.

The regime frowned at and sought to deal with the basic problems of unemployment, sparse transportation and inadequate telecommunication facilities. This was truncated by the abrupt end of the regime, marking a hiatus in the attempts to recreate Nigeria. Similarly, General Ironsi did not drag feet in proclaiming his concerns over the sharp rise in food prices which he said would decline after the harvest of 1966 [22]. Partly to curb unemployment and reduce external control of Nigeria's domestic affairs, General Ironsi in April 1966 ensured that the Police Special Force divested itself of nearly all its British contract officials on the reason that the move would improve on the branch's effectiveness and create more jobs for qualified Nigerians. In the same vein, he mandated the National Manpower Board to gather data to enable the government plan adequately on how best to plan towards massive employment strategies.

The first Nigerian military regime also excelled in its corrective agenda in several ways which included decrees on declaration of assets, special tax, and the establishment of bankruptcy courts. It further announced that it had reduced the budget gap from £146 million deficit to merely £46 million. It equally embarked on measures such as diverting monies that would have been used to pay Premiers, Ministers and Parliamentarians, for important public works while the Supreme Commander and all Military Governors retained their army pay and did not receive an extra penny for the job they did, nor did the regime venture into pay rise for military officials, for which Ironsi asserted that, "it will be most unwise for us to raise our pay now, if we do, everybody will want a pay rise and we will not be able to lay the foundation for "operation reconstruction" [23]. But to motivate his colleagues, Ironsi further averred that:

We will be setting the example for sacrifice and we will not be rendering selfless services, if we do the job well, I propose to give every member of the Armed Forces some honorarium on annual basis, provided the

¹⁶ Olatunde Odetola, *Military Regimes and Development: A Comparative Analysis in African Societies* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), 105.

¹⁷ Central Intelligence Agency, Current Intelligence Country Handbook on Nigeria, OCI No 1712/66, Copy No. 337, June 1986, 11.

¹⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, 12

¹⁹ CIA, Intelligence Report, 6

²⁰ General Ironsi addressing the National Conference of Traditional Rulers, Ibadan, 28 July 1966

²¹ CIA, Intelligence Report, 7

²² CIA, Intelligence Report, 7

²³ Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi, Broadcast for First 150 days in Office contained in Hilary M. Njoku, *A Tragedy without Heroes: The Nigeria-Biafra War* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1987).

soldiers maintain a reasonable standard of comradeship, devotion to duty, honesty and loyalty [24].

In furtherance of its corrective endeavour, the National Military Government under General Ironsi took steps to reduce house rents in the capital territory to a minimum of 1 pound, 10 shillings for a room without modern facilities; 2 pounds, 10 shillings for a room with modern facilities, and 10 pounds per month for each wing of flats containing four rooms with individual amenities. Measures were also put in place for city dwellers to pay 12 pounds 10 shillings for a self-contained flat with modern amenities, that is, two bedrooms, sitting room, dining room, boys' quarters and garage, or 20 pounds per month for a self-contained flat with four bedrooms. This was consolidated in the Decree No. 15 on Rent Control [25].

Nigeria's economy during General Ironsi's brief stay in office marked a remarkable departure from the profligate waste of the First Republic. The administration's proclamation of its corrective nature gave some hope for what was to come. Then the constitution and commissioning of panels of enquiries and commissions reiterated the administration's devotion to correction. In response, Nigeria's principal investors commended the administration's effort. President Johnson of the United States accepted that "hope returned" to Nigeria. He was perhaps impressed by the palpable improvements in Nigeria's economy when he told Congress that "despite the recent upheaval, Nigeria was one of the five countries which together accounted for nine-tenth of \$665 million deployed in development projects." He agreed also that, "assessing by the improvements so far seen, Nigeria was one of the countries determined to help themselves" [26]. The country saw a stable economy which reflected in the exchange rate of \$2.80 for one pound. This was indicative of its retention of its primary reliance on agriculture while oil export played a supportive role and served as addition to revenue from agricultural income.

After Ironsi, successive administrations were unable to sustain this diversified dimension of Nigeria's economy. Beginning from Yakubu Gowon, especially in the early 1970s, the Nigerian economy became primarily hinged on the sale of crude oil. This saw Nigeria basking in huge inflows of cash but convalescing within a dangerous precipice. The oil economy thrived amidst a centralised quasi-unitary

political system wherein the Federal Government shared proceeds from oil to component States on monthly basis. As it turned out, the oil-based homogeneous economy narrowed Nigeria's economic base. It equally made money available for public officials with the propensity for corruption. Similarly, several ethnic militias arose to demand rights from oil which were mostly exploited from few geo-political regions that were inadequately funded or ill-compensated. In recent times, the oil-dependent Nigerian economy has gone into recession, leaving the country at the mercy of countries that patronise her sole product—oil. In fact, an accumulation of economic factors, chief of which was the dependence of the economy on oil and the dependence of the States on revenue sharing from the centre together with several economic factors, had plunged the Nigerian State into ominous poverty. Its unstable exchange rates explain the obvious difference between January and July 1966 and the oil-based economy of the 1970s and after.

It is likely that General Ironsi's legacies in economic balance are desirable after fifty years. Until recently, Nigerians had asked for a diversified economy, emphasising the importance of agriculture to the oil-based monocultural economy. Similarly, there have been wishes in Nigeria, even fifty years after General Ironsi that the Nigerian currency reverts to the improved value it had in the times of Ironsi. Similarly, the above-mentioned willingness of local and foreign investors to invest during the General's tenure was an indication that General Ironsi left some legacies to emulate. Investment is the backbone of economic development of any nation. Meanwhile, the unsteady behaviour of investment in Nigeria constitutes, up till recent times, a source of worry. Duruechi and Ojiegbe are of the opinion that despite policies and efforts made by successive governments at different times to tackle the problem of "lack of confidence by investors, the problem still persists, leaving investment levels to be erratic and often heading to a rapid decline" [27].

Government regulation of economic activities in post-Ironsi Nigeria had been inadequate. House rents escalated beyond what common citizens could earn. It is even truer to argue that the aspect of rent and food prices was no longer of interest to governments after Ironsi, for the rate at which the prices of these basic needs rose is indicative of this position. It may be truer also to say that General Ironsi's magic wand to manage the agro-based Nigerian economy in 1966 lay in his centralisation of the system for easy assessment and influence. He oversaw all aspects of the economy and was prepared to listen to all corners of the society

²⁴ Federal Ministry of Information Release, June 1966.

²⁵ See A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook, 1966-1970*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1971, Vol. 1: January 1966-July 1967), 143.

²⁶ Charles M. Thomas, *African National Development* (London: Penguin, 2000), 52.

²⁷ Anthony Duruechi and Joe Ojiegbe, "Determinants of Investments in Nigerian Economy: An Empirical Approach 1990 – 2013," *International Journal of Financial Research* 6, no. 4, 2015, 3.

through the creation of several avenues of communication with the masses, including suggestion boxes [28]. In fact, it was a people-oriented government poised towards responding to the needs and aspirations of the masses, especially in areas where the First Republic had failed. Regrettably, up to fifty years after Ironsi, successive military governments in Nigeria were yet to improve the lot of the astronomically increasing suffering populace, wherein 60 percent lived in poverty when the government earned over ₦1.400 trillion revenue from oil in contrast with the 1966 earnings of ₦45 million annually [29].

Foreign Policy

On assumption of duties, General Ironsi announced that his government would respect all treaty obligations and all international agreements entered into by the previous governments. That way, the General reassured the international community of his regime's willingness to respect existing relations and establish new useful ones. To strengthen these international relations through reputable representation by Nigerian diplomats, the General convened a conference of ambassadors in June 1966 in Lagos. The main purpose of the conference was to re-examine the premise and duration of Nigeria's foreign policy. Among other things, the conference re-dedicated Nigeria to the task of "emancipation of all African territories still under foreign domination and the eradication of racial discrimination." Departing slightly from Balewa's conservative foreign policy style, General Ironsi's regime terminated diplomatic relations with the fascist leadership in Portugal over the Rhodesian issue in June 1966; a relationship that was closely nursed and maintained by the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa government despite the government's posture towards decolonisation on the African continent. The General further affirmed his regime's foreign policy posture by reiterating that:

In the whole sphere of Nigeria's external relations, the government attaches the greatest importance to our African policy. We are aware that because of our population and potentials, the majority of opinion in the civilised world looks up on us to provide responsible leadership in Africa and we realise that we shall be judged to a very large extent by the degree of success or failure with which we face up to this challenge which this expectation throws on us. We are convinced that whether in the political, economic or cultural sphere our destiny lies in our role in the continent of Africa [30].

It is instructive that the liberation of Africa from the last vestiges of colonial and racial domination

and the development of the continent as a whole were the major pillars of the African policy. Nigeria's foreign policy was thus pre-occupied with the liberation of South Africa and other southern African white-ruled territories like Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and Namibia as well as Portuguese-ruled Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Cape Verde which were the last colonies on the continent. Nigeria equally maintained its membership of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)'s Liberation Committee of Eleven, albeit its disposition for a go-slow policy towards Portugal, Rhodesia and South Africa. General Ironsi retained Nigeria's cordial relations with the Arab countries in the Middle East. Birai observed that "there were rumours to the effect that President Nasser of Egypt and other Arab leaders were preparing to break relations with Nigeria because of their anger on the death of the Prime Minister and northern Premier, the Sarduna of Sokoto" [31]. The significance of the rumours lay in the fact that the potentiality of influence of religion in Nigeria's Middle East policy was difficult to deny. General Ironsi sent a large delegation of prominent northerners on a hastily arranged tour of the Middle East to reassure Arab leaders and regain their confidence. The General also maintained cordial relations with Britain, America, the Netherlands, West Germany and other Western European countries. Nigeria under the General also related with Japan and kept faith with international organisations like the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Non-Aligned Movement and other international for a [32].

It is noteworthy that domestic problems did not allow the regime to articulate and pursue much desired foreign policy agenda. It rather strove to maintain policies inherited by its predecessor. Ofoegbu observed that "the brief six months period of the first military regime illustrated that no State which is extremely disturbed and is unstable at home can be effective in international relations" [33]. Nevertheless, General Ironsi impacted meaningfully and significantly in the foreign policy of Nigeria. In this wise, he, considering the cost implications, stopped the practice of sending regional economic missions overseas. He equally closed down regional Consulates abroad. This

³¹ U. M. Birai, *Domestic Constraints on Foreign Policy: The Role of Religion in Nigeria-Israel Relations, 1966 – 1996* (Kaduna: Sahab Press, 1996), 61.

³² Based on oral interview and casual discussions with Thom Aguiyi Ironsi

³³ R. Ofoegbu, *Foundation Course in International Relations for African Universities* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1980), 124.

²⁸ Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict*, 167

²⁹ *Sunday Vanguard*, August 21, 2016, 11.

³⁰ Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (London: Hurst and Company, 1998), 57.

was obviously one of the demands of unitary system of government [³⁴].

General Ironsi's regime continued with Nigeria's role of playing a moderating role in African affairs. It remained committed to being a strong voice in the OAU. The regime enhanced a remarkably improved relationship with Ghana following Nkrumah's disposition. Similarly, it enjoyed good relationship with Congo (Leopold Ville) probably due to the Head of State's personal role during the crisis in Congo (1960 – 1965). Tanzania also showed attitudes of good feeling to the new military government in Nigeria.

Against the backdrop of the rampaging cold war alliances, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), notwithstanding its established diplomatic relations with Nigeria, was cautious in its efforts to influence it. This was perhaps due largely to considerations that Nigeria, being a former British colony, had strong affiliations with her former coloniser and at such would not be easily detached from it. Similarly, Nigeria "recognised" both Chinas, but did not have relationships with them. General Ironsi's commitment to improving relationships with the international community manifested in his approach to peace endeavours. In May 1966, Ironsi's Nigeria and France deliberated on issues of halted relations. This resulted in resumed Nigeria-France relations after a five-year break initiated by Lagos over France's nuclear tests in the Sahara. Similarly, Nigeria accepted the services of Peace Corps which at the time were about 700 personnel with prospects of increasing to 1000 by the end of 1966 [³⁵].

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is of the view that Nigeria was at the verge of experiencing uprisings with international dimensions due to the ban on political activities. It envisaged that Communist countries would probably offer support to the Socialist Workers and Farmers Party (SWFP), the Nigerian Communist Party and its two arms, the Nigerian Trade Union (NTU) and the Nigerian Youth Congress (NYC) to resist bans on political activities by the regime. According to the CIA, these proposed plans to incite restiveness were perhaps not realised due to low funding from these interested Communist countries [³⁶]. Nigeria maintained its membership of the International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), World Health Organization (WHO),

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Inter-governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO, now International Maritime Organization (IMO)), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and others. Furthermore, Nigeria under Ironsi acknowledged its obligation over aids received by the previous administration which amounted to £11.7 million from the United Kingdom, in 1964; £14 million from Czechoslovakia in 1965; and other such financial obligations with the IBRD and the UN. With the fiscal year beginning on April 1 [³⁷], one Nigerian Pound exchanged for \$2.80 [³⁸]. In line with the economic policies of the international financial institutions which encouraged liberalisation of global economies, General Ironsi reassured international investors that his administration had considered the unfruitfulness of nationalising foreign private industries in Nigeria. He equally reassured foreign investors of government's willingness to continue offering convenient environment for their economic activities [³⁹].

Successive Nigerian governments have retained Nigeria's big brother posture over Africa. They equally have maintained a relatively commendable posture of a giant among African countries. Yet, one would fault the issue of unnecessary borrowing by successive military governments. Resort to international financial institutions for arbitrary aids led the military governments of the 1980s into the recommended Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). In an effort to abide by these incompatible recommendations, African countries have plunged deeper into inextricable economic crisis. For Nigeria, this was made worse by the unwillingness of the governments to inwardly address Nigeria's problem. Their resort to foreign loans and aid brought Nigeria close to collapse.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria's foreign policy thrust in the post-Ironsi military regimes was not guided by reciprocity. Ironsi's successor was accused of paying fees for foreign students of countries with which Nigeria had no educational bilateral agreements and from which Nigeria expected no gains. Perhaps, the availability of large proceeds from crude oil sales informed that decision. Similarly, General Buhari's decision in the 1980s to send home Ghanaians that lived in Nigeria negated the "Big Brother" role as it violated the spirit of mutual cooperation among Africans nations, particularly among countries in the West African sub-

³⁴ Bulletin of Nigerian Foreign Mission, 1965 to 1966 made available to the researchers in electronic format by a staff of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³⁵ "Nigeria," Central Intelligence Unit Report, June 1966, 7

³⁶ "Nigeria," CIA, 1966, 7

³⁷ At the time, Nigeria's financial year used to start on 1st April. This has since changed, and the country's financial year now begins on 1st January.

³⁸ "Nigeria," CIA, 1966, 11.

³⁹ Lagos Broadcasting Corporation, January 21 1966

region. The Babangida administration saw the dark days of Nigeria's reputation abroad. The constant cases of Nigerians charged with drug trafficking and related offences abroad left the impression that Nigeria's image abroad was of no concern to the Head of State whose tenure ended after annulling a supposedly transparently conducted transition process. The days of Abacha's "Area Boy" diplomacy were regarded as the worst days of Nigeria's foreign policy era. The era saw Nigeria with several sanctions within international circles. Abacha's despotic disposition, perhaps borne out of ignorance, pitched Nigeria against several international institutions, most of which either expelled or suspended Nigeria's membership.

Like the First Republic, Nigeria's diplomacy during the first military regime was moderate and gainful. Nigeria regained the confidence of foreign governments and investors. It was indeed a period of hope for Nigeria. Over fifty years after his assassination, the remarkably good policies of Nigeria's first military Head of State have been acutely downplayed. Often, the general impression is that the General's tenure was boring, empty and bleak, with little or no policies. But recent researches have proven that the six months of General Ironsi's leadership was a good foundation for the development of Nigeria, if subsequent leaders had sustained the policies. The General's plan to politically reform Nigeria was misconstrued by his colleagues who planned and executed his assassination. To achieve this, he was accused of initiating a Unification Decree to subjugate other ethnic groups under Igbo domination. Unfortunately, fifty years after his death, Nigeria remains, at least in practice, a unitary State. Also, his contributions to the efforts towards economically reforming Nigeria left a lasting foundation for successive leaders. In the same vein, the General's view of foreign policy was that all international interactions were to be gainful to both the Nigerian citizens and the government.

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