

**Secessionist Movements and the National Question in Nigeria:  
A Revisit to the Quest for Political Restructuring**

**Olu Awofeso, PhD**

Department of Political Science

Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria

**Abstract**

Nigeria is currently facing several challenges arising from unresolved national question revolving around sensitive national issues like group marginalization, revenue allocation, politicalisation of religion, ethnic militancy, terrorism, corruption, etc. One major manifestation of some of these unresolved problems is the emergence of groups demanding for self-determination and political independence as witnessed among the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in South-East, the Niger-Delta Avengers (NDA) in South-South and several other groups in different parts of the country. Although, threats of secession and secessionist movements are not entirely new to Nigerian politics, the dimension they have assumed today are not unconnected to the national question. The paper against this background examines the relationship between some of these unresolved questions and the on-going agitation for self-determination by some groups within the Nigerian state. Apart from identifying these activities as collective threat to national unity, the paper also analyses the prospect of restructuring Nigeria politically as a remedy to these challenges. The paper concludes by proffering suggestions for the unity of the country.

**Keywords:** National question, Political restructuring, Self-determination, Secessionist movement.

## I. Introduction

Many keen observers of political development in Nigeria will agree to the fact that, one of the greatest challenges the country is currently facing is the seemingly unending spate of crises across the entire land. Today, the country parades several yet-to-be-resolved crises, including those of the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East of Nigeria since 2009; intermittent religious clashes between Muslims and Christians which have claimed many lives, especially in Kaduna State since 2016; incessant conflict between farmers and herdsman which was somewhat limited to the north initially, but now a nightmare in several communities in South-East and South-West; the resumption of ethnic militancy through the activities of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) in the South-South, which has almost crippled the nation's economy; and of course, the continuous agitation for the creation of the state of Biafra separate from the Nigerian State by emerging groups like the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in South-East.

Apart from the general sense of insecurity created by these protracted crises, other associated problems include inter-ethnic tension, economic depression, religious intolerance, bureaucratic corruption and many more. Studies, including those of Eteng (1998); Naanen (1995); Kukah (1993); Osadolor (2004); Olufemi (2005); and Egwu (2005); have however shown that many of these crises are highly rooted in age-long dissatisfaction and discontents against successive government policies and actions by the masses across the country. For instance, there were pockets of resistance and criticism against the structural imbalance of Nigeria's federalism since independence, controversial revenue sharing formula, ethnicity and ethnic politics, religious intolerance and violence, human rights abuse during the first and second republics. The passage of time equally witnessed mind provoking issues like agitation for resource control, complaints of political marginalization, demand for power shift and rotational presidency, etc. Many of these agitations remained unresolved till today. These and many other unresolved problems are collectively referred to as the National Question.

It must be acknowledged, however, that many of these bottled-up problems are directly or indirectly linked with cases of secessionist movements and threats of secession in Nigeria's federation in the recent past. To drive this point home, we wish to recall here that Ralph Nowazuirike's MASSOB declaration of Biafra State in 2000 was an immediate response to the Sharia crisis which resulted into the killings of many Ibos in the North same year (Awofeso, 2005). Likewise, the Yoruba leaders rose

from a meeting on October 8, 2015 at Ibadan to issue a communiqué. tantamount to threat of secession in reaction to the kidnapping and maltreatment of one of their leaders, Chief Olu Falae, by the Fulani herdsmen in South-west. Part of the communique issued at the end of the meeting which called for urgent restructuring of Nigeria to reflect true federalism reads thus:

If we do not see any step in this direction within a reasonable time, the Yoruba may consider their place in a union that cannot protect them and would not allow them to protect themselves and use all legitimate and peaceful means to attain self-determination (The Paradigm: October 9, 2015).

The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) equally threatened to secede from Nigeria in 2016, in reaction to their perceived age-long exploitation of their resources by the Nigerian state. The Niger Delta Avengers through its spokesman, Mudoch Agbinobo made its intention known in the following words:

The Buhari led government has failed Nigerians with their misdirected policies that has divided the country, as such nobody wants to be part of that failed state not even the Niger Delta. The October 1<sup>st</sup> (2016) declaration is still sacrosanct if the Nigerian government fails to retrace its steps by restructuring this country (The Herald: August 19, 2016).

The on-going agitation for self-determination of the Igbos and declaration of an independent Biafran State by Kanu's IPOB is seen as a reaction to the age long marginalization of the Ibos from the scheme of things by the Nigerian State. The paper, on this note, probes the activities of groups agitating for autonomy, self-determination or outright independence and the root causes of these agitations.

## **II. Conceptualizing and Contextualizing Secessionist Movement and Political Restructuring**

This section attempts an operationalization of the two major variables in this study within the contextual framework of the scope of study, that is, Nigeria. We begin with the first variable, secessionist movement.

### **Secessionist Movement**

Whether referred to as separatist or autonomist groups, secessionist movements refer to groups seeking withdrawal from a larger political entity or a country with the aim of becoming independent

state, separate from the former country they belong. The methods adopted by these groups vary from peaceful, non-violence approach to violent and armed struggle tactics.

Since democratic rebirth in 1999, Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge of such separatist groups seeking for self-determination and autonomous entity of their own. Of major concern is the fact that these agitations are not limited to one or two sections of the country as the case in the past. Virtually every sections or geo-political units in the country have witnessed such agitation from one or more separatist groups. The South-East alone currently has at least three vibrant secessionist movements seeking for the actualization of the Biafra Republic. These groups are:

1. Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) formed by Ralph Nwazuruike
2. Biafra Zionist Federation (BZF) led by Benjamin Igwe Onwuka
3. Indegineous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu

While the MASSOB claimed to be peaceful and non-violent in its approach, the IPOB have the tendency of using violent approach. The BZF was actually violent, especially when the group invaded the Enugu State Broadcasting Station (ESBC) and attempted to gain entrance into Enugu State House for the purpose of hoisting their flag on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2014.

In the South-South, several militant groups, including the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPFF), etc. had in the recent past agitated for the Niger Delta Republic. Also, from the South-South was the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People led by late Ken Saro Wiwa, which agitated for the Ogoni Republic. The resurgence of militancy in the Niger Delta by the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) which also agitated for the Niger Delta Republic and also threatened to declare the Niger Delta State on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2016. All the secessionist groups in the South-South were actually violent in their approach, preferring the methods of kidnapping, intermittent attack on oil companies' facilities and oil wells in their region and direct confrontation with security agents.

In the South-West, the Oodua People's Congress had equally, at one time or the other, agitated for the Oduduwa Republic adopting both peaceful and semi-violent approach. The Middle Belt are also not left out in their agitation for autonomy by the Middle Belt Federation (MBF). The North-east is

notoriously known for the on-going insurgency perpetuated by the Boko Haram, a religious sect, seeking among other things, for a separate Islamic Caliphate in their territory.

The table below shows various separatist groups which emerged at different point in time in different parts of the country and the methods used by them to actualize their demands.

### Secessionist Movement Groups in Historical Nigeria

Group	Region	Proposed State	Method	Agitation
Boko Haram (Boko Haram Islamic State Movement (BKISM))	North-East	An Islamic Caliphate	Believe in the use of violence to human person and properties	Pressing for Self-Determination and separate existence based on the Islamic religion of Sharia
Oodua People's Congress (OPC)	South-West	Oduduwa Republic	Mainly dialogue/threat of violence	Self-Determination and ethnic separation from the Nigerian State
Arewa People's Congress (APC)	North	Arewa Republic	Mainly dialogue/reactionary utterances and threat of violence	Self-Determination / Not clear
Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)	South-South	Niger Delta Republic	Application of violence to property and business installation and direct confrontation with government forces	Justice, Self-Determination and Resource Control
Niger Delta People's Volunteer (NDV)	South-South	Niger Delta Republic	Application of violence to property and business installation and direct confrontation with government forces	Justice, Self-Determination and Resource Control

Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)	South-South	Ogoni Republic	Mainly dialogue/threat of violence	Justice, Self-Determination and Resource Control
Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)	South-South	Niger Delta Republic	Application of violence to property and business installation and direct confrontation with government forces	Justice, Self-Determination and Resource Control
Middle Belt Federation	North-Central	Not clear	Mainly Dialogue	Emphasizes the illegality of Nigerian 1999 constitution and the solid structure/ethnic constitution of the protest Nigerian State

**Source:** The Author

### Political Restructuring

To restructure presupposes to re-organize or re-arrange the existing order for mutual benefit. Political restructuring therefore is a call for re-organization of the existing political structure which many perceive as unfair, unjust, discriminatory and anti-development. In Nigeria's context, calls for political restructuring centre on the imbalance nature of the country's federal arrangement and inherent grievances – political representation, revenue allocation, political appointments, etc. embedded in this arrangement.

The call for political restructuring of Nigerian Federalism is not new. It is highly rooted in the past military dictatorship (Awofeso, 2000:116). Proponents of political restructuring of Nigerian federalism suggest the decentralization or devolution of powers to lower levels of government as well as the re-organization of the federation into six geo-political zones, each autonomous in its sphere of administration and co-ordinate with the central government, as a viable means of correcting the perceived structural imbalance and functional inequalities in the system.

Post-1999 renewal calls for political restructuring have been much more volatile, citing cases of ethnic domination, marginalization, discrimination, exploitation of regional resources, etc. Initially, the impression created was a dichotomous viewpoint between the North which perceive the calls for political restructuring as a hidden agenda for secessionism, and the South which consider the calls as a democratic course aimed at addressing observed injustices in the system. However, recent calls for political restructuring appear to come from all sections of the country, at least, by opinion leaders in virtually all the geo-political zones of Nigeria. It remains whether there is strong political will to actualize this desire.

### **III. Threat of Secession and Secessionist Movement in Historical Nigeria:**

#### **Cases and Causes**

Secessionist threats date back to period before the independence of Nigeria. Evidence abounds in the literature where the three defunct regions, through utterances by their political leaders, threatened to break away from the entire country. The North, in 1950 and 1953 at the Ibadan General Conference and in reaction to the crisis generated by the demand for self-government by the South respectively, threatened to secede from Nigeria. The West in 1954 also threatened to break away from the rest of the country when Lagos was cut off from the Western region. The same apply to the East when Nnamdi Azikwe failed to win a seat in the Central Legislative Council, the House of Representatives, in 1952 due to what he perceived as the Action Group and Yorubas gang-up against him. Consequently, "Azikwe decided to resign his position from the Western regional house as Leader of the opposition party and proceeded to the Eastern region" (Awofeso, 2014:111).

Post-independence attempts at secession, especially, under the military were much more volatile. Major Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw man had earlier led an armed campaign for greater Niger Delta autonomy, resource control and self-determination for the inhabitants of the Niger Delta in the mid-1960s. To be specific, Boro and his Niger Delta Volunteer Force declared the Niger Delta Republic as Independent State on February 23, 1966 and gallantly engaged the federal forces in a battle that lasted for only twelve days. The most reckoned with secessionist movement that was pushed to a logical conclusion but short-lived, was the declaration of the Republic of Biafra as an Independent State on May 30, 1967 by Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu, who was then the Military Governor of Eastern-region. This

action led to the Nigerian-Biafran war which lasted till January 15, 1970, when the State of Biafra ceased to exist.

The post-1999 era witnessed the emergence of several groups across the entire country, seeking for self-determination of their people and territories. We have mentioned and discussed very briefly the demands of some of these groups earlier in this paper. It must however be emphasized that the causes of the post-1999 agitations and separatist movements, especially from the South-East and the South-South geo-political zones of Nigeria are deeply rooted in perceived aged long exploitation, marginalization and extreme display of neglect by successive governments in Nigeria. While the South-South had always cited cases of severe exploitation and economic deprivation of their oil mineral resources in the face of developmental neglect of their environment, the South-East were quick to remind everybody of prolonged cases of marginalization and discrimination of the Igbos by successive administrations in Nigeria.

Starting from Isaac Boro's revolt against the Nigerian state in 1966 and the emergence of ethnic militancy in the oil producing area of the Niger Delta, virtually all the militant groups that have threatened to declare or have declared the Niger Delta region as an independent state have all laid claim to extreme cases of economic exploitation and deprivation of their people. The "Kaiama declaration" of February 23, 1966 by Isaac Boro, which mobilized the youths for action for instance reads in part:

Today is a great day, not only in your lives, but also in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps it will be the greatest day for a very long time. This is not because we are going to bring the heavens down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression. . . Remember your 70 years old grandmother who still farms to eat, remember also your poverty stricken people and then, remember too your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom.

(Oyebode, [www.naij.com](http://www.naij.com))

The same declaration reminds the Nigerian state of how frustrated and neglected the Ijaw youths were, and how they have been strangled in a tyrannical chain of political oppression and social deprivation. On the developmental neglect of the Niger Delta region, the declaration further noted:

Economic development of the area is certainly the most appealing aspect. There is not even a single industry. The only fishery industry which ought to be situated in a properly riverine area is sited about 80 miles inland of Abia. The boatyard at Opobo had its headquarters in Enugu... Personnel in these industries and also in the oil stations are predominantly non-Ijaw.

(Oyebode, [www.naij.com](http://www.naij.com))

Subsequent threats of secession and declaration of the Niger Delta Region by emerging groups in the Niger Delta Region, including the Adaka Boro Avengers and the Niger Delta Avengers, both of which threatened to declare Niger Delta Republic as an independent state on August 1<sup>st</sup> and October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 respectively, have followed similar pattern of demands and the course started by Isaac Adaka Boro.

In the South-East axis, the declaration of Biafra Republic by Lieutenant-Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1967, marked the emergence of secessionist movement in that region. The leader of the Biafra secessionist movement and the then military Governor of the defunct Eastern region, Lt. Col. Ojukwu had laid claim to the Northern Nigerians' exploitative and systematic killings of the Ibos since 1945 in Jos, in 1953 in Kano and in 1966 following the first and the second military coups in Northern parts of the country, as some of the reasons that pushed the Igbos to secede from Nigeria.

After the Nigerian civil war in 1970, Igbos continued to suffer cases of deprivation and discrimination from successive governments in Nigeria. The Igbos had complained that the 3R (Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, Reintegration) policies of the federal government to rebuild Igbo land after the civil war were not fulfilled; that Igbos were being treated like second class citizens in their own country; that Igbos were systematically deprived of holding sensitive political offices while the Eastern region has only five states compared to other geo-political zones that have more, and the refusal of the federal government to address these grievances and other emerging challenges faced by the Ibos contributed in large measure to the re-birth of Biafra agitations and the emergence of secessionist groups like the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the indigenous people of Biafra (IPOB), Biafra Independent Movement (BIM) and the Biafra Zionist Federation (BZF). The emergence of these groups and their agitations for Biafra Republic is an indication that "Ojukwu reasons for pulling out of the Nigerian state are still very present". This position was re-echoed by the secretary of Ohanaeze, the apex Igbo socio-cultural organization, Dr. Joe Nworgu that:

Since 1966, this has been the story. The story of injustice, marginalization and brazen emasculation of a people. The young people of today have seen it all. They have seen policies of government made just to favour a section of the country, they have seen lopsided appointments into government offices with absolutely no regard to federal character. The agitations you see today are the responses of the young people to the many unjust realities they are being forced to live with (Vanguard August 21, 2016).

The leader of the IPOB, Nnamdi Kanu in an interview with Aljazeera on Biafra Remembrance Day, May 30, 2017, rhetorically explained the federal government discrimination against the Igbos, and why his group is agitating for the Biafran state.

I'm not allowed to contest for the presidency of Nigeria because I'm Igbo. I'm not allowed to aspire to become the Inspector General of Police because I'm Igbo. I'm not allowed to become Chief of Army Staff because I'm Igbo... Why would any idiot want me to be in that sort of country? (www.aljazeera.com)

Agitations and threats of secession in other geopolitical zones like the South-West and the North-Central were not as volatile as in the South-South and the South-East, where there were calls from separatist groups for total breakout from Nigeria. However, these zones (i.e. South-West and North-Central) have also, at one time or the other, expressed grievances ranging from perceived political domination, economic strangulation, lopsided political appointments, poverty, insecurity, etc. Rather than embarking on secessionist option, these zones preferred a peaceful approach by calling for political restructuring of the country.

#### **IV. Explaining Secessionist Movement in Contemporary Nigeria**

The study is anchored on Professor Anifowose's (1982: 5) "relative deprivation, rising expectation and frustration – aggression hypothesis" for explanation. This model is an amagma of several theoretical propositions aimed at explaining human aggression and its manifestation in various forms – civil strife, riots, political violence, rebellion and several other anti-civil behaviour. Prominent among these studies are Ted Robert Gurr's works (1968a, 1968b, 1970) which centre on the sources of

human aggression and anger and their translation into civil violence and rebellion in the society. Earlier studies, including those carried out by Bryant Wedge (1962) Kanrad Lorenz (1966) also linked aggression to instinct behavior in human beings. The frustration-aggression theory however has its roots in the work of John Dollard and his colleagues in 1939 and was further developed by Neal Miller et al, and Leonard Berkowitz in 1941 and 1969 respectively.

Despite the inherent differences in the approaches and conceptual usages by scholars on this subject, Anifowose was able to identify common affinity in all the variances developed by the proponents of the frustration – aggression theory. The central premise of the frustration – aggression theory is that “aggression is always the result of frustration”. Anifowose (1982:6) illustrates further his position in the following words:

An individual, whose basic desires are thwarted and who consequently experiences profound sense of dissatisfaction and anger is likely to react to his condition by directing aggressive behavior at what is perceived as being responsible for thwarting those desires, or at a substitute.

On the other hand, and with special reference to the anticipated desires or rising expectations of individuals, the advocates of the frustration – aggression thesis also emphasize the likely consequences of any discrepancy between what men seek and what seems attainable- which according to them, is anger and aggressive behavior. Such discrepancies have also been interpreted in terms of “the comparison between what one currently enjoys and what one expects, what one thinks one ought to have or what one regards as ideal”. (Anifowose, 1982:7).

In summary, the proponents of frustration – aggression theory posit that aggressive behavior in form of riots, rebellion and civil disobedience do not just occur in a political system. They are usually prompted by chain of events, both conscious and unconscious which tend to deny or are perceived to have denied certain individuals or groups some desired values. These values may be justice, equity or fairness as against economic exploitation, political domination, social discrimination or ethnic marginalization among others. These conditions may linger for some period depending on the strength of ideologies that sustain them, until they begin to elicit individual and collective anger from the people due to prolonged state of hopelessness and frustration the people are subjected to.

The model below provides insight to how aggressive behaviour gradually emanate from severe cases of deprivation and denied expectation of the masses. These in turn lead to hopelessness, lack of trust and anger with the indication of bottled-up frustration.



were actually propelled by frustration occasioned by prolonged cases of deprivation and denied expectation. These were however aggravated by the body language of successive governments which, rather than addressing these grievances, choose to ignore them. As if that was not enough, government officials became neck-deep into corruption which further plunged the country into economic recession with its attendant consequences of increase level of poverty, unemployment and crime across the country. Governance became much more irresponsible and greatly lacking in accountability and service delivery. Gradually, the government became less efficient in protecting lives and property with the spate of insurgency, kidnapping, cultism, communal conflicts culminating into protracted insecurity in the country. Then suddenly, in the words of Nnamdi Kanu, nothing seems to be working in the country. Hence, the center could no longer hold again and things started falling apart (Achebe, 1958).

#### V. **Political Restructuring as Panacea to the Secessionist Question in Nigeria**

The secessionist question is an integral aspect of 'national question' in Nigeria. The two are intertwined to the extent that the former is a micro unit of the latter, which is a complex whole. The national question, on the other hand, is a term used in a broader sense to embrace all issues relating to nationalism. In this regard, many countries across the globe, including the Soviet Union, Britain, Germany, United States, etc have had reasons, based on their historical past to address challenges confronting their unity and national co-existence which are embedded in their respective national questions.

The national question in Nigeria dates back to the 1914 amalgamation which brought together different nationalities and multi-culturally diverse ethnic groups in a marriage of "convenience" under a common government by the British colonial administration. Thereafter, especially since 1946, when the North was brought under the legislative competence of the national legislative council, through 1951 till independence, there were structural defects and imbalances in the federal arrangements inherited by the political class in 1960. These however created deep sense of mutual suspicion and distrust among the various ethnic groups which further intensified unhealthy competition, intolerance, struggle over political power and control of economic resources among political leaders of different ethnic extractions during the first republic. The advent of the military into Nigerian politics in 1966 truncated the federal arrangement under the 1960 constitution and ushered in a new era of military centralism with over-concentration of powers into the federal government. The national question was further exacerbated by

incessant cases of religious and ethnic crises, class division, political exclusion or marginalization of certain groups, injustice, insecurity of lives and property of people across the entire country, etc. as witnessed during the second, third and fourth republics. In essence, the national question in Nigeria centres on diverse problems that have remained unsolved and have constituted serious challenges to national integration and citizenship rights.

As many as the components of the national question in Nigeria are, one aspect of the national question that have received scant attention is the secessionist question. Successive governments have either, consciously or unconsciously, treated with levity, most grievances associated with threats of secession and secessionist movements in historical past. The most serious attempts at addressing some of these grievances were the national political conference organized under Presidents Obasanjo and Jonathan's administrations. Unfortunately, these conferences were politicized by the Nigerian elite, while salient recommendations to some of these grievances were abandoned. For instance, President Buhari openly acclaimed that the priority of his administration was not to implement the recommendations of the 2014 national political conference, which many believe have the answer to the national question in Nigeria. In this regard, President Buhari was quoted to have said that "I haven't even considered to read it or ask for a briefing on it, and I want it to go into the so-called achieves" ([www.vanguardngr.com](http://www.vanguardngr.com)) President Obasanjo on the other hand, chose to manipulate the political conference during his administration to pursue his third term agenda.

One would have expected that the course for which Isaac Boro declared the Niger Delta Republic an independent state in 1966 were seriously addressed by the Ironsi military regime instead of condemning the "activists" of that great event to death. This, of course, would have nipped in the bud, subsequent militancy and agitations in the Niger Delta region, or at least, provide a blue print for addressing the problem amicably. The same applies to the developments that led to the declaration of the Eastern region an independent Biafran state in 1967. A proper management of the post-Biafran civil war fall-out by the Gowon regime and successive governments by fully re-integrating the Igbos into mainstream socio-political and developmental activities, may have prevented the resurgence of Biafra agitation by emerging groups like MASSOB, IPOB, and others.

The Isaac Boro and Ojukwu secessionist attempts were two classical cases of mismanaged opportunities of checkmating separatist agitations in Nigeria. The federal government simply and wrongly assumed that those agitations would fade away with passage of time. But Timinipire Owonaru

thinks otherwise. In a recent interview with the Vanguard Newspaper, Owonaru, the only surviving member of Isaac Boro's guerilla army stated that the course for which they fought in the first place is still yet to be fully actualized. According to him:

The tenets which have us in a stranglehold, that deny us our right to be able to control and manage our resources, are still in place. And until these laws are either reviewed or abrogated outright from statute book, the struggle continues. (Oyebode, www.naij.com)

The recent clamour for political restructuring of the Nigerian federalism as a solution to the secessionist question and other related questions, present another golden opportunity for the federal government to address the national question in Nigeria. Two fundamental reasons make the current calls for political restructuring more appealing than earlier calls that were started by Anthony Enahoro's Pro-National Conference Organization (PRONACO) and other progressives, especially from the South-West.

First, is the fact that the calls for political restructuring has gained wider acceptability from opinion leaders across the six geo-political zones including the core north which had always perceived earlier calls for political restructuring as an excuse for secession. For example, two prominent northern leaders, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, a former Vice President of Nigeria and General (rtd) Ibrahim Babangida, former military president, had both supported the idea of restructuring the Nigerian state. Atiku, at different fora since 2016, had consistently championed the call for restructuring of Nigeria. At the launching of a book written by Chido Onumah, titled "We are all Biafrans", Atiku was quoted to have said that:

I suggest we resolve today to support calls for the restructuring of the Nigeria's federalism to strengthen its unity and stabilize its democracy. I believe that restructuring will eventually happen whether we like it or not (thenationonlineng.net October 5, 2016).

At another gathering, in a public presentation and launching of Daily Stream Newspaper at Abuja, Atiku was reported to have posited that:

For Nigeria to develop or even make any appreciable progress, we must restructure Nigeria's political, administrative and political architecture... restructuring will facilitate the emergence of a leaner bureaucracy, enhance efficiency, block wastages and promote more prudent management. It will make for happier constituent units more committed to the progress and unity of the country and the emergence of a sense of nationhood ([www.pmnewsnig.com](http://www.pmnewsnig.com))

Also, lending his voice to the call for restructuring of Nigeria, was in a related development, General Babangida during prayers to mark his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration at Minna, in Niger State when he called for the devolution of more power from the federal levels to the states. He also urged Nigerians to embrace the creation of state police. According to him:

Restructuring has become a national appeal as we speak, whose time has come. I will strongly advocate devolution of powers to the extent that more responsibilities be given to the states while the federal government is vested with the responsibility to oversee our foreign policy, defence and economy... we need to tinker with our constitution to accommodate new thoughts that will strengthen our nationality, ([pmnewsnigeria.com](http://pmnewsnigeria.com) June 27, 2017).

Secondly, and more thought provoking, is the entire politics and politicking surrounding separatist agitation in Nigeria today. These appear to have convinced the average Nigerian, including those from the South-South and South-East, where the clamour for total break-away is louder, that what the separatist agitators actually wanted is humane, fair and just handling of the grievances, which can better be achieved through political restructuring; rather than a total breakaway from the Nigerian state. In a related development, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) in a letter signed by its National Publicity Secretary, Mr. Ifeatu Obiokoya condemned Nnamdi Kanu's approach to Biafra agitation and noted that the Biafra concept was a metaphor for the demand for equity, and fair play in the Nigerian state and not a separatist movement (Vanguard, July 8, 2017:10). Many other Igbo opinion leaders, including the Governors of the five Eastern states have equally condemned Kanu's agitation for secession and gave their support to the call for the restructuring of the country.

It should be noted however, that while the camp of the protagonists for the restructuring of the country continue to swell daily, there were still few antagonists who consider restructuring of Nigeria as a political gimmick by

the elite to further perpetuate their selfish interests. Describing the call for political restructuring as “opportunism and irresponsibility”, El-Rufai, the Kaduna state Governor, unequivocally dismissed the relevance of the 2014 Confab’s recommendations to addressing the clamour for restructuring of the country. The Governor further described the advocates of restructuring as “people that have presidential aspirations” (vanguardngr.com June 30, 2017). Similarly, Olisa Agbakoba, former president of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and human rights activist equally described restructuring as “a ploy of the political class to capture power in 2019” (Daily Trust Newspaper, July 9, 2017).

Irrespective of the viewpoints of both the protagonists and the antagonists of political restructuring in Nigeria, one question remains unanswered – what should be the template for restructuring Nigeria if eventually the clamour for political restructuring scales through? This question becomes so relevant and equally difficult to address because many dimensions and interpretations have been introduced to the calls for the restructuring of Nigeria.

For instance, many observers of political developments in Nigeria believe that while some section of the country conceive of restructuring as a ploy to break away from Nigeria, some see it as avenue to control their resources, yet others conceive it as a means to addressing group domination, marginalization, inequalities and injustice in the system. In this regard, Ralph Obioha, a chieftain of the apex Igbo socio-cultural association, Ohanaeze observes that:

Restructuring as defined by people of certain regions of this country is different from what people on the other side of the Niger may be saying. They have mixed restructuring now with revenue allocation. They have put it into fiscal responsibility. Some people have put it into ‘development at your own pace’. Some are saying regionalism. What exactly do they mean? (Daily Trust Newspaper, July 9, 2017).

It was not surprising therefore that suggestions that were proffered to resolving restructuring debate cut across political, economic and institutional solutions to Nigeria’s problems. To this end, many opinion leaders and knowledgeable individuals in Nigeria, including Professor Soyinka, General Babangida, Alex Ekweme, Atiku Abubakar, Emeka Ayaoku, Frank Kokori, to mention just a few, have suggested ways and strategies for restructuring Nigeria. As many and diverse these suggestions are, we can categorize them into the following:

1. That federalism in its proper and true sense should be institutionalized such that the component units are relatively autonomous and financially viable to undertake more responsibilities. To this end, more powers should be devolved to the state government to accomplish new responsibilities without necessarily being dependent on the central government. The federal government on the other hand, should assume the power of an overseer of interests that are common to all the component units.
2. That economic restructuring should take cognizance of a fair and just revenue allocation that would be beneficial to all, especially the oil producing state which must be developed and compensated for their age-long exploitation. Resource allocation should also be aimed at encouraging productivity, healthy competition, discovery and extraction of more resources, assisting the weak states and discouragement of wastages and corruption.
3. That a functional geo-political arrangement should replace the current 36 states structure which many believe is not equitably fashioned out to forestall domination, marginalization and inequality in the system. To this end, many suggestions including, a revert to the regional arrangement as enshrined in the 1960 Constitution; creation of 6 to 8 geo-political unit arrangement with each unit with power to create states that are viable; a return to the 12 states structure introduced in 1967; the adoption of the 2014 confab recommendation of 8 geo-political units and 54 states; have been put forward.

We may equally add here the former President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's opinion that the country does not need any restructuring, but what is needed is the restructuring of Nigerians mindset. According to him:

The answer to most of our problems is mindset change and change of mentality. If we need any restructuring, it is the restructuring of our mindset and mentality. (Vanguard, July 8, 2017:5)

## **VI. Summary and Concluding Remarks**

So far, the paper has been able to establish the fact that the Nigerian state currently harbours, for so long, multi-dimensional grievances which have culminated into agitations for self-determination and calls for disintegration of the country by separatist groups, especially from the South-South and the South-East geo-political zones. It is also a truism that these agitations stemmed from prolonged deprivations and frustrations which according to Alhaji Bashir Tofa, a former presidential candidate of the defunct National Republican Convention (NRC), centered around three things,

namely: (1) marginalization; (2) dominance of others in their region; and (3) resources and opportunities distribution (Daily Trust Newspaper, July 9, 2017). The paper has equally analyzed these issues and found that many Nigerians still preferred a united Nigeria based on the principles of justice, fair play and equality as against total break-up. This has been confirmed by the clamour for the restructuring of Nigeria by individuals and groups across the entire nation in the recent past. There is also little doubt that the call for political restructuring has continued to wax stronger as other ethnic groups which ordinarily would have accepted the status-quo, continue to raise their voices in support of political restructuring. For instance, the North-central zones; consisting of Kogi, Niger, Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa states, as well as southern parts of Kaduna, Borno, Gombe, Bauchi, Yobe and Adamawa publicly declared through Nasiru Jababa, the spokesperson of a group on July 4, 2017, that the whole world should consider them as Middle Belters and not Northerners. According to him, “the Middle-Belt is not part of the North”. The group called for the restructuring of Nigeria to reflect this wish. Similarly, the indigenes of Abuja recently demanded for self-determination and call for the restructuring of Nigeria that will take cognizance of their new-found identity.

With these developments, it is crystal clear that the issue of restructuring of Nigeria has become an albatross to Buhari-led government, and a matter of time as rightly observed by Atiku Abubakar that, “restructuring will eventually happen whether we like it or not”. But the earlier Nigeria is restructured through dialogue and discussion, the better through violent means. It is in this light we commend the action of the National Assembly on the recent call for the 2014 Confab recommendations for discussion. However, we also wish to observe that the on-going disagreement among the law-makers on the debate over restructuring Nigeria is a misplaced priority. Rather than disagreeing or politicizing this all-important issue that borders on national interest, legislators should endeavour to live above personal and selfish interests and sincerely conduct themselves as the true representatives of the people by honestly aligning with the wish of the majority, otherwise, allow a Sovereign National Conference of all ethnic nationalities to address the issue of restructuring of Nigeria.

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