4 Religious Ties and the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–1970

Shortly after the Congo Crisis, Nigeria's ethnic conflict accelerated. This strife between ethnic groups developed into a secessionist war between Biafra, the Eastern region of Nigeria, largely composed of the predominantly Christian Ibo tribal group, and the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, which consisted of the Muslim Hausa-Fulani group, the religiously heterogeneous Yorubas, and many smaller tribes.

The Nigerian Civil War provides a good contrast to the Katangan secession as four years separated the two conflicts, thereby holding most variables relatively constant. Despite the short time between the two secessionist crises, and despite many similarities between Biafra and Katanga, the international politics of the Nigerian Civil War were not identical to those of the Congo Crisis. No states recognized Katanga while five states recognized Biafra. No global organization, such as the United Nations, became involved in the Nigerian Civil War, but a new regional organization, the Organization of African Unity [OAU], played an important role. In contrast to the UN's role in defeating the Katangan separatists, the Nigerian armed forces defeated Biafra. The Katangan secession increased fears of neocolonialism and white control over Black Africa. Instead, Biafra's secession resonated mostly along religious divides as the Christian Ibos of Biafra were seen as the "Jews of Africa" being oppressed by Nigeria's predominantly Muslim Northern region.

Comparing these two secessionist crises is both feasible and interesting, as there are many features common to both civil wars. Analysts perceived

the Nigerian Civil War to have confirmed the international norms and precedents set in the Congo Crisis.[1] Both secessionist regions, Katanga and Biafra, contained the richest mineral resources in the state from which they were seceding. As a result, the interests of outside powers were significant in both crises. Moreover, each movement sought to secede from one of the larger influential African states, increasing the impact these crises might have on future events and relations in Africa. In both cases, outside aid prolonged the crisis and increased tensions between states.

By studying a secessionist civil war occurring shortly after the Congo Crisis, we can make comparisons between the various states involved in each crisis. Some states followed similar policies in both crises, while other states developed very different policies. For vulnerability arguments, the most important concerns in this case are: did vulnerability to secessionism inhibit support for the Biafrans? Further, did the specification of boundary maintenance norms by the Organization of African Unity deter states from supporting secession? The adjusted realist framework concentrates on whom Nigeria or Biafra threatened. If Nigeria is such a strong state relative to others, more states will balance against it, by supporting Biafra, among other means. Finally, the theory of ethnic politics and foreign policy predicts that as the conflict becomes defined as a religious one, those politicians with Christian constituents would support Biafra, and politicians relying on Muslim supporters would aid Nigeria. The only leaders going against the ethnic ties of their constituents would be those facing less severe competition.

The Origins of Biafran Secessionism

While ethnic conflict existed before the coup d'état that ended the First Republic of Nigeria, strife between the tribal groups increased because of the military takeover. On January 15, 1966, a coup against the civilian government of Nigeria occurred, resulting in the deaths of the Prime Minister as well as the governors of the Northern and Western states. Only the Eastern governor, an Ibo, survived. The leader of the military regime, Major General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi, also an Ibo, proclaimed Nigeria to be a unitary state, abolishing federal institutions established before decolonization. This led to anti-Ibo riots in the Northern Region as fears of Ibo domination grew.

A second coup, on July 29, 1966, resulted Ironsi's death, and the ascension of Colonel Yakubu Gowon, a member of a smaller tribe. Rioting and

massacres of Ibos in the northern regions occurred afterward, leading to large flows of Ibos returning to the eastern region. General C. Odumegwu Ojukwu, appointed military governor of the Eastern Region after the first coup, was reluctant to submit to the authority of the Federal Military Government. After failed negotiations, Ojukwu declared the independence of the Republic of Biafra, which consisted of the territory of Nigeria's Eastern Region, on May 30, 1967. Fighting broke out in July 1967, and the conflict ended two and a half years later in January 1970, after a series of offensives by the Nigerian armed forces.

International intervention consisted of humanitarian efforts to aid the civilian population in Biafra, arms assistance to the secessionists by a few states and to Nigeria by several others, diplomatic recognition of Biafra by four African states, and efforts at consultation and mediation by the Organization of African Unity. Biafran diplomats exerted great efforts to internationalize the conflict, resulting in a mixed record of success. By emphasizing both religious differences as a cause of this civil war and the risk of genocide, Biafrans sought diplomatic recognition and military support for their movement. Though four African states (and Haiti)[2] recognized Biafra, and several countries provided arms, Biafra was unable to parlay these gains into broader support.

Biafra's Ethnic Politics

General Ojukwu and the other Biafran leaders engaged in ethnic politics to both domestic and international audiences. Within Biafra, emphasis on religious ties and raising fears of genocide were policies consciously devised to unite many tribes. At the international level, Biafran elites used religious ties and the potential genocide to gain assistance from states in Africa, Europe, and America.

While the Ibos were the largest ethnic group within Biafra, they accounted for only 64 percent of the Eastern Region's population.[3] Within Biafra, there were several smaller tribes with histories of tensions with the Ibos, and they were less enthusiastic about secession. A more common bond in Biafra was that of religion: 90% of the population were Christians, and most of the rest were animists. Less than 0.5% of the Biafran population were Muslims.[4] By stressing religious ties, the Ibos were seeking to get support from non-Ibo Christians, and by emphasizing the history of enslavement

by Muslims, the Ibos were trying to appeal to the animists. By defining the conflict as one between Biafra and the Muslim Hausa-Fulani, rather than the whole of Nigeria, the Biafrans emphasized religious identities. Ojukwu broadcasted to Biafrans, that "the aim of the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy is to subjugate and enslave what was Southern Nigeria."[5]

The emphasis on religious persecution also aimed at the international audience, as Biafra sought to get foreign assistance. Biafrans defined themselves as the Jews of Africa, comparing their situation to that of the Jews of Europe during the holocaust and of Israel and its hostile Arab neighbors. The international community ignored both the Jews of Europe and the Christians of Biafra as they faced genocide. "Today, a similar situation is taking place in the West Coat of Africa. More than 30,000 inhabitants of what used to be Eastern Nigeria were murdered in cold blood. Pregnant women, children, unarmed *Christian* worshippers, were among the victims of the pogrom in Northern Nigeria last year."[6]

While there was some veracity to the claims of religious conflict, the Biafrans faced one significant difficulty in defining this civil war as one of religion. General Gowon, two-thirds of the Nigerian cabinet, and most of the federal army were non-Muslims. Ojukwu argued: " 'Gowon claims to be a "Christian and a son of a Methodist Minister" a claim calculated to impress foreign churchmen and press correspondents who do not know that he is in reality the leader of a Muslim jihad directed towards the annihilation of Biafrans and the islamization of Biafra.' "[7]

Biafran appeals to religious ties had important consequences. It influenced the perceptions of many non-state actors, as well as the domestic politics of some of most important countries involved in this crisis. Many nongovernmental humanitarian organizations became involved in the civil war as they sought to provide humanitarian aid to the Biafrans. Most prominent among these groups were those affiliated with Protestant and Catholic Churches[8] including Nordchurchaid, World Council of Churches, and Caritas.

These groups helped Biafra in two ways. First, besides providing needed goods, they paid Biafrans for services rendered with foreign exchange. "The most decisive and reliable source of funds that could be used to purchase military equipment abroad was the foreign exchange component in the vast, privately administered, humanitarian relief effort."[9] Thus, Biafra could buy arms on the open market, since few states were willing to give away weapons. Second, humanitarian relief flights provided cover for the airlift of arms from

Gabon, the Ivory Coast, and various Portuguese colonies. When Nigeria allowed day flights of humanitarian supplies, if inspected by government officials for contraband, Biafra refused to admit planes that had undergone this procedure. By forcing the relief planes to fly at night, Biafra was able to deter Nigeria from shooting down all incoming night flights.[10] Religious appeals and assertions of genocide aimed against Christians by the Muslim north also influenced the positions of many states toward Biafra and Nigeria.[11] This strategy was a double-edged sword, as it encouraged some states to support Biafra, while it alienated many others, pushing them into Nigeria's camp.

Biafra's Supporters

Unlike the Katangan crisis, where almost all the supporters of the secessionist movement could be classified as white-ruled regimes, the states assisting Biafra do not fit into any neat categories. Indeed, Biafra's supporters were very strange bedfellows, including: radical Anglophone states and conservative Francophone states of East and West Africa; France, the People's Republic of China [PRC], Israel, and the white-minority regimes of Southern Africa. Because both Tanzania, a leader of radical Black Nationalism, and South Africa, a white-ruled regime, supported Biafra, race cannot explain the international politics of this conflict. Likewise, as the Ivory Coast, one of the most conservative and anti-communist African states, and the PRC assisted the secessionists, the communist/anti-communist conflict cannot explain the policies of states toward this crisis. By assessing the ethnic political opportunities, constraints, and strategies that elites face in the countries supporting Biafra, we understand better why ethnic groups receive support.

Tanzania

As the first state to grant recognition to Biafra, Tanzania played a very influential role in internationalizing the Nigerian Civil War. No state had recognized Katanga, and none had recognized Biafra in eleven months between the declaration of secession and Tanzania's announcement. An important precedent was set, increasing the willingness of other states to rec-

ognize Biafra, as the three other African states to give diplomatic recognition did so within a month of Tanzania. Tanzania's efforts went beyond recognition of Biafra. Tanzanian officials lobbied other states to recognize Biafra, including Zambia, whose President, Kenneth Kaunda, was a close friend of Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere. Tanzania also voted against various OAU resolutions supporting the Federal Military Government. More importantly, after giving the Biafrans a chance to meet representatives of the People's Republic of China, Tanzania apparently gave significant material support to the Biafran armed forces as Nyerere permitted his state to become a "staging point for arms from China."[12]

Why did Tanzania, led by Nyerere, give diplomatic recognition and other forms of assistance to Biafra? Nyerere's policies are especially puzzling. Tanzania was the initiator of the Organization of African Unity resolution sanctifying the existing boundaries,[13] and Nyerere had made many statements before the crisis affirming the territorial integrity of African states and the norm of nonintervention.[14] Nyerere rejected the religious dimension of the conflict, and asserted that self-determination "is an issue of life and death,"[15] and that Biafra's secession was necessary to increase the Ibos' security.[16] Many scholars have argued that Nyerere was following his principles when Tanzanian officials asserted "Only by this act of recognition can we remain true to our conviction that the purpose of society and of all political organization, is the service of man."[17] Nyerere's humanitarian principles can only serve as a partial explanation of Tanzania's behavior. Why was he able to act on his beliefs? Not all leaders can follow their principles as most leaders are constrained by their own political constituencies and strategies (as the case of Senghor of Senegal illustrates below). There are several reasons, other than humanitarian interests, that can help in explaining Nyerere's support of Biafra.

Due to Tanzania's political and social structures, Nyerere faced fewer constraints than other leaders. Before independence, Nyerere organized a mass-based party, the Tanganyika African National Union [TANU] aimed at achieving independence and developing a Tanganyikan national identity to overcome the many tribal ties in the society. TANU was so successful in gathering support that political competition between parties became meaningless, leading to Nyerere's development of a one-party state, with intraparty competition. Nyerere sought a one-party system as he believed that multiparty systems created divisions and cannot foster so broad civic nationalism as a single-party system can.[18]

The rules governing elections and intraparty competition minimized the incentives politicians had to mobilize religious or tribal ties to gain power. "Participation is made possible but so structured as not to mobilize cultural pluralism. The election does not offer incentives or provide opportunities for aggregative communal coalition."[19] Because each election at every level was between two candidates approved by TANU party committees, and because of the structure of the constituencies and the electoral system, politicians had little incentive or ability to gain support by emphasizing ethnicity. Besides electoral incentives, references to ethnic divisions were to be banned from political competition. Part of the instructions given to the body assigned to develop the one-party system included prohibitions against discrimination based on race, tribe, color, or religion. " 'There shall be no propagation of group hatred, nor of any policy which would have the effect of arousing feelings of disrespect for any race, tribe, sex, or religion.' "[20] The result of this mass-based, non-ethnic political structure was that Nyerere was not compelled nor constrained by the ethnic composition of his constituency, especially in the realm of foreign policy.[21] Thus, Nyerere's ability to develop a foreign policy that defied the narrow predictions of all three models suggests that political competition, or its absence, is a critical factor in foreign policymaking.

There were two difficult divides confronting Nyerere in 1968: religion and the differing interests and histories of mainland Tanganyika and the island of Zanzibar. While more than 40 percent of the Tanganikan population followed traditional African religions, a growing 30 percent were Muslims, and the remaining were Christians.[22] Recognizing a secessionist movement posturing as a Christian victim of Islamic domination would seem to be a dangerous policy. Realizing this, Nyerere played down the religious nature of the war. "In spite of attempts on both sides of the quarrel to bring in religion, the conflict between Nigeria and Biafra is not a religious one."[23] Still, recognizing Biafra could have alienated the mostly Muslim island of Zanzibar, which had recently united with Tanganyika to form Tanzania in 1964. However, instead of offending the relatively new citizens of Tanzania, Nyerere sought to reassure them through his recognition of Biafra. In justifying the extension of recognition, Nyerere argued that governments "should be very solicitous of the interests of minorities, because they are the ones which need the protection of the State. If a dominant group does not act in this protective manner, then civil strife and consequent Biafras become inevitable."[24] The audience for Nyerere's statement is Zanzibar as

Tanganyikan individuals and institutions were dominant in the new United Republic of Tanzania. Nyerere also asserts that he would not resist an attempt by Zanzibar to secede.[25] Because Zanzibar did not have a shared history or culture with mainland Tanganyika,[26] and as Nyerere was a Christian mainlander, he had to reassure Zanzibar frequently as they felt insecure in a political system dominated by Nyerere and TANU.

Supporting Biafra's fight against Nigeria would not be as offensive to Zanzibaris as it would be to other Muslims, because of Zanzibar's history, where an Arab minority oppressed Africans living on Zanzibar until the 1964 revolution. Zanzibar's ruling party, the Afro-Shizari Party, won office as a "result of its ability to tap long-latent resentment of Arab social and political preeminence."[27] Since the Afro-Shizari Party continued to govern Zanzibar after it united with Tanganyika, its preferences and strategies influenced Tanzania's politics and policies. Because predominantly Muslim Zanzibaris hated Arabs, and the Biafrans were fighting a state said to be dominated by Arabs (the Fulani of the Northern Region), supporting Biafra would not necessarily alienate the newest members of Tanzania.

Still, Nyerere's policies during this crisis are an anomaly that cannot be explained by ethnic ties. Because his constituency consisted of different religious groups having ties to both sides of the Nigerian Civil War, the theory predicts that Nyerere would stay neutral or follow ambivalent policies. However, Nyerere took very assertive steps to favor Biafra. Several factors may have lessened the ethnic constraints he faced. He did try to redefine the conflict as a human rights problem, rather than a religious conflict. The institutions governing political competition in Tanzania gave Nyerere greater autonomy than had the politicians of other states. The part of his constituency having religious ties to Nigeria, the Zanzibaris, may have supported his policies because they may have perceived the Nigerian Civil War as a racial conflict between Africans and Arabs, rather than a religious dispute between Christians and Muslims. Even so, Nyerere's recognition and support of Biafra policies are "difficult to explain," as one analyst put it.[28]

Tanzania's foreign policy is even harder for the vulnerability argument to address. First, Tanzania faced a very serious threat of separatism because of the recent union of Tanganyika and Zanzibar. Second, Nyerere played an important role in specifying the norm of territorial integrity, so it is quite surprising that Tanzania recognized the first secessionist movement to come along after the OAU declaration, which legitimated the colonial boundaries. Third, the OAU, an organization that Tanzania helped to create, played a

strong role in the conflict, trying to deter support for Biafra, yet Tanzania openly and aggressively followed policies that violated the OAU consensus.

Realists cannot make sense of Tanzania's support of Biafra, either. While Tanzania was less powerful than Nigeria, all other measures of threat suggest that Nigeria did not threaten Tanzania. Nigeria had no meaningful ability to disrupt Tanzania's territorial integrity. The distance separating the two states meant that Nigeria could not pose a conventional military threat. Indeed, as the white minority regimes in southern Africa posed far greater threats due to their size, proximity, and hostile intentions, it is quite puzzling that Tanzania would support efforts to divide a potential ally.

Overall, Tanzania presents quite a puzzle. Its foreign policy toward Biafra contradicts most clearly the vulnerability argument and realist accounts. Further, Nyerere's policy ran counter to what ethnic ties would suggest. He should have played a neutral or ambivalent role in this conflict since his constituents had ties to both sides. However, the political system insulated Nyerere from political competition at this time, allowing him to do what he wanted. Because of his dominance in the political system, Nyerere could redefine the conflict as a humanitarian crisis, and could emphasize the Arab/racial component of the conflict, rather than the religious dimension.

Zambia

Zambia's President, Kenneth Kaunda, an ally and friend of Nyerere, faced similar political circumstances and, like Nyerere, gave Biafra diplomatic recognition. Kaunda's justification was similar to Nyerere's: " 'You cannot reassure people who are afraid through the barrel of a gun.' "[29] Zambia also assisted the secessionists by providing some relief supplies, a couple of old cargo planes, and some foreign currency, which enabled Biafra to purchase arms from the international black market.[30] Although Nyerere seemed to make great efforts to encourage other states to recognize Biafra, the Nigerian diplomats considered Kaunda more troublesome.[31]

Many have argued that Kaunda was simply influenced by his friend, Nyerere, but there is more to Zambian foreign policy than merely following Tanzania. Like Nyerere, Kaunda faced the difficult task of uniting many different tribes as he sought to gain independence for Zambia, which was part of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The United National Independence Party [UNIP] was to Kaunda and Zambia what TANU was

to Nyerere and Tanzania. It was a multitribal party whose leaders sought to play down tribal differences.[32]

The most important method Kaunda used to de-emphasize tribal cleavages was to develop a civic nationalism, which included the ideology of Humanism. Humanism developed out of Kaunda's Christian and pacifist beliefs, and combined Christian and traditional convictions.[33] The core belief of Zambian civic nationalism and of Humanism centers on respecting the dignity of individuals. " 'I personally do not believe in such "ions" and "isms" other than Zambianism which I would define simply as the service of man by man for the protection of all that is good in the Zambian way of life.' "[34] This ideology was not designed merely to affect domestic politics, but foreign relations as well. "Humanism is designed not only to overcome internal racial conflict, but also to advance an alternative international order in Southern Africa based on racial equality and respect."[35] After gaining power, Kaunda continued to stress Humanism and acting according to it: " 'Saying we are Humanists is not enough. Behaving like Humanists is what must be done. Humanism is our guiding light.' "[36] Therefore, Humanism shaped the policies of Kaunda and UNIP in both domestic and foreign realms.

Like Ghana's and India's civic nationalisms in the previous chapter, Zambianism's international implications are not clear unless applied to specific issues and events. Because the Biafrans portrayed themselves as Christian victims of genocide, Kaunda and his supporters felt that Humanism required an end to the bloodshed as quickly as possible, even at the cost of Nigeria's integrity. "Whereas it is our ardent desire to foster African Unity, it would be morally wrong to force anybody into Unity founded on blood and bloodshed. For unity to be meaningful and beneficial it must be based on the consent of all parties concerned, security and justice to all."[37]

Kaunda was free to follow the tenets of Humanism, as he had no Muslim constituency to offend. Unlike many African states, Zambia's Muslim population was minuscule.[38] Three-quarters of the population were followers of traditional religions, while the remaining Zambians were Christians.[39] The religious mix was somewhat different among the populace of Barotseland, a Zambian territory attempting to secede.[40] As this separatist region was predominantly Christian,[41] Kaunda's support for Biafra might have been an attempt to position himself as a good Christian, and thereby appeal to Christian separatists within his own state to support him and to remain in Zambia.

While there is little doubt that Kaunda believed in the tenets of Humanism, it is also obvious that Humanism was a political ideology, part of an

effort to develop a civic nationalism and to play down tribal identities. This civic identity influenced foreign policy as opportunities arose to demonstrate the relevance of Humanism for international, as well as domestic, politics. Kaunda sought to build a multitribal party, and developed a civic nationalism to mobilize support on grounds other than tribal ties. Because his constituency consisted of few Muslims, Kaunda could support Biafra without losing much domestic support, and because the content of Zambia's civic nationalism was derived from Christian and animist doctrines, Kaunda was inclined to assist Biafra.

The rival explanations cannot account for Zambia's foreign policy. Clearly, the existence of secessionists in Barotseland suggests vulnerability to secession did not inhibit Kaunda. Otherwise, he would have supported Nigeria, given Zambia's own separatist threat. Realists cannot account for Zambia's foreign policy either. While Zambia was weaker than Nigeria, the countries were too far apart to threaten each other. On the other hand, Zambia neighbors Rhodesia, which clearly presented a superior threat. One would expect Zambia to rely on the support of other African states against southern Africa's white minority regimes, but Zambia, instead, took the same side as Rhodesia by supporting Biafra.

Ivory Coast

Nyerere and Kaunda found themselves in strange company when President Felix Houphouët-Boigny, seen as one of the most conservative leaders in Black Africa, recognized Biafra. Houphouët-Boigny's support went beyond recognition; Abidjan, capital of the Ivory Coast, served as a crucial transit point for arms from Portugal, France, and the European black market. The Ivory Coast not only gave significant financial support to Biafra,[42] but also provided arms, ammunition, and other supplies that the French would replace.[43]

Why did the Ivory Coast assist the Biafran separatists? Some argue that French President Charles de Gaulle influenced Houphouët-Boigny, but others assert that the persuasion was in the other direction—Houphouët-Boigny is said to have converted de Gaulle to the Biafrans' side.[44] This kind of argument begs the question of why Houphouët-Boigny was more susceptible to French influence than leaders of other former French colonies. Religion helps explain Houphouët-Boigny's support of Biafra: his Catholic back-

ground and that of the majority of the National Assembly; and his fear, distrust, and hatred of Islamic states.

Houphouët-Boigny was known for his astute ability to manipulate ethnic politics to minimize opposition.[45] He kept a careful balance of different tribal groups in his cabinet to ensure that no group was alienated. This is an interesting contrast to the religious composition of the National Assembly. While only eight or nine percent of the population of the Ivory Coast were Catholic,[46] more than half of the National Assembly were.[47] This was no accident as Houphouët-Boigny's party, the Parti Democratique de la Cote d'Ivoire [PDCI], was the only party represented in the Assembly because of electoral procedures that eliminated competition.[48] Support for the Biafrans, self-defined as a Christian movement, can be seen as a product of Houphouët-Boigny's use of religious identity to bind his party together, despite tribal divisions.

Houphouët-Boigny's support of a group seeking to secede from a (perceived) Muslim-dominated state fits into his traditional pattern of mobilizing latent hostility toward Muslims. Houphouët-Boigny "hated and feared communism and Pan-Arabism as the twin forces really fighting against Biafra."[49] Within Ivory Coast as well as many other African states, there is still much resentment toward Muslims due to the role they played in the slave trade. By aiding Biafra, Houphouët-Boigny could be seen as opposing Islamic domination in another state. While Christians were not a majority in the Ivory Coast, non-Muslims were. Because of his anti-Islamic postures, Houphouët-Boigny could gain the support of a large percentage of the population despite their other differences.

While ties to France may have influenced Houphouët-Boigny somewhat, the important motivations for supporting Biafra were the roles of Catholicism and Islam in domestic politics. Because his support came mostly from Catholics, and the rest from animists, and because of existing enmity against Muslims, Houphouët-Boigny could support a "Christian" secessionist movement against a "Muslim" state. Indeed, this policy could mobilize his Catholic constituency without alienating the animists. A more domestically oriented emphasis on a particular religion might alienate either group, but the two religious groups within Houphouët-Boigny's constituency shared a hostility toward Islam.

The irony of Ivorien support for Biafra is that it gave a separatist movement within the Ivory Coast, the Sanwi, a justification for its own secession. In 1969, citing France's and the Ivory Coast's assistance to the Biafrans, the

Sanwi argued that they should be allowed to separate from the Ivory Coast because their movement suffered as much as the Ibos.[50] This movement was quickly repressed. Thus, vulnerability did not deter the Ivory Coast from supporting Biafra. Neither did the OAU, although this is a bit less surprising here than in the Tanzanian case since Houphouët-Boigny did not play as important a role in creating the OAU or its resolution on territorial integrity.

Realism performs better here than the vulnerability argument. Because the Ivory Coast is close to Nigeria, and significantly weaker, supporting Nigeria's division could improve the Ivory Coast's security. A smaller Nigeria without its oil resources would not pose as much of a threat. So, either realist imperatives or ethnic politics (or both) drove Ivorien policy toward this conflict.

Gabon

Gabon's assistance to Biafra was very similar to the Ivory Coast's. Libreville, Gabon's capital, was one of the most important points in Biafra's arms pipeline, particularly for the transport of French arms.[51] Like the Ivory Coast, Gabon provided arms to the Biafrans from its own arsenal, with the expectation that the French would replenish them.[52] Gabon was also the third African country to recognize Biafra, and consistently took positions supportive of Biafra at the Organization of African Unity meeting. As Gabon's policies were similar to the Ivory Coast's, and because Gabon's President, Albert Bongo, was a close friend of Houphouët-Boigny, many of the interests argued to be behind the actions of the Ivory Coast have also been argued to be the Gabon's motivations for its policies toward Biafra. "In some ways Houphouët-Boigny has acted as a sort of super-president of Gabon. . . . There is no need to assume that Bongo's motives differed from those of Houphouët-Boigny, or to consider anything that went on in Libreville relating to Biafra was outside the control of the Ivorien President."[53] Those who follow this line of argument assert that French influenced Bongo.

While people viewed Houphouët-Boigny as influenced by France, Bongo was perceived to be even more of a lackey. "Gabon has been the *most compliant* of France's former Black African territories, adjusting automatically to French pressures. . . . The most glaring example of *Gabonese subservience to French policy recommendations was evident in Libreville's recognition of Biafra* in 1968."[54] There are two problems with arguments emphasizing

Houphouët-Boigny and France. Such assertions cannot account for why other former French colonies did not fall in line with France, nor do they take seriously domestic interests that might have motivated Bongo and Gabon. The crucial difference between Bongo and other leaders of francophone African states is that he presided over "the most Christianized of the states of the French Community in Africa."[55] In addition, the rest of the population, with the exception of about one percent, were animists.[56] Thus, Bongo was relatively unconstrained when dealing with Biafra since he did not face a sizable Muslim population. Indeed, as tribal cleavages were seen as a crucial problem that needed to be overcome,[57] shared religious background could be used to unite disparate groups.[58]

By recognizing the self-defined Christian Biafrans, Bongo could emphasize the Christian bonds his supporters shared as he tried to build an all-encompassing mass party, resulting in a single-party system.[59] Bongo supported Biafra as this policy served to emphasize religious unity, binding his constituency, rather than tribal divides.

Of the two other competing arguments, again realism outperforms vulnerability. The vulnerability argument cannot explain Gabon's foreign policy, as its leaders had to worry about a potential secessionist movement in the Haut-Ogooue region. Because of Nigeria's proximity, and because of its strength relative to Gabon, it could be considered to present a threat to Gabon. Thus, realists correctly predict Gabon's aid to Biafra. Still, ethnic politics provides a convincing explanation of why Gabon differed from nearly all of Africa in its Biafra policy.

Other Supporters of Secession

Several states outside black Africa gave significant assistance in the forms of arms, ammunition, and military supplies. Specifically, Israel, France, the People's Republic of China [PRC], Portugal, Rhodesia and South Africa all assisted Biafra. While ethnic politics was not a crucial determinant of policy in all of these states, it did play a role in many. We can consider only could the policies of France and the PRC to be completely free of ethnopolitical motives.

Among these outside actors, Biafra's definition of the conflict as Islam versus a minority religion most clearly motivated Israel. As Biafra used the themes of persecution, genocide, and their fate as the " 'Jews of Africa,' "

they gained the popular support of Israeli Jews.[60] Though Israeli Jews did not have ethnic ties with the Christian Ibos, they shared a common ethnic enmity: Islam. The Israeli parliament pressured the foreign ministry to do more to aid Biafra.[61] Israel reportedly sent to Biafra Soviet equipment, captured from the Arab forces during the June War of 1967.[62] Israel also assisted Biafran efforts to buy arms from private arms dealers.[63] There was some dispute during the conflict as to whether Israel gave aid to Biafra. "This was dispelled by the mournful statement of Mr. Abba Eban, then Israeli Foreign Minister, on January 19 1970 in which he lamented the collapse of the Biafran rebellion, arguing that 'Israel had exerted itself . . . in providing aid to the former secessionist regime.' "[64]

Portugal, still a colonial power in Africa, and the white minority regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa supported Biafra as they had aided Katanga. Portugal's aid was most important as airports in Lisbon, Portuguese Guinea, and Sao Tome were used for the shipment of arms. Lisbon was also the center for Biafra's arms purchasing and pilots' training.[65] While South Africa and Rhodesia were not as well positioned geographically as Portugal and its colonies to assist Biafra, some efforts were made, including the shipment of small arms.[66]

These three supporters of Biafra shared a very distinctive attribute: the rule of white Europeans and their descendants where black Africans were in the majority. Their common domestic political situations and their similar policies toward Biafra were not coincidental.

> By helping to sustain a civil war in Africa's most populous and potentially strongest country, these three white-supremacist governments undermined African unity, weakened the African liberation movements' drive against themselves (Nigeria had been one of the biggest contributors to the O.A.U.'s 'freedom fighter' funds) and nourished their own propaganda message depicting black Africa's inherent and incurable instability.[67]

It is also possible, though less likely, that each of these states may have been motivated by religious ties as each of these countries' regimes was led by Christians who relied on the support of Christians. For instance, predominantly Catholic Portugal was sympathetic to the Biafrans because of these religious ties.[68] Other motivations included financial gain, as Portugal profited from its relationship with Biafra. However, the most important at-

tribute shared by these three states, one that motivated their policies both in Katanga and Biafra, was their interest in weakening black Africa. Does this make realism the best explanation of these states policies? Yes, but only after the ethnic definition of threat or enemy is brought into play. Without the role of race in these states, it is hard to understand why, for instance, Rhodesia and South Africa are not enemies. Vulnerability cannot account for these three states as Portugal was not vulnerable to separatism, and the other two states faced serious ethnic conflict but supported Biafra anyway.

Nigeria's Supporters

In its struggle against Biafra, Nigeria received support by many states inside and outside Africa. While British and Soviet arms assistance gave the Nigerians the ability to end the secession militarily, other forms of assistance from African states also helped. In particular, the diplomatic support of Ethiopia and of Nigeria's immediate neighbors, Niger and Cameroon, prevented the Biafrans from getting the resources they needed.

Ethiopia

The efforts of Ethiopia's Emperor, Haile Selassie I, to support Nigeria's territorial integrity have been called "Herculean."[69] As chairperson of the OAU's Consultative Committee on the Nigerian Civil War, Selassie was extraordinarily energetic in his attempts to end the conflict.[70] His aim was to end the conflict as quickly as possible while preventing Nigeria's disintegration. Although the impact of the OAU upon this crisis is debatable, Selassie's influence within the organization is clear. Not only did he push through resolutions at the OAU reaffirming support for Nigeria, but the Emperor also shaped the Consultative Mission's findings, which reaffirmed the OAU's condemnation of secession. " 'The point of our task,' the Emperor declared in summing up, 'is to end secession.' "[71]

Selassie's defense of Nigeria's territorial integrity is explained by many as the result of Ethiopia's problems with its own boundaries: Eritrean secessionists, Somali irredentism, and border disputes with Sudan. The Emperor referred to these difficulties he faced at home as he cited the possible contagion effects of a successful Biafran secession.[72] However, Ethiopia's vul-

nerability to secession cannot explain by itself why such efforts were taken to support Nigeria. Other states facing separatism and ethnic strife supported Biafra anyway, including Gabon, the Ivory Coast, and Zambia. Paradoxically, though they stood on opposite sides of this conflict, Ethiopia shared some characteristics with the Ivory Coast and Gabon. All three were conservative states that had sizable Christian populations and a historical and cultural fear of Islamic domination.[73]

Ethiopia's political elites at this time were Christians, and his bureaucrats, cabinet officials, military officers and the like were almost entirely Christian.[74] At first glance, one would expect that the Emperor's foreign policy would emphasize religious identity at home. Biafra would seem to the perfect opportunity to use religion to mobilize support. However, this was not the case for several reasons. Though traditionally the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Christianity were unifying forces in the Ethiopian polity, as the Empire expanded and included more Muslims, religion lost its utility for mobilizing popular support as it began to create differences rather than loyalty to the state.[75] Consequently, the Emperor sought to accommodate religious differences as he called for tolerance, met with Muslim leaders, and finally included one in his cabinet in 1966.[76] Hence, as he faced the Nigerian Civil War, his interest was to resolve a conflict abroad before it could inflame religious antagonisms at home.

In a similar vein, the Emperor sought to undermine the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's power. Not only was emphasizing religion a damaging political strategy for the Emperor, but the existence of an independent authority, such as the Church, was also seen as a threat. Over time, the Emperor succeeded in weakening the Church's political strength.[77] Aiding secessionists that were proclaiming themselves Christian martyrs would be going against this policy. "Within the boundaries of this religiously pluralistic, ethnically and linguistically diverse political entity that is called Ethiopia, *the government has been deliberately pursuing a policy of creating an Ethiopian national identification, a higher loyalty than that to religion or group.*"[78]

Part of creating such a national identity was Ethiopian leadership in Africa. Traditionally, Ethiopia was isolated from the other African states, and did not share a common history. As Ethiopia was never colonized, and only briefly occupied by Italy, Ethiopians had not taken part in the various Pan-African independence movements as had Nkrumah, Nyerere, Kaunda, Sekou Touré, and even Houphouët-Boigny. By taking the lead in creating the Organization of African Unity, with its headquarters in his capital, Emperor

Selassie radically reoriented Ethiopian foreign policy.[79] "The new emphasis on African unity also serves to broaden the horizons of loyalty of Ethiopians, who are asked to think of themselves as Africans and Ethiopians, not as Shoans, Tigreans, Eritreans or Amhara."[80] As the Emperor positioned himself as a leader within the Pan-African movement, he tried to build ties between the various ethnic groups and himself. After carefully using a Pan-African foreign policy to attempt to build an Ethiopian national identity, the Emperor would not sacrifice leadership of the OAU and the pan-African movement by supporting Biafra.

The Emperor's constituency was homogeneous along religious lines, i.e., the Christian Amhara ethnic group, suggesting support for Biafra. However, he did not face an organized ethnically defined opposition at the time of the Nigerian Civil War, so he was not forced into engaging in religiously oriented outbidding. Further, because he wanted to expand his constituency to include Muslims, support for Biafra was to be avoided. The Emperor sought to build a greater Ethiopian nationalism at the expense of religious and linguistic divides within his society. Because this new nationalism was tied to Ethiopia's position as a leader of Pan-Africanism, the Emperor was interested in supporting Nigeria and the Organization of African Unity.

In this case, vulnerability provides an accurate prediction—Ethiopia's vulnerability may have encouraged its support of Nigeria and opposition to Biafra. Clearly, Ethiopia was one of the states most vulnerable to separatism. Further, Ethiopia had played a major role in creating and maintaining both the OAU and its norms. In addition, Ethiopia and Nigeria had a positive relationship before this crisis, so one would expect that that relationship would affect Ethiopia's policies. Thus, of all the cases thus far discussed, Ethiopia best supports the vulnerability argument.

Realism, on the other hand, does not provide such a clear prediction. Ethiopia is similar to Nigeria in relative power, once we control for the size of Nigeria's population. Nigeria does not pose a significant threat to Ethiopia because of distance and perceived intentions. So, realists would predict no Ethiopian support for Biafra, but not necessarily Ethiopia's enthusiasm for Nigeria's territorial integrity.

Cameroon

Because of its location, adjacent to Biafra, Cameroon's policies were very important in this crisis. Because Cameroon could have provided the Biafrans

with bases, arms, and military supplies, the Nigerian government viewed Cameroon's support to be critical, and they were not disappointed.[81] President Ahmadou Ahidjo was "among the most hostile to Biafra's existence."[82] While Cameroon allowed unarmed Biafrans to transit across Cameroon, and refugees were permitted to stay in camps,[83] Ahidjo did not allow arms and ammunition to be supplied to the Biafrans.[84] Cameroon also supported Nigeria's position at the OAU, as Ahijdo served on the Consultative Mission along with Selassie and Niger's President.

While Cameroon's proximity to Nigeria might have deterred Ahidjo from assisting the Biafrans, it is also important that his domestic political interests indicated support for Nigeria, not Biafra. As he considered the preferences of both his own party and of West Cameroon, where he had less support, Ahidjo faced significant opposition to Biafra. First, within his own party, Ahidjo could not find many eager to support Biafra. Ahidjo's political base in Northern Cameroon was, like himself, of Fulani descent.[85] That is, they belonged to an Islamic tribe, speaking the same language as Northern Nigeria's leaders. As the war came to be defined as a conflict between Northern Nigeria and the Ibos of Eastern Nigeria, Ahidjo assisted the side with whom he and his supporters shared historical, religious, linguistic, and cultural ties.[86]

Second, Biafra's Ibos were not particularly popular in West Cameroon. The Cameroons were administrated as part of Nigeria after the British gained the former German colony after the first World War. A movement grew in the 1950s in the Southern Cameroons to separate from Nigeria to join with the French colony of Cameroon. As these territories were part of the League of Nations mandates, and later fell under the jurisdiction of the United Nations Mandate system, a plebiscite was held to determine whether Northern and Southern Cameroons would be part of Nigeria or unite with Cameroon. While the Northern Cameroons voted to stay with Nigeria, the Southern Cameroons chose to become West Cameroon as part of a federation of Cameroon. Part of the pre-plebiscite campaign for unification with Cameroon involved the manipulation of hostility toward the Ibos of Eastern Nigeria. "In reality the union was less a positive joining together of two parts of the former German Kamerun . . . than a rather negative flight of the South Cameroonians from Nigeria on ethnic grounds. The Southern Cameroonians were concerned above all to *avoid Ibo* and Yoruba domination in a federal Nigeria."[87] It has even been argued that the Ibos "acted as a catalyst to the political expression of the West Cameroon 'ethnicity.' "[88] This

anti-Ibo antagonism did not wane after unification, as the small Ibo popu-
lation remaining in West Cameroon dominated the local commerce, in-
creasing resentment.[89] Indeed, the party that had campaigned for unification
with Cameroon, the Kamerun National Democratic Party, became West
Cameroon's most powerful party. Its leader, John Foncha, was both Prime
Minister of West Cameroon and the Vice President of Cameroon from in-
dependence until 1968.[90] Thus, the majority of West Cameroon opposed
aiding Biafra.

As a result of these domestic political interests—his own supporters had
ties to the Nigerian elites and his coalition partner's constituency hated the
Ibos despite some common religious ties—Ahidjo's policies were very sup-
portive of Nigeria's territorial integrity. This case indicates that both ethnic
ties and enmities of coalition partners need to examined, and that more than
one ethnic identity may be influencing the interests and perceptions of those
involved.

Vulnerability fares much better than realism in this case. Cameroon had
to deal with separatism within its boundaries so vulnerability theorists would
be correct in predicting that Cameroon's opposition to Biafra. Realists, on
the other hand, would have failed to predict Cameroon's policies. Because
Cameroon is much weaker than Nigeria, and because of its proximity to
Nigeria, realists would have expected Cameroon to support Biafra, just as
they correctly predicted Congo-Brazzaville to support Katanga. Instead,
Cameroon opposed Biafra and significantly helped Nigeria.

Niger

Niger's position was very similar Cameroon's. President Hamani Diori
asserted that "The territorial integrity of Nigeria is the important thing, the
rest is purely domestic."[91] Although his close friend and mentor Houphouët-
Boigny supported Biafra, Diori was willing to risk this alliance as he main-
tained consistent support for the Nigerian Federal Military Government.[92]

Most analysts agree that Diori's foreign policy in this crisis was motivated
by his supporters' ethnic composition. Diori himself admitted "if Niger made
any overt move toward greater recognition [of Biafra], his people would not
let him back into the country."[93] Considering both the tribal and religious
makeup of his cabinet, his party, and his country, Diori would have surprised
many had he made any friendly gestures toward Biafra. Forty-six percent of

Niger's population and forty percent of the cabinet in 1967 consisted of Hausa peoples, who spoke the same language and had other historical and cultural ties to the dominant tribe of Northern Nigeria. As there was a history of secessionist sentiment on the part of the Hausa,[94] which would only have increased had Nigeria broken up into three different states,[95] Diori was not interested in increasing this desire for a separate Hausa state, nor in alienating some of his core supporters. Niger's religious makeup also pointed toward supporting Nigeria. Between 72 and 85 percent of the population were Muslims, while the remaining Nigerians were of traditional beliefs.[96] Furthermore, Niger's political elites were entirely Muslim.[97] Because Islam "is a force for communality that is said to help override ethnic differences in Niger," it would be self-destructive for Diori to do anything else but support predominantly Muslim Northern Nigeria against the Christian Biafrans.[98]

Because of the cultural ties between large portions of Niger's population and Northern Nigeria, as well as the dominance of Islam in Niger's leadership and populace, it is hard to conceive of any politician in Niger advocating a pro-Biafran line. Indeed, Diori could take only a pro-Nigerian position.

Niger's situation was quite similar to that of Cameroon: ethnic ties and vulnerability correctly predict these two states' behavior while realism cannot. Because Niger faced a potential secessionist movement in the Hausa, one could argue that vulnerability constrained its foreign policy. However, realism cannot account for Niger's foreign policy since Niger did not balance against its greatest threat—Nigeria—by supporting Biafra, but instead supported Nigeria.

Other Allies of Nigeria

Since the Muslim-Christian cleavage defined the civil war between Northern Nigeria and Biafra, states with large Muslim populations supported Nigeria. "Arab support was invaluable to the Nigerians, both materially and diplomatically. . . . Egypt supplied pilots and technicians for the air force and Sudan and Libya, traditional users of British weaponry, sold Nigeria some of the equipment Britain refused to provide."[99] It was argued that, "Egyptian pilots are fighting not so much Biafra as Christianity. . . ."[100] Even Somalia, with its history of trying to change its own boundaries,[101] supported

Nigeria's territorial integrity.[102] Only Tunisia, due to its French ties, came close to supporting Biafra, but its president, Habib Bourguiba, was constrained by his Muslim constituency.[103] Because of the religious dimension of the civil war, not a single country ruled by politicians relying upon Muslim support recognized or gave material assistance to Biafra.

Neutral and Ambivalent States

While most states took sides in this crisis as they voted for or against OAU resolutions affirming Nigeria's territorial integrity, a few states either took neutral positions or vacillated between Nigeria and Biafra.

Senegal

Senegal's position toward the Biafrans changed over time from weakly supporting some of their demands to denouncing its right to secede. At the outset, Biafran leaders perceived Senegal's President, Leopold Senghor, to be most likely to be receptive to Biafran appeals.[104] Consequently, Biafra aggressively lobbied Senghor.[105] Senghor called for an immediate cease-fire, one of Biafra's demands, as the issues at stake—federalism, confederalism, secession—were not worth the costs of the civil war.[106] Despite Senghor's disgust for the loss of life, Senegal never recognized Biafra. When expectations for Senegalese recognition were high after a series of long meetings with de Gaulle, Senghor distanced himself from France's position and from Biafra, refusing to recognize Biafra and asserting Nigeria's right to maintain its territorial integrity.[107]

Contradictions between Senghor's personal and political interests produced inconsistencies between the perceptions of Senghor, his statements, and Senegal's policies. Senghor's Catholic background and his support of *Negritude* shaped his inclination to support Biafra. As a Catholic, Senghor had great sympathy for his fellow Catholic, Ojukwu, and the mostly Christian Biafrans. Moreover, as the proponent of an ideology stressing the dignity of the African man,[108] the war and its waste of life disgusted Senghor. Therefore, Senghor sought an immediate cease-fire. However, Senghor's political interests constrained him from giving more support to Biafra. The role of religion, particularly Islam, in Senegalese politics cannot be emphasized

strongly enough.[109] More than 85 percent of the population are Muslims.[110] In his bid for power in Senegal, despite his Catholic background, Senghor was able to gain and maintain the support of Muslim religious leaders, who "represent the main traditional force in Senegalese politics."[111] Senghor "proved that although he was a Roman Catholic, his more conservative policies had a greater attraction for Muslim leaders," than his opposition's more radical policies.[112] These Muslim elites became even more important for Senghor during the Nigerian Civil War, as crises developed within Senegal. "The dual crises in the countryside and the cities almost swept away the Senghor regime, which owed its salvation . . . [to the] intervention for the second time by the religious chiefs, who broadcast appeals for calm."[113]

Because of his dependence on Muslim elites, Senghor could not support the Biafrans, or else he would have alienated those who helped maintain his position. Senghor was "under considerable domestic pressure from his large Moslem constituency," to support Nigeria, not Biafra.[114] Thus, the religious composition of Senghor's supporters restrained him from following his personal preferences.

The other two arguments fail to explain Senegal's position. Vulnerability cannot predict Senegal's foreign policy since it faced no real separatist threat at the time. Our adjusted realist approach suggests that Senegal would not support Nigeria since Senegal is weaker than Nigeria, and therefore would benefit from Nigeria's disintegration. However, the other components of threat do not suggest that Nigeria threatens Senegal. Thus, at best, realism predicts that Senegal is unlikely to support Nigeria. Instead, Senegal moved from ambivalence to supporting Nigeria.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's policies during this crisis ranged from being somewhat supportive of Nigeria to more neutral stances to weak support for the Biafrans. Sierra Leone supported Nigeria's territorial integrity by taking its side at the Organization of African Unity summit in Algeria in September 1968.[115] However, shortly afterward, along with Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Tanzania, Zambia, Kenya, France, and the Netherlands, Sierra Leone pushed for UN consideration of the Nigerian civil war, which Nigeria wanted to avoid.[116] Sierra Leone also abstained from voting on a resolution in September of 1969 that supported Nigeria's position.[117]

During 1969, serious consideration was given to recognizing Biafra, and the Prime Minister of Sierra Leone, Siaka Stevens, suggested that he might do so. While recognition was never granted, Sierra Leone's stance moved closer to the positions taken by Zambia, Tanzania, the Ivory Coast, and Gabon. Stevens faced serious pressure from his parliament as it passed a resolution calling for Sierra Leone to push for an unconditional cease-fire, a stance favoring Biafra.[118] However, "despite much public sympathy for Biafra there is strong opposition to recognition within the cabinet."[119]

During the Nigerian civil war, Sierra Leone experienced: an election that threatened to put out of office a regime that had been in power since independence; a military coup d'état to keep that regime in place; a counter-coup by junior officers who said they would bring back civilian control but did not; a coup by privates and sergeants to put the winners of the election into office; a national coalition of the losers and winners of the election; and finally, after an additional election and further ethnic violence, a regime that was governed by the winners of the 1967 and 1968 elections.[120]

After this upheaval, the All People's Congress [APC], led by Siaka Stevens, was solidly in office, with the Sierra Leone People's Party [SLPP] in opposition. While Sierra Leone had only a small Christian population, they were influential in the SLPP. Likewise, the APC were affiliated with the Islamic population of the northern region. One would then expect that the SLPP would push for recognition of Biafra and the APC would seek to support Nigeria if religious politics were to influence Sierra Leone's foreign policy. However, neither party was religiously homogenous, as the APC's elites were mainly Christian Creoles, and a prominent faction of the SLPP was Muslim.[121] As neither religion was popular enough to mobilize sufficient political support,[122] and since each party's constituency consisted of different religious groups, politicians had little desire to emphasize religious identity.

Supporting either side strongly would only alienate parts of either party's constituency. Thus, Sierra Leone took a different policy stance than other states. It did not recognize Biafra, but it did not consistently defend Nigeria's territorial integrity. Abstaining and pushing peaceful ways to end the Nigerian civil war were the most that Sierra Leone could do.

Vulnerability suggests that Sierra Leone would support Nigeria because of its vulnerability to separatism, so its ambivalence and neutrality would be surprising. Realism suggests that Sierra Leone would not support Nigeria since it is relatively weaker, but realism is not more determinate since Nigeria, otherwise, posed very little threat.

The leaders of ambivalent states did have some interests in supporting Biafra, but domestic politics generally constrained them. In Senegal, Senghor's own personal background suggested that he might assist Biafra's secession. However, the political importance of his predominantly Muslim constituency outweighed his personal preferences. Similarly, Sierra Leone's leaders were caught between different religious interests within their own constituencies. The best policy, in this case, was to push for an end to the crisis without offending various factions within one's supporting coalition. Likewise, in Uganda,[123] where tribal outbidding was the norm, President Milton Obote sought to play down religion as a political cleavage because his own party, the Uganda People's Congress, consisted of both Protestants and Muslims.[124] Even though Uganda was thought to be a likely supporter of Biafra,[125] Obote's own multireligious constituency inhibited any efforts toward supporting either side in the conflict.

As Biafran leaders created appeals based on religious affiliation, they caused leaders of multireligious constituencies to be handcuffed during this crisis. These politicians could not make significant efforts to support either party in the conflict, because such policies might lead to the loss of critical supporters.

Ethnic Politics and the Nigerian Civil War

The international politics of the Biafran secession is a strong test of the ethnic politics as model as there was much variance in the kinds of ties and enmities existing between the combatants and outside actors. This case is also a good test of the alternative approaches since their critical variables, vulnerability and threat, also varied.

Balance of Threats and the Nigerian Civil War

The adjusted balance of threat approach needs to be applied to the Nigerian Civil War to shed light on both the conflict itself and the value of this approach. It asserts that states will align against states posing the greatest threats. Why then is a particular state perceived to be a threat by some states and not others? To understand the threat Nigeria posed to other states, we need to consider the four components of threat—aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capability, and aggressive intentions.

TABLE 4.1 Realism and the Nigerian Civil War

Country	Power Relative to Nigeria*	Nigeria's Threat	Biafra's Threat	Neighbors of Nigeria	Predicted Policy	Actual Policy
Gabon	Weaker	Moderate	Low	Almost	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Israel	Stronger**	Low	Low	No	No Support for Biafra	*Supported Biafra*
Ivory Coast	Weaker	Moderate	Low	No	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Portugal	Weaker	Moderate	Low	Almost	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Rhodesia	Weaker	Moderate	Low	No	Support Biafra	Supported Biafra
South Africa	Stronger	Moderate	Low	No	Indeterminate	Supported Biafra
Tanzania	Weaker	Low	Low	No	No Support for Nigeria	Supported Biafra
Zambia	Weaker	Low	Low	No	No Support for Nigeria	Supported Biafra
Sierra Leone	Weaker	Low	Low	No	No Support for Nigeria	Neutrality and Ambivalence
Uganda	Weaker	Low	Low	No	No Support for Nigeria	Neutrality and Ambivalence
Cameroon	Weaker	High	Low	Yes	Support Biafra	*Supported Nigeria*
Egypt	Stronger	Low	Low	No	No Support for Biafra	Supported Nigeria
Ethiopia	Stronger**	Low	Low	No	No Support for Biafra	Supported Nigeria
Niger	Weaker	High	Low	Yes	Support Biafra	*Supported Nigeria*
Senegal	Weaker	Low	Low	No	No Support for Nigeria	Ambivalence, changed to *support for Nigeria*
Somalia	Weaker	Low	Low	No	No Support for Nigeria	*Supported Nigeria*
Sudan	Weaker	Low	Low	No	No Support for Nigeria	*Supported Nigeria*

* This is coded from a ratio of the country's power relative to Nigeria's, using measures of military and economic capabilities and population measures, as discussed in chapter six.

** Coded stronger, compensating for overly strong influence of Nigeria's population on power measures.

Italics indicates incorrect predictions

Bold indicates correct predictions

Nigeria was (and is) one of the most powerful states in Africa, due to its large population and oil deposits. Because of its near-hegemonic position, Nigeria can be perceived as posing a threat to many African states. However, aggregate power, by itself, is a poor predictor of the behavior of other states, because states of varying capabilities lined up on either side of the conflict. South Africa, Africa's most powerful state, supported the Biafrans, as did Gabon, a considerably weaker state. Similarly, Egypt and Cameroon supported Nigeria despite differing levels of aggregate power. Further, as Nigeria was one of the most powerful states in Africa, this approach would have predicted much more support for Biafra than was actually the case; only a small number of states supported Biafra. As Walt himself argues, aggregate power cannot predict foreign policy behavior by itself.

The second component of threat, geographic proximity, does not seem to clarify the conflict's international politics. Walt argues that the closer a powerful state is, the more threatening it will appear.[126] However, the closest states to Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon, both aligned with Nigeria, and supported its efforts to suppress the Biafrans. In effect, they bandwagoned with Nigeria. Walt allows for bandwagoning when weak states do not have alternative alliance partners, but he generally predicts balancing against threats, rather than aligning with them.[127] This might aid in explaining Niger's and Cameroon's behavior, but fails to account for why states further away from Nigeria did not follow policies similar to each other. Tanzania and Zambia are as close to (or as far away from) Nigeria as Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, but followed completely different policies. The former supported Biafra, and the latter assisted Nigeria. Geographic proximity, thus, is not a very helpful predictor of foreign policy, especially considering the differences between the behavior of Nigeria's neighbors and the Congo's. Nigeria's neighbors did not support Biafra, but the Congo's neighbors tended to support the Katangans.

Nigeria's offensive capability was not very threatening because its military was not then able to intervene directly in other states, except perhaps its immediate neighbors. Even this threat declined greatly during the outset of the crisis, when Biafra's forces invaded Nigeria. This success, at the time, suggested that Nigeria's offensive capability was minimal, and its defensive capability might be suspect. Therefore, the threat Nigeria posed to other states may have declined, just as several states began to support the Biafrans. Expanding the definition of offensive capability to include disrupting other

states' territorial integrity does not help things much. Neither Nigeria nor Biafra had a particularly special capability of disrupting other states, compared to the Congo's and Katanga's abilities to threaten other states. Changes in offensive capability, then, do not necessarily predict the perceptions of states nor the policies they follow.

The final component of threat is aggressive intentions. While Nigeria had supported Africa's efforts to sanction Rhodesia and South Africa, Nigeria had not acted directly against the interests of Biafra's other allies. It is difficult to determine what could have caused such diverse states as Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Tanzania, and Zambia to perceive Nigeria as threatening. The latter two are especially puzzling, since they are on the opposite side of the continent: Nigeria can hardly threaten them in any meaningful way. It is even more amazing that Tanzania and Zambia would be on the same side as Rhodesia and South Africa, who are much closer, more powerful, more capable of acting aggressively, and having a history of aggressive behavior. If states act primarily because of the external threats they perceive, one would expect Tanzania and Zambia to support Nigeria as a potential ally against the white minority regimes of South Africa.

While a focus on relative power is helpful to explain whether states are successful in achieving their goals, the realist approach cannot explain the perceptions and preferences of states as they rarely consider the domestic sources of interests and threats. Of the seventeen states studied here, the adjusted realist approach correctly predicts four, is wrong on six, and indeterminate in seven other cases. The white minority regimes balanced against Nigeria, because it was the most powerful state in Africa ruled by blacks. Nigeria was a potential ally of the white minority regimes' internal opposition. Rhodesia and South Africa balanced by supporting Biafra, because their own internal politics determined who their enemies were.

Common Vulnerability and International Cooperation

The history of ethnic instability in Biafra's supporters undermines the vulnerability argument. Of the four African states to recognize Biafra and provide arms, three faced actual or potential secessionist movements. The fourth, Tanzania, the product of a recent union between Tanganyika and Zanzibar, faced the difficult task of integrating a noncontiguous, ethnically

distinct territory. While none of the supporters of Biafra outside black-ruled Africa was vulnerable to secession, several of them, specifically Israel, Rhodesia, and South Africa, faced serious opposition along ethnic cleavages. Another outsider, Portugal, was facing opposition along racial lines within Africa to its colonial rule.

Overall, of the seventeen cases, the vulnerability argument correctly accounts for the behavior of four states, wrongly predicts the behavior of nine

TABLE 4.2 Vulnerability and the Nigerian Civil War

Country	Vulnerability to Ethnic Conflict and Separatism	Vulnerability Predictions	Actual Policy
Gabon	High	Support Nigeria	*Supported Biafra*
Israel	High	Support Nigeria	*Supported Biafra*
Ivory Coast	High	Support Nigeria	*Supported Biafra*
Portugal	Low	No Prediction	Supported Biafra
Rhodesia	High	Support Nigeria	*Supported Biafra*
South Africa	High	Support Nigeria	*Supported Biafra*
Tanzania	High	Support Nigeria	*Supported Biafra*
Zambia	High	Support Nigeria	*Supported Biafra*
Sierra Leone	High	Support Nigeria	*Neutrality and Ambivalence*
Uganda	High	Support Nigeria	*Neutrality and Ambivalence*
Cameroon	High	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Egypt	Low	No Prediction	Supported Nigeria
Ethiopia	High	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Niger	High	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Senegal	Low	No Prediction	Ambivalence, changed to Support for Nigeria
Somalia	High	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Sudan	Low	No Prediction	Supported Nigeria

Bold indicates correct predictions
Italics indicates incorrect predictions

states, and is indeterminate in the remaining four. The Nigerian Civil War indicates that vulnerability to secession and ethnic conflict probably is not a very good explanation nor a predictor of the foreign policy toward secessionist conflicts.

The conventional wisdom considers the relatively few supporters of Biafra as evidence of the Organization of African Unity's influence. The OAU's involvement inhibited potential supporters, according Jackson and Rosberg and Herbst. While the OAU's involvement may have influenced non-African states, the OAU could not play that influential a role since some of its most important founders and supporters acted against its resolutions. Although Tanzania's Nyerere was one of the OAU's founders, and supported the 1964 resolution affirming the legitimacy of the existing boundaries, Tanzania supported Biafra. Further, one of the logical underpinnings of Herbst's arguments, reciprocity, is undermined here, as Tanzania supported Nigeria's internal enemy despite Nigeria's assistance to Tanzania in handling its own internal conflicts. Finally, the OAU's independent role is hard to determine because it may merely reflect states' preferences, rather than changing them in some way. The number of states supporting Biafra is a little larger than the number supporting Katanga, but most states supported Nigeria—votes within the Organization of African Unity were on the order of thirty-six or more to four. Those who assert the importance of international cooperation can argue that the Organization of African Unity was as successful in limiting support for secession as the United Nations, but cannot really say why various states defied the two institutions. However, the conflict's religious definition may have produced the appearance of support for Africa's boundary regime, just as the racial definition of the Congo Crisis may have increased support for the Congo.

The Ethnic Politics Model and the Nigerian Civil War

Table 4.3 indicates that the theory of ethnic politics and foreign policy produces much more accurate predictions than the two other approaches. Ethnic ties predicted the policies of fourteen of the seventeen states, with the exceptions of Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Senegal.

Neither ethnic ties alone nor the competing approaches can explain Tanzania's policies. The vulnerability hypothesis does not work: Tanzania was the product of recent merger of two territories separated by water and by cultural differences, and was therefore vulnerable to separatist sentiment.

TABLE 4.3 Ethnic Politics and the Nigerian Civil War

Country	Religious Ties To:	Religious Competition	Ethnic Ties Predictions	Actual Policy
Gabon	Biafra	Low	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Israel	Biafra*	High	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Portugal	Biafra	Low	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Ivory Coast	Biafra	Low	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Rhodesia	Biafra	High	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
South Africa	Biafra	High	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Tanzania	Both	Low	Neutrality or Ambivalence	*Supported Biafra*
Zambia	Biafra	Low	Support Biafra	**Supported Biafra**
Sierra Leone	Both	High	Neutrality or Ambivalence	**Neutrality and Ambivalence**
Uganda	Both	High	Neutrality or Ambivalence	**Neutrality and Ambivalence**
Cameroon	Nigeria**	High	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Egypt	Nigeria	Low	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Ethiopia	Biafra	Low	Support Biafra	*Supported Nigeria*
Niger	Nigeria	High	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Senegal	Nigeria	Low	Support Nigeria	*Ambivalence,* changed to **Support for Nigeria**
Somalia	Nigeria	Low	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**
Sudan	Nigeria	High	Support Nigeria	**Supported Nigeria**

Bold indicates correct predictions

Italics indicates incorrect predictions

*   Israel had religious enmities towards Nigeria, which produces the same preferences as ties with Biafra.

** The two different ethnic groups within the politicians' constituencies had different ties and enmities at stake. One shared religious and kinship ties with Nigeria, and the other had enmity against the Ibos, who led the Biafran secessionist movement.

Focusing on international cooperation does not work because Tanzania had a history of cooperation with international institutions and Nigeria before this conflict, but was not interested in continued cooperation. The realist approach cannot account for Tanzania's policies because Nigeria posed no significant threat to Tanzania. Indeed, Tanzania's greatest threats were posed by other states supporting Biafra: Rhodesia and South Africa. Tanzania's policies only make sense once we consider how political competition gave Nyerere more autonomy than other African leaders.

Ethiopia's policies are not predicted by ethnic ties alone, but are not as contrary to the theory's logic as Tanzania's. Since there was no organized competition in Ethiopia, religious outbidding was not prevalent at this time. Because there were no viable exit options for the Emperor's Christian constituency, Selassie could take such a stand in favor of Nigeria. Further, his ethnopolitical strategy aimed at attracting Muslims, so he cared about their preferences, including support for Nigeria. Of course, the Emperor's efforts to define himself as a leader of Africa and of the OAU for his domestic audience increased his willingness to support Nigeria.[128]

Senegal's neutrality and subsequent weak support for Nigeria can be understood once the conflict between the leader's ethnic and political preferences and the ethnic ties of his constituents are considered. Senghor was a Catholic, and cared about the dignity of the African individual. Consequently, he saw the war as a waste, and disliked the repression of the Biafrans. However, he relied on the support of Muslims for his position, and could not act directly against their preferences. His position converged with the expectations of ethnic politics as he eventually supported Nigeria.

Summary

The Nigerian Civil War has several implications for the study of the international politics of secession. First, those approaches focusing on international cooperation are correct in predicting that relatively few states support secessionist movements. However, these arguments are built upon a faulty foundation: vulnerability to secessionism did not inhibit any of the four African states recognizing and assisting Biafra. Vulnerability cannot explain the behavior of these states. Second, the adjusted realist model would have expected that because of Nigeria's predominance in the region, more

states would have supported Biafra to balance the threat posed by Nigeria. Yet, relatively few states did so. Instead, many states supported Nigeria because their constituents wanted Biafra to lose and Nigeria to win. The question remains as to whether ethnic politics applies to the present day and outside of Africa.