



Aburi Accord and the Narrative of a New Nigeria

NDUKA LUCAS OLUKA, AMBROSE OSARIYEKEMWEN IYASE
University Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

Abstract. The failure of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria (FMG) to implement the resolutions of the January 1967 Peace Agreement in Aburi, Ghana, which favoured a loose confederation where regional governments were made to command authority over their regions, and currently enjoys consensus in some quarters as the only genuine opportunity to reborn Nigeria of the old and save it from its numerous problems, has reinforced ethnic and religious tension in the country. The disagreement for restructuring, constitutional review and resource management, and separatist movement in South-East region are echoes of the failure of the FMG to implement the Peace Agreement at Aburi. This becomes the starting point of this study, which examined what the Aburi Declaration stands for, and the truth behind the assumption that it may have ushered in a new Nigeria where national cohesion thrives. To source for relevant materials used in this study, historical research design was chosen and secondary sources like textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, and internet sources were employed. Conflict Management theory was chosen as the study's theoretical framework to analyse how the Aburi Peace Agreement was poorly managed by the FMG. Faced with these realities, this study suggests among others that there should be total implementation of the provisions of the Aburi Declaration and others similar to it, such as the Ad-Hoc Constitutional Conference of September-October 1966, National Reconciliation Commission (1967-1970).

Keywords: Aburi Accord, Aburi Declaration, Narrative, A New Nigeria, Nigerianism.

1. Introduction

The realization of self-rule in October 1960 after a long period of British control may have been the time

for honest attainment of national cohesion that was under threat during the colonial rule, which instituted ethnic and religious division among the people of Nigeria. Prior to the fusion of the protectorates of North and South in 1914 by Lord Lugard, the indigenous tribes enjoyed their diversities in culture, linguistics, and economic and political life. Conversely, this freedom was taken away by the forced merger which happened without consultation with the people of the protectorates whether it was convenient or not to co-exist as a united entity, now called Nigeria. Before the January and July 1960 military coup and counter coup, Nigeria's political space was relatively smooth, though, with minor itches related to ethnic and religious tension in some areas.

The founding fathers while consenting to self-rule in the 1940s and 50s dreamt about 'one Nigeria, a united Nigeria' that was later achieved through formation of political parties and coordinated national movements with true-sense of Nigerianism. Regrettably, the failure of government and some powerful individuals and the coup plotters to sustain the faith in the Nigeria's dream, changed the country's narrative to what it has become today. The behaviours of these privileged few became the primary reason for the Aburi Meeting held in Ghana in 1967. The breakdown in trust following the expectations that came with the Aburi Peace Agreement was the prime force behind Odumegwu Ojukwu declaration of the Republic of Biafra as a sovereign state on 30th May 1967, leading to the civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. As Ighodalo (2025) puts it:

Though there are a number of peace moves to avert the Nigerian civil war, including the efforts made by some prominent monarchs (Obas) from the Western region, and efforts of the government under the National Conciliation Committee and Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU) and others,

but in all these efforts, the Aburi Peace Agreement stands out because of its genuine posture and resolutions (Ighodalo, 2025:883).

It is on this basis that most previous writers, scholars, and analysts advanced the resolutions reached at the end of the meeting in Ghana as the only alternative effort that perhaps averted the civil war and national issues after the war, majority of which stocked with the country to date. Likewise, much have not been said concerning how Nigeria's contemporary national concerns like the separatist movement in South-East and South-West expanses, militancy in the Niger Delta, and agitations for resource management and true-federalism, the whole time, may have been resolved through implementation of the Aburi decisions. This study therefore interrogates the need for implementation of the recommendations of Aburi meeting and the novel narrative of a new Nigerian State. The fact remains that the Republican Constitution of 1963 that replaced the Independence Constitution of 1960 failed to address the concerns of the minority groups and their desires for self-rule. Three years after attainment of self-rule, the desires of the minority tribes generated intense tension that later encouraged the government to create Mid-Western region in 1963 (Ighodalo, 2025).

While the agitation for self-rule was successful in Western region following the creation of a new region of the Mid-West, same was not the issue in Northern region in which the agitators were imprisoned. The tribal and religious awareness that was created by the British colonial power and the 1914 fusion of the protectorates of the north and south continued to threaten post-independence concept of nation-building. Along the line, the Western region was engulfed with political crisis that led to the suspension of the regional government and parliament. The 1963 census dispute involving the regions inflating of figures to their respective advantages, resulting to bitterness and accusations and counter accusations among the regions created more problems in the country. The controversial election of 1964 and Western region election of 1965 marred by violence, and the January coup and July countercoup coordinated by northern soldiers became the leading factor of Nigeria's problems as they shattered the nation's already fragile national unity (Akinyetun, 2020; Ighodalo, 2025; Okoji, 2025).

The final stroke that led to the Nigeria's national unity dilemma is the total collapses of the Aburi Declaration that may have settled the critical issues caused by the military coup of 1966. It is on the basis of this assumption that Uwechue (2003) and PENGlobal

(2023) identified the difference in interpretation given to the Aburi Declaration by both the federal military government headed by Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon and Eastern region delegates led by Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, and promulgation of Decree No. 8 of March 1967, which in itself was described as a deliberate attempt to frustrate the loose confederation provision suggested at Aburi as the reason for the civil war in Nigeria. While Decree No. 8 was said to target the prevention of disintegration of Nigeria and a civil war that was already evident following the secession moves in Eastern Nigeria, it failed because it did not reflect all the terms agreed upon at the meeting. The leadership of the separatist Biafra movement perhaps saw this as a betrayal and breach of the resolutions reached at Aburi meeting. It was argued that the Decree contains clauses that still gave the FMG the power to impose emergency rule against any of the regions, including Eastern region. On the contrary, the head of the military government, Gen. Yakubu Gowon said that the Accord collapsed and failed to prevent the civil war because of Odumegwu Ojukwu's demand for regional military control (Jide, 2025).

Nevertheless, the fashionable theory being propagated by many about Nigeria concerning the implementation of Aburi agreement and other related national conferences held to resolve the nation's problems is a focus. Ironically, the prescribed best of all these constitutional reviews, which is the 'Aburi Accord' was never implemented and Nigeria is paying the price. Taking it from this point, this study argued that the Aburi Peace Agreement despite the challenges that held back its implementation by the military government, a new Nigeria may have been achievable in 1967. Face with this reality, this study examined what the Declaration stands for, and ascertains the truth behind the assumption that if implemented, it may perhaps usher in a new Nigeria where national cohesion will thrive and national development achievable.

2. Method of Study

This study adopted the historical research design as the methodological framework. This is because historical design is the most appropriate design in the analysis of a study of this nature. Research design can be defined as the setup of the conditions under which data are collected and analysed in a manner that helps to combine the relevance to the purpose of the research. Research design is a statement of the conceptual structure in which a research is undertaken. Research design plays the role of ensuring that maximum amount of time is put into the gathering of relevant evidence or data (Kothari, 2009; Kothari & Garg,

2019). Historical components can assist researchers in exploration current and previous events, mostly based on secondary data sources like textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, internet sources, etc. Greenwood (2012) noted that information about events in the past can inform ‘what occurred’ and ‘why it occurred’, and influences modern circumstances. The applicability of qualitative research method to this study is vital since it can provide a helping hand in the following areas: obtaining crucial data on available literature, and help the researchers in data collection.

Yin (2013) identified three aspects in qualitative research method: investigation of contemporary phenomenon, and use of multiple sources of evidence. It can be approached in exploratory, descriptive and explanatory approaches. Therefore; the data sources that were used to get the materials in this study are strictly limited to secondary literature like peer-reviewed journal articles, textbooks, newspapers, internet materials, and others. These materials were selected with regard to academic plausibility and suitability that they have with the national challenges in Nigeria, link with the failure of the military government to implement the recommendations reached at Aburi Peace Agreement in 1967, and the narrative of a new Nigeria. Cross-referencing sources, triangulation of historical evidence and verification of factual claims with other independent records were used to critically appraise every source. The qualitative method was taken to be the most suitable as it enables the researchers to conduct a subtle assessment of the Aburi Declaration and its relevance in revolving Nigeria’s contemporary concerns.

3. Theoretical Discussion

Conflict Management theory is adopted in this study. While the early ideas of this theory date back to Mary Parker Follett in the 1920s, modern conflict management theory dominated by other prominent scholars like Kenneth Thomas and Ralph Killmann in the 1970s emerged. There is no institution or organisation that is immune of crisis. This reality makes conflict management a crucial aspect of many organisations or institutions. Understanding and applying conflict management principles is to effectively manage conflict situations within an organisation, or a nation-state. Negotiation, mediation and arbitration can be used to manage or resolve conflict but preventive measure stands out as the best avenue of managing it. Effective conflict management practices can significantly benefit parties in conflict. Conflict management theory is a fascinating one since it focuses on identifying and resolving disputes constructively, treating conflict as a functional part of

human interaction rather than a mere instrument for resolving conflicts. Traditionally, conflict is seen as dysfunctional and harmful but the modern view sees it as natural, inevitable, and potentially beneficial for fostering new ideas, especially in a complex organisation (Rahim, 2002).

Some political philosophers and sociologists are linked with Conflict theories, from the ideas of Plato in his tripartite soul, ‘The Republic’, to the ideas of Thomas Hobbes’ ideas in his ‘The Leviathan’, as well as Jean Bodin, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, Thomas Robert Malthus, George Simmel, and Karl Marx (Turner, 1975; Brown, 2017). Conflict arises when there is a clash of interest between two or more parties. How much power or influence the parties exercise in a given conflict situation determines its consequences. If the parties exercise equal levels of strength, the conflict may continue because both may decide to fight back to become more powerful. When there is a power gap, the most powerful party may impose its will on the submissive party. The submissive party in order to win will have to take drastic measures that will increase its power to reach the same level as the dominant party (Hanan, 2025). This was the situation between the FMG of Nigeria that exerted superior power against submissive Ojukwu led Biafra Republic side that exerted lesser power. Though engaging in the war for a couple of years resulted in loss of hundreds of lives and properties.

A servant leader is expected to prioritise other people’s concern and enable them perform their duties at a higher level of growth, which in the Nigerian context featured in agitation for regional management of political power and resources. Ability to manage such conflict situation effectively is one of the basic qualities of a transformative leader (Merril, 2015; Aij & Rapsaniotis, 2017). The success of any organisation including nation-states depends on the extent to which the leadership identify conflict areas, and have perfect understanding on how to manage or resolve them amicably before they get out of control. This was the reason Aburi Meeting was promptly organised, regrettably, poor management of the conflict situation resulted to the civil war and the position Nigeria now finds itself. Issues that affected the success of the meeting are conflict of interest between the parties involved, i.e., the FMG led by Yakubu Gowon and Biafra Republic agitators headed by Ojukwu. If personal or group interests were not shield but discarded, there may have not been any war and a new Nigeria may have been achievable at the end. Today, most of the recurring national problems, especially those related to the failure of both parties to accept and implement the resolution of the meeting may not have

been visible and hunting all other processes negotiated by the successive regimes to attain national unity in the country.

4. What Aburi Accord Means

Aburi Peace Accord also refers to as 'Aburi Declaration' held in Aburi located in Ghana's Eastern Region between 4th and 5th January 1967 and chaired by the former Ghana Military Head of State, General Joseph Arthur Ankrah. Aburi was chosen as the venue of the meeting between the FMG representatives and Nigeria's Eastern region representatives because of their safety. Aburi Meeting was conceived as the last option for peaceful resolution of the conflict, and avoidance of open arm confrontation between the FMG and the secessionist Biafra Republic. Prior to the Aburi Meeting, it was agreed that the use of force to settle the crisis will not be necessary. It was as well agreed that the head of the FMG should assume the title of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria. At the end of the meeting, it was agreed that the resolutions should be embodied in the Decree to be

issued by Lagos, with the concurrence of the military governors (Mwakikagile, 2001).

Among the delegates present at the Aburi meeting are: the Chairman of Ghana National Liberation Council, Lt. General J. A. Ankrah (Chairman); Major Mobolaji Johnson, Governor of Lagos State; Lt. Col. Hassan Katsina, Governor of Northern region; Lt. Col. David Ejoor, Governor of Mid-Western region; Commodore Joseph Edet Akinwale Wey, Vice President of Nigeria; Colonel Robert Adebayo, Governor of Western region; Alhaji Kam Selem, Mr. T. Omo Bare. Others present include N. Akpan, Secretary to the Military Governor of Eastern region; Alhaji Ali Akilu, Secretary to the Military Governor of Northern region; D. Lawani, Under Secretary Military Governor's Office, Mid-West; P. Odumosu, Secretary to the Military Governor, Western region; S. Akenzua, who later became the Oba of Benin- Erediauwa 1, Permanent Under-Secretary-Federal Cabinet Office (PENGlobal Associate Limited, 2023). The table below therefore presents the key decisions reached at the Aburi meeting:

Table 1: Decisions of the 1967 Aburi Accord

S/N	Category	Decisions/Resolutions/Recommendations
1.	Use of Forces	Renunciation of forces: All the parties involved agreed not to use force to settle the Nigerian crisis but resolve the issue through negotiation.
2.	Armed Forces to be reorganise.	Regionalisation of the Army through the establishment of area military commands, corresponding to existing regions, under the control of Area Commanders.
3.	Army Reorganisation.	Army Council: Establishment of a Military Headquarters with equal representation from the regions, to be headed by a Chief of Staff.
4.	Army Reorganisation.	Control of Troops: Regional governors were to have control over Area Commands, i.e., the Army Units, for internal security in their respective regions.
5.	Governance	Establishment of a Supreme Military Council (SMC): All decisions affecting the country require unanimous agreement from the Council.
6.	Governance.	Regional Constitutions: Any matter that needs to be resolved should be referred to military governors for comment and concurrence.
7.	Appointments.	SMC Approval: Appointments to senior police diplomatic, consular, and super-scale posts in federal civil/statutory corporations must be approved by the SMC.
8.	Constitutional	Repeal of Decrees: Regional members agreed that all decrees passed since January 15, 1966, which eroded regional powers should be repealed.
9.	Refugees	Rehabilitation Programme: A committee to look into the rehabilitation of displaced people, i.e., victims of 1966 massacres should be constituted.
10.	Finance	Revenue and Personnel: FMG was to continue with the payment of salaries to staff that fled to the East, and review of revenue sharing formula.
11.	Implementation.	Decree Formulation: Resolutions to be drafted into a decree by Lagos, subject to approval by all military governors.

Source: Nairametrics, 2011; Mwakikagile, 2001.

This table clearly reflects the major decisions reached at the end of the Aburi meeting. All of these were expected to be implemented by the ruling FMG as the critical issues in the country during the period. Perhaps, the story of the Aburi meeting was not just what was decided, but also about how these agreements were imprecisely interpreted, and never implemented as agreed, and how this in the end became undone (Mwakikagile, 2001; Nairametrics, 2011). Although, organised to mend fences and restore

the unity of Nigeria, sadly, it finally stands out as one of the most tragically misunderstood episodes in the country's political history. All its agreements were never formally codified into a single binding document by the FMG despite the fact that it carried the hopes of building a nation that was at the edge of collapse. With months, these hopes collapsed completely, giving way to a devastating civil war.

5. Aburi Peace Agreement and the Narrative of a New Nigeria

Expectations were high following the outcomes of the Aburi meeting. After its collapse, which gives way to distrust between Biafra leaders and the federal government side, and the civil war of 1967, several narratives were conceived. Most Nigerians believed that implementation of the resolutions may have mended and restored peace and national unity in the country. Others believed a combination of implementation of Aburi recommendations and others similar to it, such as the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference of September-October 1966; National Reconciliation Commission of 1967-1970; 1990 National Conference; 1994-1995 Constitutional Conference; Yusuf Mamman Committee 2000; Oputa Panel of 2001; National Political Reform Conference of 2005; and 2014 National Conference, may have restored national unity and trust between the military government and the Eastern region, and among the diverse ethnic nationalities that constitute the nation-state, as well restore the notion of true-Nigerianism.

This was the basis for a general consensus that the supposed implementation of the provisions of the Ghana Peace Agreement, which favoured a loose confederation where the regional governments were made to have direct control over their regions, security and resources may have been the solution to all the contemporary national concerns in Nigeria. Jide (2025) advanced two conflicting reasons for the collapse of the Aburi Declaration to prevent the civil war; first, he said, was the enactment of Decree No. 8 by the FMG, and lastly, he said the collapsed was because of Ojukwu's demand for regional military control which Yakubu Gowon never accepted. Ojukwu wanted total control of government affairs in his region but the federal government of Nigeria never saw the Aburi meeting as a forum for constitutional restructuring or military devolution. Ojukwu's intent on the other hand was different, reason he declined to attend the meeting held in Benin by all the regional governors and federal military government representatives to converse the path forward after the Aburi meeting (Jide, 2025).

On 'Aburi we stand maxim' in recent times, means that the Accord has received more consideration and acceptance as a part of the laid down solutions to the Nigeria's recurring problems. Supporters of this theory argued that since it provided for regional autonomy, which was consistently repeating itself in the country's frontline political debate, Gowon should have granted freedom to the regions to manage their resources, allowing for a new Nigeria and reduce the fear of a central power dominance. Furthermore, it was argued that it may have prevented the civil war and established a solid foundation for a balanced and peaceful federal system, mitigating recurring national issues of ethnic dominance, weak national unity and the struggle for a grab of the national cake. As Izu and Obriki (2019) rightly stated:

It may be a case of being economic not to admit the truth that Aburi and Abuja Accords offered Nigeria the rare opportunity to rediscover, reconstruct, and reconstitute its political, social and economic fronts, and restore trust among its component units and national unity (Izu & Obiriki, 2019:222).

The Abuja Accord which was also a peace agreement, though, signed by Nigerian presidential candidates, notably Goodluck Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari on 14 January 2015 to prevent election violence, enforce peaceful campaigning, and ensure acceptance of results alongside the Aburi Accord and similar conventions, may have ended the nation's numerous problems, usher in new Nigeria, and reinforce commitment to peace, security and national unity. With the present level of violence unleashed on defenceless citizens, especially on the Middle Belt Christians, and south and west people by Hausa/Fulani nihilists, the situation closely resembles the one that existed before the Biafran war; implementation of the Aburi Accord becomes an option to secure the nation existence and unity. As long as the federal government has no answer for Boko Haram, ISWAP, or the daily killings by Fulani marauders in Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau and Kaduna States, and kidnapping for ransoms all over the country, Aburi Accord can again help Nigeria (Jaro, 2011).

Table 2: Areas of Transformations of Nigeria

S/N	Policy Area	Pre-Aburi Scenario (Centralised)	Post-Aburi Implementation (Proposed "New Nigeria")
1.	Structure of Government.	Unitary System (Decree 34), with immense power concentrated in Lagos.	Loose Confederation.
2.	Regional Power.	Weak regions, central control.	Significant autonomy/control over regions.
3.	Military structure.	Unified command.	Unanimous government of all governors needed.

4.	Decision making.	Supreme Commander	Regional "Area Commands" for security.
5.	Governance	Unilateral centralization (Decrees)	Peaceful settlement to avoid civil war.
6.	Stability/War.	High tension/impending conflict.	Peaceful settlement to avoid civil war.

Source: (Nairametrics, 2011; Ayomide, 2021).

This table summarizes the areas in which the Aburi peace agreement may have created a new Nigeria. The government structure prior to the meeting was a unitary system with so much power vested at the central and governed by military decree. With the implementation of the decisions of the meeting, a new Nigeria may have emerge with a loose confederation in which the regions may have enjoyed significant autonomy, and have direct control over their regions, security and resources. A unified or unanimous government of all governors may have foster national unity because regional governors would have been involved in decision-making at the centre under the new military structure. The recent passage of 'State Police Bill', empowering state governors to appoint Commissioner of Police in their respective states by the National Assembly (NASS) under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu led administration (Adebayo, 2026; BBC News Pidgin, 2026), means that the central government is adopting a more tactical approach to end insecurity which is one the most critical issues in the country. It has been described nationwide as a right step in the right direction, resembling compliance to a section of the Aburi Accord.

6. Conclusion

The Nigerian civil war has ended but the matters that are associated with it are yet to be properly addressed by government. These matters play huge role in escalating the problems that are threatening national unity. However, restoring national unity in Nigeria, 59 years after the failed Aburi Accord requires addressing the same issues of trust, equity and power sharing, which led to the civil war and complicate the problems of the country since 1967. Giving the current circumstances, the country is at risk of moving from an underdeveloped state to a failed state, a scenario that must be avoided by the current leadership through adherence to the resolutions made at the Aburi meeting. Virtually everything about Aburi is relevant till today. It remains the best debate in history and for a new Nigeria to be built. Unfortunately, its recommendations are jettisoned by the military government headed by Gen. Gowon long before they were conceived.

Recommendations

A new Nigeria devoid of the crises of ethno-religious conflict and persistent calls for restructuring, resource

control, financial autonomy of states-regionalism, secession, and state and local government creation, is achievable if the following suggestions are giving consideration by government:

The federal government should adhere to the provisions of the Aburi Declaration of 1967, and others similar to it, such as the Ad-hoc Constitutional Conference of September - October 1966; National Reconciliation Commission (1967-1970), etc., with sincerity of purpose. This will not only rebuild trust among the ethnic and religious groups, but will also restore the faith of the people of the South-East region in one Nigeria.

Structural reform or true-federalism should be favoured against the highly centralised unitary system or quasi-federal structure, allowing states to manage their own resources and pay taxes to the federal government, which may reduce the conflict over resource control and debate for restructuring.

There should also be genuine or fairness in citizenship irrespective of tribe, region, social class, level of education, and regional affiliation or state of origin.

There should be reorganisation of the key security structures in line with Aburi proposal for a decentralised military or police structure that can ensure local safety, preventing the fear that state security will be used against a particular region, as was witnessed in recent past against the Biafra agitators, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in South-East region and in the Niger Delta agitators.

A national economic and social integration policy should be prioritised by the federal government. It should focus on reducing regional inequalities, providing equal job opportunity, and improved infrastructure, especially in the marginalized areas. This will not only foster a sense of belonging but return the spiritual of one Nigeria.

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