The Ironsi Regime and Decree No. 34: A Historical Review

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Ani S. Uchenna, PhD
uchennaani05@yahoo.com
Department of History and Strategic Studies, Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State

Ezeonwuka I. O. Franklyn, PhD
egbuacho@gmail.com
Department of History and International Relations, Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State

Abstract

The General Ironsi regime in May 1966 promulgated the Unification Decree No 34 as a solution to the problem of ethnicity which was the reason for the collapse of the First Republic. Regional autonomy was severed from the regions, the centre was strengthened, civil, public and judicial services were unified likewise exploitation of mineral resources, management and distribution of revenue. The result was clamours of Igbo domination which the North argued is inherent in the decree that led to the violent overthrow of the Ironsi regime. Ever since, aspects of the decree which allotted enormous powers to the central government to the detriment of the component states and central derivation, management and distribution of revenue which made the states unable to deepen sustainable development were not reversed by subsequent administrations. A total resort to true federalism is suggested as the solution to peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Key Words: Ethnicity, Unification, Federalism.

Clearing the Landscape: Nigeria experienced the first military regime on the 17th of January, 1966 after a bloody coup d' tat led by Major Kaduna C. Nzeogwu and his comrades. The coup succeeded in truncating the perceived corrupt civilian regime of the first Republic, but it was countered by the supreme commander of the Nigerian Army in the period, Major Gen. J.T. Aguiyi Ironsi. Owing to the damage caused to the parliament by the coup, and the general uncertainty in the polity, the leadership of the parliament, afraid of the breakdown of law and order, handed power over to the military.

The condition of the military take over at the onset was greeted by jubilation across the country, but in the passage of time, the jubilation turned sour as government policies were rolled out, most especially, the Unification Decree No. 34 of May, 1966. The result of which did not only see the assassination of the Head of State but also the pogrom meted on the Igbo and some other minority groups in Eastern Nigeria. The outcome of the pogrom was the conflagration which engulfed the country over a period of 30 months. The central theme of this paper is the impact of the Ironsi regime and his Unification Decree No. 34 on the Nigerian polity and governance. The Decree has been viewed by scholars and political pundits as a shackle that would facilitate the domination of the Igbo over other groups that make up Nigeria.[1] Others were of the opinion that

[1] A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup,* Ibadan: Evans Brothers Nigeria Publishers, 1981, p.157. I also interacted with a number of people who witnessed with keen interest the events that followed the overthrow of the First Republic and the first military administration headed by Gen. Aguinyi Ironsi. Among them were Col. C.C Ude (rtd) c.81, Retired Army Officer, former Federal Commissioner, Federal Character Commission, interviewed in Ngwo, 14/05/2015. He was trained at

the Decree was the solution to the problem of ethnicity and its inherent liabilities that saw the violent ouster of the First Republic.[2]

This paper suggests that though the Decree's intention was to solve the problem of ethnicity and its liabilities which was the main basis of the corrupt leadership in the first Republic; Ironsi's personality and style of leadership, and the nature of the promulgation of the Decree gave it a posture of dominance of one group over the others. Also, the Gowon's regime which was formed after the violent overthrow of the Ironsi administration and the subsequent regimes that followed did not change aspects of the Decree which gave the centre enormous power over the component states; which also introduced the idea of Federal exploitation of major resources and distribution of allocation to component states. Ethnicity which is the root cause of corruption, under development and uneven development that the Decree intended to solve is still inherent in the polity. This paper therefore, suggests a total reversion of the components of the Decree which has made Nigeria a quasi-federal state and greatly hindered cordial relationship across different groups in the country. It also suggests true federalism – where every state will both generate and manage the resources in their areas and as were mastermind the development of their respective states as the answer to the problem of ethnicity which has hindered massive development in the country.

In doing this, Nigeria's background to the first military regime will be explored so as to understand the dynamics of relationship among groups that make up Nigeria and the sources of conflict among them. Ironsi's personality and style of leadership will be examined viz-a-viz the Decree No. 34, the ripples of Decree No. 34 in subsequent administrations will be reviewed then comes the conclusion.

Primary and secondary sources constitute data for historical reconstruction, these include oral samples collected from purposefully selected respondents, it will be augmented with books, journal articles and other unpublished documents. The study will utilize historical method examining the subject matter in time perspective.

Nigeria's Background to the Military Rule:

Nigeria held within itself people of diverse groups. There are more than five hundred spoken languages and well over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups some numbering fewer than ten thousand people.[3] The people of Nigeria have a history which stretched far back into the past; the savannah lands and plains of the North saw the emergence of the great Kanuri Empire of Kanem-Borno which wielded great influence among the Kanuri, Kanembu, Felata, Shua Arabs and other groups inhabiting the lake Chad Basin.[4] Their position at the receiving end of one of the most ancient trade routes across the Sahara from Cairo through Fezzan to Lake Chad enabled if to develop rapidly as a leading commercial and

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the intercontinental Military Academy Teshie, Ghana and Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, England. Mr..Micheal Ani c.75 Ex-Academic, social critic and public affairs analyst. They were of the opinion that the nature of the turn of events under Gen. Ironsi regime raised suspicion especially in the North.

[2] F. Forsyth, *The Making of A Legend: The Biafran Story,* London: Penguin Books, 1969, p.47

[3] Mabogunje A.L. "Physical and Social Geography" *Regional Surveys of the World: Africa South of the Sahara 32nd Ed, London*: Europa Publications 2002, pp.143-144.

[4] B. Davidson and F.K Buah, *Growth of Africa Civilization: History of West Africa, 1000-1800.* London: Longman group Ltd. , 1967, pp.71-72

political centre.[5] To the West of Borno were fourteen Hausa states which include Daura, Kano, Rano, Zauzan, Gobir, Kastina and Biram. Others classified as "Banzabakwai" (illegitimate states) include Kebbi, Zamfara, Nupe, Gwari, Yoruba and Kwararafa (Jukun).[6] These states traced its origin to a common ancestor, Bayajidah, who was acclaimed to be a prince of Baghdad. In the 19th Century, the Fulani who migrated from the Niger bend, around Futa-Toro and Futa-Djalon, settled in Hausa land rose in an Islamic revolution against the Habe rulers of Hausa states. Owing to internal weakness occasioned by mutual antagonism among the rulers of Hausa states, they were defected under the inspiring leadership of Usman Dan Fodio.[7] The result was the establishment of a vast theocratic empire with its headquarters at Sokoto. The empire united within itself numerous minority groups in the North who, invariably were converted to Islam. In the North also lie numerous other minority groups which include the Tiv, Igala, Idoma, Igbira, Borgu etc. who formed Kingdoms that wielded influence beyond their immediate environments.

In the South is the Yoruba speaking people, a homogenous group that claimed decent from one ancestor, Oduduwa. Oke-oramfe in Ife is taken to be their place of origin. Growth in population and scramble for scarce resources triggered the forces of migration which led to different Yoruba kingdoms like Oyo, Owu, Ketu, Ila, Ijebu, Ekiti, Akure, etc.[8] of all the kingdoms formed by Yoruba people, Oyo Empire was the most powerful. At one time, it wielded influence over a good number of the Yoruba groups. Also in the South are the Benin Kingdom and numerous chiefdoms formed by Igbo speaking peoples. Other groups that make up the South include the Itshekiri, Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik, Uhroboh and numerous others.

Over the second half of the 19th Century these whole areas was occupied by the British who, by enforcing series of treaties with conquered local rulers, obtained recognition of formal suzerainty over the territory that is today known as Nigeria at the Berlin conference.[9] During colonial rule, the protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria were administered as separate entities, while Governor Sir Hugh Clifford established a legislative council for the whole Nigeria, only the Southern delegates sat in the council to make laws for their people; but for the North, laws were made for them through proclamation. The British divide and rule system which was carried out by her successive administrators in Nigeria[10] made it difficult for the groups inhabiting the North and South to meet and as well relate citizens of the same country. Sir Hugh Clifford in justification of the divide and rule system inherent in his constitution cited ethnic diversity as one of the reasons he limited

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[5] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis : 1967–1970*, Benin City: Ethiope Publishing corporation , 1973, p.9

[6] T. A Osae and S.N Nwabara, *A Short History of West Africa, AD 1000-1800*, London: Hodder and Stoughton Educational Ltd, 1968, p.75

[7] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis...*, p.11

[8] A. Akinjogbin and A .E Ayandele, "Yorubaland up to 1800" in O. Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History,* Ibadan: Heinemann Education Books, 1980, pp.125-133.

[9] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis...* p.12

[10] T.N Tamuno, " British Colonial Administration in Nigeria the Twentieth Century" in O. Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigerian History* ... p.397

the competence of the legislative council to the South.[11]

By 1946 when the Richards constitution was promulgated, it provided for a legislative council for the whole country. The groups that make up the North and the South were able to meet for the first time in council since the inception of Nigeria. Sir Bernard Bourdillon Nigeria's Governor General from 1935 -194 was the architect of this constitution. According to Olusanya, he was one of those few Governors who actively worked for the unity of the country.[12] In 1942 he took a tour of the North to ask the Emirs and the people of the North to take more interest in the affairs of the whole country.[13] He further explained why constitution aimed at the unity of the country should have as its major features the establishment of three administrative regions into which the country is divided. He advanced that owing to the inability of many Northerners to speak English, their unfamiliarity with parliamentary procedures will not only turn them to redundant members, it might also lead to friction between them and the educated Southerners.[14] He also posited that since the native authority is the unit of political consciousness, the establishment of the regional councils will promote wider consciousness of a regional basis which invariably will be the necessary pre-requisite for the growth of national consciousness.[15]

The regional councils were therefore provided for by the constitution. For the North and the West, it provided for a bi-cameral legislature which consists of the House of Assembly and the House of Chiefs then for the East was a uni-cameral legislature that is the House of Assembly. The regional councils deepened ethnic politics and subsequently political parties were formed along ethnic lines to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the constitution to deepen development in their respective regions.

In 1940, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Adeyemo Alakijah formed the Action Group (AG) out of a Yoruba cultural organization "Egbe Omo Oduduwa". Their aim is to bring within its fold all nationalists of Western region to work together as a united group to advance policies of common interest.[16] The "Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa" meaning Northern Peoples Congress was formed in 1949. Their intention was to embrace the whole North. Owing to their fear of being dominated by other groups in the South, their main aim is regional autonomy within a united Nigeria while the immediate self-government was not their aim. Their motto is "One North one People" irrespective of religion; tribe or rank.[17] The formation of all these parties took impetus from the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon formed by Dr Hebert Macaulay and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe in 1944. That is the only party that looked like a national political party. Its

[11] G. Olusanya, " Constitutional Development in Nigeria, 1861-1960" in O. Ikime (ed.) *Groundwork of Nigeria History* ... p.521.

[12] G. Olusanya " Constitutional Development in Nigeria ..."p.527

[13] L. Dare and A. Oyewole, *A Textbook of Government*, Ibadan: Quibonoje Press and Book Industries Ltd, 1987, p.129

[14] G. Olusanya. "Constitutional Development in Nigeria... p.527.

[15] G. Olusanya. "Constitutional Development in Nigeria ..."

[16] L. Dare and A. Oyewole, *A Textbook of Government* ... p.138

[17] L. Dare and A. Oyewole, *A Textbook of Government...*

membership of the party at the onset is organizational rather than individualistic. It has within its fold the Igbo State Union and other ethnic based and professional associations.

According to Nnoli, Ethnicity which is a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups can only exist within a political society consisting of diverse ethnic groups.[18] Ani noted that the urban centres which offered a heterogeneous environment titled the friendly relationship that existed among different ethnic groups before colonialism when greater part of Nigerian societies were largely homogenous into a conflictual relationship.[19] Schaefer advanced that the source of conflict in urban centres are driven by economic tendencies which reflect people's needs, choices and decisions.[20] At the initial stage of convergence of different urban centres, the source of conflict did not revolve around ethnic leanings; rather, they were influenced by the scramble for jobs, shelter, business and scarce resources which were basically economic issues that are individualistic in nature.[21] As the societies in the Northern, Western and Eastern Nigeria became politically conscious owing to the regional councils and political parties formed along the lines of regions; the major source of conflict tilted from economic issues to Ethnicity.

The manifestation of deeper animosity sown by ethnicity among Nigerian groups played out in 1956 with the vehement rejection of motion for self-government as moved by Hon. Anthony Enahoro, an Action Group member from the West, by the Northern delegates. Fear of Southern domination ever since, formed the crux of their nationalism. When at independence, they (the North) gained access to the control of the Federal Government, there was a prevailing atmosphere of tense and cut-throat competition. Regional and ethnic chauvinism developed a pace and accusations of an alleged attempt at Hausa-Fulani or Igbo domination were freely exchanged.[22] In the struggle for the control of the federation, both the ruling party and opposing leadership groups made intensive use of ethnic rivalry and did everything possible to whip xenophobic sentiments among various groups in the federation. The events that followed were marred by gross irregularities, intimidation and lawlessness. For instance, the Action Group crisis of 1962, the census crisis of 1962-64 and the Western Regional election crisis of 1965[23] is a testimony to the ruthless dimension the pursuit of power by different regions have assumed.

Economic mismanagement and violent suppression of minority group agitation for self-determination in Tivland combined to discredit the government of the politicians in the eyes of the populace. The result was the violent overthrow of the first Republic through a bloody military coup.

The military coup of January 1966 organized by five and afterwards seven young Nigerian military

[18] O. Nnobi, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* ... pp. 5 – 6.

[19] U. Ani, "Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria: A Skeletal Overview", in NR Uwajimogu (ed) *Renaissance University Journal of Management and Social Sciences Vol. No 2,* Enugu's RUJMASS Press, 2014, p.73

[20] R. Schaefer, *Sociology 9th Edition*, Boston: McGrowHill Publishers, 2005, p.467.

[21] U. Ani, "Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria"... pp.73-74

[22] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis*... p.20

[23] Micheal Ani, Interview cited. A lecturer at the University of Ibadan in the period, he posited that political thugrey reached new heights; this led to the destruction of lives and properties and as well breakdown of law and order.

officers, led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu was tagged an Igbo coup for Igbo domination.[24] The aim of the revolution according to Ademoyega is to establish a strong, united and prosperous nation free from corruption and internal strife.[25] The coup was not successful as it was countered by Major Gen. Ironsi. The overthrow of the civilian regime was celebrated by Nigerians in different locations. It was a fresh start in the process nation building. The extent at which the nation will either progress or derail is dependent on Major Gen. Ironsi, the head of the military government.

Major Gen. Ironsi and the Decree No. 34

Major Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi born in Umuahia in March, 1924, educated partly at Umuahia and partly at Kano was enlisted into the West African Frontier Force as a private at the age of eighteen during the Second World War. He rose to the rank of Sergeant Major at the end of the war and in 1948 he was chosen for the officer conversion course at Eaton Hall in England; at the end of the course in 1949 he was appointed Second Lieutenant.[26] Balogun underscores that the British Colonial Authority only take care, in terms of promotion and privileged for subdued Nigerians in institutions like the army.[27] He advanced therefore that this tells of his shallow intellectual capacity and originality of the mind. It also added to his physical courage and proficiency as a soldier.[28] As a second lieutenant he was posted to the Ordinance Depot in Lagos, he was later converted to an infantry regiment promoted to the rank of lieutenant serving as the ADC to the Governor General, Sir John Macpherson. As a newly promoted captain, he attended the coronation in London in June, 1953[29]. He attained the rank of Major in 1953, later in the year when the Queen visited Nigeria, he served as her query. In September 1960, he was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and he commanded the Nigerian contingent of the United Nations force in the Congo. Promoted to a Brigadier in 1961, he later returned to Congo to command the entire UN force. He was subsequently promoted to the rank of Major General and appointed Head of the Nigerian Army.[30]

To Forsyth, Ironsi was an honest man and tried to run an honest administration. But despite his honesty, he was not a politician and he showed little aptitude for the intricacies of diplomacy necessary inside a highly complex society.[31] Invariably, he was a man trained to be highly submissive to authority possibly no matter how good or bad the authorities were. Ademoyega noted that Ironsi and all the senior officers from the rank of colonel and above were totally committed to the Belewa government and only pre-occupied with sustaining Belewa in power and preserving themselves in the upper hierarchy of

[24] A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck...* p.24; P. Effiong, *Nigeria and Biafra My Story,* New Jersey: A Sungai Book, 2004, p.21; A. Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Civil War,* Enugu: Forth Dimension Publishers, 1980, pp.17-19,B. Gbulie, *Nigeria's Five Majors...*, p.50 underscores these facts.

[25] A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck* ... p.123

[26] R. Luckhan, *Nigerian Military: A Sociological Analysis of Authority and Revolt, 1960 – 1967,* London: Cambridge University Press, 1971, p.253. See also F. Forsyth, *The Making of A Legend...* p.43, O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis* ... p.23

[27] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis* ... p.23

[28] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis...*

[29] F. Forsyth, *The Making of a Legend* ... p.43

[30] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis* ... p.24

[31] F. Forsyth, *The Making of A Legend...* p.45

the Army.[3232] He was noted as a man who nothing in his education or intellectual background had prepared him for the role of administering Nigeria. Luckhan advanced that in 1965 Major General Welby Everald his predecessor advised against his appointment as the GOC owing to the fact that he did not have firm grip on his command.[33]

His hard drinking habit, his mono-focal knowledge of submission, bull courage and sincerity typical of a traditionally trained soldier was not good enough to take care of situations, given the prevailing circumstances in the country. Gbulie advanced that he knew, Ironsi's assumption of power was nothing short of a major catastrophe. His ill disposition to pursue programme of dynamic revolutionary changes, his ineptitude to grapple successfully with many problems posed by the explosive and chaotic situation in the country.[34] Ironsi at the onset showed no favouritism towards his region of birth as he tried to run an honest regime; this is basically reflected on the nature of his appointments and actions. For instance, the 23 permanent secretaries he appointed into the federal public service ministries were distributed thus: The North – 8, Mid-west – 7, West – 5 and East – 3. He also appointed 25 general managers, chairmen and secretaries of Federal Corporations; it was distributed thus: West – 12, North – 6, East – 3, Mid-west – 1, Foreigners – 3.[35] The North occupied position in the high echelon of the military and as well constitute majority of his back room staff and personal aids. As he ordered the detention of former politicians in the South which he perceived, are likely to cause trouble, the Northern politicians were not only left in their liberty, but were integrated into Kastina's administration as Military governor of Northern Region. All these were targeted a pacifying the North who he perceived, beared the brunt of the coup that was planned and executed by Nigerian military officers of Eastern extraction. Nothing in his appointments showed Igbo domination.

On assumption office, he quelled the Western Regional crisis, the minority agitation for self-determination in Tivland and middle belt region. Also, the Isaac Boro insurrection in Niger Delta.[36] These actions raised the hope of Nigerians and confidence in his administration; but this confidence plummeted with the growing opposition from the North, not because his policies were not good enough, but the nature of its implementation. Ironsi's regime lacked the ideology that will drive his administration. Ideology could have injected right thinking political forces that would synergise his polices among groups that make up Nigeria. In a complex society like Nigeria with its deep seated antagonism prevalent among different regions, governance must go beyond administration to embody aspects of politics.[37]

By Feb, 1966 when he articulated the unification Decree No 34, there was no political structure on ground to transmit it to the minds of different Nigerian groups. It was obvious that ethnicity was the bane of the First Republic where people did not see themselves as members of one country but members of different regions. In the regions too, group tension is prevalent. For instance, the Christian minorities of the middle belt have been struggling for liberation from the ultra-

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[32] A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck...*

[33] R. Luckhan, *Nigerian Military* ... p.253

[34] B. Gbulie, *Nigeria's Fire Majors: Coup D'état of 15th January, 1966, First Inside Account,* Onitsha: African Education Books, 1981, p.103

[35] F. Forsyth, *The Making of a Legend...* p.45–47

[36] F. Forsyth, *The Making of a Legend...* p.45

[37] R. Luckhan, *Nigerian Military...* p. 254 – 255

conservative NPC. In the East, the Ijaw, Efik, Ibibio and other groups were struggling for relevance within the NCNC. The turmoil in the West was also a problem of group interest and ethnicity.

A good number of leaders in Nigeria even before Ironsi have suggested that a system of government that will severe regional autonomy and strengthen the centre as the only form of government that will unite and strengthen different groups that make up Nigeria as one indivisible body.[38] To Ironsi, tribal loyalties and activities which promote group consciousness and sectional interests must give way to the urgent task of national reconstruction.[39] But the nature of his implementation did not only look suspicious but as well inflammating to other regions and groups especially the North. On the 13th of February, he appointed a two man commission headed by Mr Francis Nwokedi and Mr Micheal Ani all from eastern Igbo, to study and report on the unification of Nigerian administrative structure, public and judicial service.[40] Forsyth noted that Mr. Nwokedi took a tour of the whole North, though he listened to the Northerner's view, his final report contained conclusions that did not coincide with those views.[41]

This action was greeted by scepticism and suspicion of Igbo domination of the North by the Northerners. In the midst by this suspicion, he promoted his loyal eighteen Eastern and Mid-Western Igbo officers from the rank of major to Lieutenant Colonel. To placate the other regions, he promoted three Northerners and five Western officers.[42]

Without waiting for the commission to finish sitting, Ironsi announced the unification Decree No 34. This created tension in most parts of Nigeria. The provisions of the Decree include (1) the abolition of the four regions and the creation of group of provinces that corresponds with the size of each region. (2) the transfer of the legislative and executive powers to the Federal Government (3) Public service were unified under a single public service commission.[43]

No doubt, the unification decree was what could have salvaged the fortunes of the country in the period, but Ironsi's mono-focal nature as noted earlier consistently influenced his decisions and his deliberate alienation of positive minded political actors who could understand and synergise policies beyond their immediate group, made the Decree look like a shackle of dominance. Fosyth noted that he was on occasions ill advised by his kit and kin, a common fate with men in power.[44] Balogun underscored the account of a British journalist who was closely acquainted with Nigerian affairs, he reported that his regime lost its national image and is widely felt to be a regime dominated by a clique of the Igbo group. The ill advice from his circle of friends resulted in the political mistakes which metamorphosed in the disastrous timing of the unification Decree.[45] Ex Northern politicians capitalized on these mistakes to regain favour among their people and as well whip up Northern sentiment against his regime.

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[38] F. Forsyth, *The Making of a Legend* ... p.47

[39] R. Luckhan, *The Nigerian Military*... p.264

[40] O. Balogu, *Nigeria in Crisis*... p.25

[41] F. Forsyth, *The Making of a Legend*... p.49

[42] A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck*... p.157

[43] A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck*... p.265

[44] F. Forsyth, *The Making of a Legend*... p.45

[45] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis* ... p.27

He seems to have been blindfolded by power that he could hardly understand the highly combustible political movements going on in the country. Ademoyega posited that he surrounded himself with people like him-who had little time to consider the safety of the nation which they have taken upon themselves to govern.[46] Gbulie described him as a man ill-disposed to pursue a programme of dynamic revolutionary changes, and a kind of leader who could not grapple successfully with many problems posed by the expensive chaotic situation in the country.[47] One of such situations is the fate of the coup plotters. They were all put in detention without trial. Gbulie noted that as more and more days went and rolling into weeks, there was no major development in connection to their case. In the circumstances they blamed Ironsi for dragging feet and trying to resolve his problems by avoiding them. This did not only keep the nation indefinitely on tenterhooks but exposed his absolute lack of competence as a leader.[48] The result was the violent reprisal that ended his life and regime.

Ripples of Decree No. 34 in Gowon's and Subsequent Regimes in Nigeria

On assumption of office on the 1st of August, 1966, Lt. Col Gowon ordered the release of a number of political detainees notably Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Anthony Enahoro, a feat which Gen Ironsi procrastinated throughout his regime. This political gesture won the support of the West on the side of Gowon's regime.[49] The Unification Decree No. 34 was reversed. Owing to the disorder resulting from the pogrom carried out on the Eastern Igbo, a system of government could not be fashioned in replacement for the reversed Decree No. 34. A meeting was therefore brokered at Aburi in Ghana by General J. A. Ankrah to design a form of government for Nigeria. A resort to pre-January 1966 federal system of Government was agreed upon but the issues of military formation on regional bases hindered the regime of Gowon in its implementation.[50] Thereafter, Decree No. 8 was finally promulgated by Gowon's government as a replacement for the repealed Decree No. 34. The Decree contained a significant proviso that no region should exercise executive authority so as to impede or prejudice the exercise of the executive authority of the federation or to endanger the continuance of federal system of government of Nigeria.[51] The Decree vested Legislative and Executive powers of government in the supreme military council which is to act in concurrence with the regional military governors in all major issues[52]. The revenue derivation formular which was centralized under Decree No. 34 was not changed. All revenues derived from all the regions were not paid into the regional treasury but to the central treasury in Lagos. The Decree therefore rendered the regions semi-autonomous; it retained clauses that vested enormous powers on the central government – a situation which has prevailed in the country up to the time of this writing.

The creation of new states in 1967 and the issue of equitable distribution of national resources led to the inauguration of the Interim Revenue Allocation Review Committee headed by Chief

[46] A. Ademoyega, *Why We Struck...* p.156

[47] B. Gbulie, *Nigeria's Five Majors...* p.103

[48] B. Gbulie, *Nigeria's Five Majors...* p.144

[49] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis ...* p.52

[50] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis ...* p.59

[51] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis ...*

[52] O. Balogun, *Nigeria in Crisis ...* p.59 – 60

I.O. Dina by the Federal Military Government[53]. The committee report did not only uphold aspects of the Ironsi's Unification Decree No. 34 of 1966 but strengthened it when it declared as follows:

> We believe that fiscal arrangements in this country should reflect the new spirit of unity to which the nation is dedicated. No more evidence of this is necessary than the present war to preserve this unity at the cost of human lives, material resources and radical change in the country's structure. It is in the spirit of this new found unity that we have viewed all sources of revenue of this country to be used for executing the kinds of programmes which can maintain this unity.[54]

With this, lots of power is concentrated at the centre where the vast resources of the country from all the states is both collected and managed. Subsequent commissions set up to look into the nature of derivation and allocation arrived at conclusions that did not only appropriate much power to the central government but made indices that are in total variance to the principles of true federalism. For instance, both the technical committee of 1977 headed by Ojetunji Aboyade and the 1979 presidential commission on revenue allocation set up by President Shehu Shagari, headed by Pius Okigbo only ended up strengthening the central government to the detriment of the component states and local Government Councils.[55]

The Babangida regime in order to address what he perceived as, the short comings of the revenue derivation and allocation in line with the principles of true federalism, inaugurated the National Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission headed by General T.Y Danjuma. They arrived at a formula which Adesina described as a classic case of travesty of the principles of federalism.[56] This formular encouraged fiscal centralization that deepened the dependence of states to the central government. Navy Captain Joseph Adewusi in 1996 lamented that the current practice of military federation had tended to raise fears of an over centralized federal structure which denied the states the autonomy to decide their constitutional responsibilities to the people.[57]

The realities of the ripples of the Unification Decree which occasioned the violent overthrow of Nigeria's first military regime and manifests itself in over centralization of power at the centre is still inherent in the polity. The former deputy Senate president Sen. Ike Ekweremadu in a statement as part of his general contribution to the constitution review called the Nigerian federalism "feeding bottle federalism"[58] -where the centre is wielding much power and the states are dependent on the centre to carry out their statutory responsibilities.

Conclusion

The overthrow of the First Republic and the emergence of the Gen. Ironsi regime and his

[53] O. Adesina, "Revenue Allocation Commission and the Contradiction of the Nigerian Federation" in K. Amuwo *et al, Federation and Political Restructuring in Nigeria,* Ibadan: Spectrum books, 1998, p.235

[54] O. Adesina, "Revenue Allocation…" p.236

[55] O. Adesina, "Revenue Allocation…" p.237 – 238

[56] O. Adesina, "Revenue Allocation…" p.239

[57] O. Adesina, "Revenue Allocation…"

[58] Ike Ekweremadu, Former Deputy President of the Nigerian Senate on a debate as part of his general contribution to the Constitution Review Committee at the Nigerian National Assembly, … 2014

Unification Decree No 34 of 1966 saw the demise of true federalism in Nigeria. Prior to this period, the component regions that make up Nigeria both generated and managed their resources. They were able to provide infrastructure that had prospects of deepening development in their respective regions. Through challenges abound, the regional governments were viable and targeted development to key areas that will build the capacity of their citizens to generate and manage wealth.

The Unification Decree No 34 which altered the federal structure was greeted by clamour of domination of the Igbo over the other groups especially the North. This led to the bloody overthrow of the Ironsi regime; ever since, the ripples of the Unification Decree, instead of being changed by subsequent administrations, it was exploited to the detriment of the Nigerian State. The result is the creation of component states that are not viable to sustain themselves, the dependence of these states on the central government for the execution of statutory responsibilities and the emergence of corrupt politicians who run the states and other agencies of government, not for the development of those states, but for self-enrichment. This paper therefore, suggests a total reversal to true federalism where the component states will exploit all the resources in their localities for the development of their respective states as the solution for peace and sustainable development in Nigeria.