

DUAL DIPLOMACY AND THE NIGERIA-ISRAEL RELATIONS, 1967-1970.

Emediong Emmanuel Edem^{1*} and Idiongomfon Clement Okon²

¹ Department of History and International Studies, University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State; edemediongemanuel@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-9274-9024>.

² Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja, Nigeria; clemid8@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-9050-3739>.

* Correspondence: clemid8@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines Israel's involvement in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) through the perspective of a dual-track foreign policy, characterised by covert support for the secessionist Republic of Biafra along with the maintenance of formal diplomatic relations with the Nigerian Federal Government. Drawing on diplomatic histories, and existing scholarship, the study adopts a qualitative historical approach to analyse the motivations for and consequences of Israel's actions. It contends that Israel's policy was shaped by the interaction of humanitarian impulses, domestic political pressures, strategic considerations linked to its wide-ranging effort to counter Arab influence in Africa. The article establishes that its role differed from those of major powers such as Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, which pursued more overt and consistent alignments. Instead, Israel functioned within a space of ambiguity, merging covert military and humanitarian support for Biafra with continued engagement with Nigeria. The study shows that although this approach allowed Israel to exert influence during the conflict, it also contributed to prolonging the war, complicated humanitarian outcomes, and ultimately undermining diplomacy. The findings highlight the limitations of small-state diplomacy in conflict settings, and contributes to expansive debates on foreign intervention, sovereignty, and the role of non-great powers in international relations.

Keywords: Small-State Diplomacy, Nigerian Civil War, Biafra Conflict, Nigeria-Israel Relations, Dual-Track Diplomacy.

Introduction

Civil wars occur due to the struggle for who ultimately controls the commonwealth. The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) is one of the most devastating conflicts in postcolonial Africa, resulting in colossal human suffering and the reshaping the political trajectory of the new state. Emerging barely seven years after independence in 1960, the conflict was entrenched in a multiple interaction including political instability, ethnic tensions, and the failure of constitutional arrangements such as the Aburi Accord to reconcile competing regional interests. The declaration of the secessionist Republic of Biafra under Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu in May 1967 transformed an internal political crisis into a full-scale war as the Gowon regime moved to preserve national unity through militarisation for it is in this regard that the Nigerian Civil War can be rightly described as an instrument of nation-building (Falola and Ezekwem, 2016). Empirically, there is a general feeling regarding the war to be a war of self-governance and statehood between the south and the north. But then, it all together unfolded within a wide-ranging

international context that has made it a noteworthy episode in twentieth-century political history.

In international history, the Nigerian Civil War exemplifies conflict pertaining to the ideals of state sovereignty and non-intervention that can be traced back to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia and the realities of Cold War geopolitics and humanitarian intervention. Despite the formal privileges of the territorial integrity of states by the Westphalian system, the Nigerian case showed how external actors often intervened directly or indirectly in the internal affairs of “postcolonial” states. The Soviet Union, which was a major power, gave direct military and diplomatic assistance to the Nigerian Government, driven by strategic, economic and geopolitical interests, and France, in turn, assumed a more ambiguous yet to the large extent pro-Biafran position, providing the assistance that was biased towards its interests in undermining Anglophone influence in West Africa (Stremlau, 2015). Meanwhile, the humanitarian crisis unleashed by the siege of Biafra and especially the starvation and images of starving children enterprised the mobilisation of international public opinion and brought a strong moral element into the conflict, making traditional considerations of non-intervention difficult (Heerten & Moses, 2014).

In this overcrowded and over-politicised scene of foreign intervention, the role of Israel stands out unique but unexplored. Existing literature has been inclined towards defining the participation of Israel in singular analytical framework. Zaki Levey focuses on the strategic decision-making of Israel and claims that its measures were motivated by the need to neutralise the influence of the Arabs and increase its diplomatic presence in Africa at the time increasing isolation in the Middle East (Levey, 2014). On the contrary, Lasse Heerten and Dirk Moses anticipate the humanitarian aspect, noting that the Igbo were the “Jews of Africa”, Biafran leaders used Holocaust analogies and get the attention (public opinion) and moral conscience of the Israelis (Heerten and Moses, 2014). Despite the fact that these perspectives provide insights, they tend to treat humanitarianism and strategic interest as distinct, and at times competing, explanatory frameworks. They do not give recognition to the degree to which these motivations were interwoven in determining the Israeli policy.

This article seeks to address this gap by pressing forward a different analytical perspective. It argues that Israel’s involvement in the Nigerian Civil War is best understood as a *deliberate dual track policy*, in which covert intervention or involvement and formal diplomacy functioned concurrently rather than sequentially or inconsistently. On the one hand, Israel facilitated support for Biafra through indirect military assistance, humanitarian aid, and diplomatic advocacy in international forums. Conversely, it had formal diplomatic ties with the Nigerian Federal Government, which is cognisant of the strategic significance of Nigeria in Africa and the necessity not to experience a total diplomatic breakdown. This dualism was not accidental or contradictory, but a calculated, deliberate policy that was imposed by the fact that Israel was a comparatively small state

that had to live within the limits of the Cold War politics, regional politics, and postcolonial African politics. The study asks and addresses the question how and why Israel pursued a *dual-track policy* during the Nigerian Civil War, and what were the immediate and longer-term diplomatic consequences.

This study adopts a qualitative historical methodology, combining diplomatic histories, declassified intelligence reports, and a wide range of secondary literature to reconstruct Israel's policy actions during the Nigerian Civil War. Government publications, memoirs, and newspaper reports give us a reflection of the views of both the Nigerian and Israeli sides and secondary literature then places these results in the context of the arguments about intervention by foreign powers, postcolonial relations, and foreign politics. Instead of merely narrating the events, the study aims at describing the seeming contradictions of Israeli actions through the interaction of humanitarian concerns, domestic forces, and strategic interests that resulted in the creation of a dual-track policy. With this, the methodology is created not only to recreate historical processes but also to add to a more detailed comprehension of how small states can manage their complex geopolitical settings.

These years 1967 to 1970 encompass the outbreak, escalation, and conclusion of the Nigerian Civil War, providing a coherent framework within which Israel's policy can be examined in its most active and consequential phase. This timeframe allows for a focused analysis of decision-making processes and policy outcomes, while avoiding the dilution that might arise from extending the study into the expansive post-war period. At the same time, the article acknowledges that the implications of these policies extended beyond 1970, shaping subsequent diplomatic relations, as explored in later sections.

As with any historical study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Access to Israeli archival material is restricted in some areas, and available sources especially Nigerian and Biafran accounts may contain political or ideological biases. However, by triangulating multiple sources and perspectives, the study seeks to mitigate these limitations.

Historiography and Engagement with Literature

The literature on the Nigerian Civil War is voluminous, with different focuses and approaches. Early research predetermined homegrown sources, frequently by political history and ethnography. Such an approach as a historical-narrative is used by Falola and Ezekwem (2016), who follow the line of ethnic conflicts and constitutional disintegration as the cause. Their advantage is in their elaborate description of internal disintegration, but they should not focus on the domestic politics at the expense of the international aspects of the war. Stremlau (2015) opposes this by using a diplomatic history approach, placing the war in the context of Cold War geopolitics. His work shows how foreign

actors influenced the conflict, but the weakness is that the Nigerian agency can appear overshadowed by great-power manoeuvring. These works place the war as a domestic conflict and an international incident, but they leave open the question of how smaller external actors fit into this dual framing.

The next focus is on major foreign powers. Balogun (1973) relies on descriptive political analysis to show how the overt support of the Federal Government by Britain and the Soviet Union took place. His approach is more narrative and is based mostly on official announcements and press releases, which contributes to his narrative being more vivid, but analytically less rigorous. Oruke (2019), in its turn, utilises a more interpretive perspective, examining the foreign interests in postcolonial Nigeria through the prism of political economy. He establishes the role of oil and territorial integrity in inspiring Britain and the USSR and the pro-Biafran position of France was a response to the Anglophone preeminence. The advantage of Oruke approach is that it analyses interests structurally, but the approach works to reduce the complexity of African agency by presenting the war as a proxy war. All these studies bring out the decisive role of great powers but they also bring about a pyramid of literature in which small states such as Israel are marginalised

In interrogating such strands, there is a discontinuity: strategic and humanitarian explanations are treated as discrete. This division blurs the concomitance of motives. The interaction of the humanitarian rhetoric and geopolitical pragmatism on the policy of Israel is under-theorised in the literature. In this article the gap in the literature is bridged by furthering a two-track model: Israel was secretly allied with Biafra, but maintained formal ties with Nigeria. This interpretive gesture gives in to the temptation of classifying the actions of Israel under one paradigm. Through successive interrogation of the literature, domestic sources, great-power interventions, strategic and humanitarian readings, we understand that the significance of Israel is found not in the scale of its intervention but in the unique form it took by assimilating covert action, humanitarian intervention, and diplomatic prudence. This re-framing broadens the boundaries of argument through the demonstration of how small states negotiate competing claims in postcolonial conflicts.

Israel's Position in Africa Before and During the War

After its establishment in 1948, Israel faced isolation in the Middle East and therefore sought to find alliances amongst new states in Africa and expand its international legitimacy, influence (Aluko, 1974). This evangelism formed an essential pillar of its foreign policy, often referred to as its “periphery strategy” (Guzansky, 2021) which aimed to build relationships beyond its environment. Within this framework, Africa and principally West Africa was a great choice. As the most populous African country and a leading regional actor, Nigeria was a symbolic and practical partner for Israel's ambitions

on the continent. Prior to the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War, relations between the two countries were characterised by extensive cooperation in economic development and technical assistance. Israel provided loans, agricultural expertise, and technical support, embedding itself within Nigeria's post-independence modernisation efforts (Olusanya & Akindele, 1986). These initiatives were not merely altruistic; they reflected a calculated effort to secure political goodwill, expand economic opportunities, and strengthen Israel's diplomatic standing in Africa.

At the same time, Israel's African policy was inseparable from its rivalry with Arab states, particularly Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser. Egyptian diplomacy in Africa sought to isolate Israel by portraying it as a neo-colonial and illegitimate state, thereby mobilising support against it in international forums. In response, Israel actively pursued relationships with African states to counter Arab influence and consolidate diplomatic recognition (Chhabra, 1975). Consequently, by the mid-1960s, Israel had developed a significant stake in maintaining cordial relations with the Nigerian state. The outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, however, placed Israel in a precarious position. The conflict presented not only a humanitarian crisis but also a strategic dilemma: how could Israel respond to appeals from the secessionist Republic of Biafra without jeopardising its carefully cultivated relationship with the Nigerian Federal Government? This tension between moral pressure and strategic necessity laid the foundation for what can be understood as Israel's *dual-track policy* during the war.

Israel's involvement in the conflict was therefore characterised by a simultaneous pursuit of two seemingly contradictory courses of action. On one hand, it extended covert support to Biafra. The Biafran leadership deliberately framed their struggle in terms that resonated within Israeli society, portraying the Igbo as the "Jews of Africa" and invoking the memory of the Holocaust to elicit moral sympathy and solidarity (Heerten & Moses, 2014). This framing proved effective in mobilising Israeli public opinion, as segments of the press, civil society, and members of the Knesset called for intervention on humanitarian grounds (Levey, 2014). In response to these pressures, Israel facilitated Biafra's access to arms through indirect channels, provided humanitarian assistance, and engaged in limited diplomatic advocacy. Intelligence networks, including Mossad, reportedly channelled funds and coordinated aspects of this support through third-party intermediaries, while humanitarian aid particularly food and medical supplies was delivered through clandestine airlifts to maintain plausible deniability (Desgrandchamps et al., 2020; Obi-Ani & Obi-Ani, 2020). These actions contributed to sustaining Biafra's war effort, even if they did not decisively alter the overall balance of power.

Contrariwise, Israel remained committed to preserving its diplomatic relationship with Nigeria. Open alignment with Biafra would have risked being alienated by one of Africa's most influential states thereby undermining its expansive strategic objectives on the continent. As a result, Israel adopted a cautious and pragmatic approach, continuing

formal diplomatic engagement with the Nigerian Federal Government while avoiding any overt commitment to the secessionist cause. In some instances, Israel even engaged in limited cooperation with Nigeria, including the provision of military supplies, in order to prevent a complete rupture in relations (Levey, 2014). This balancing act underscores the extent to which Israeli policy was shaped not only by humanitarian considerations but also by the imperatives of state survival and diplomatic positioning within Africa.

The coexistence of these two policy tracks covert support for Biafra and formal engagement with Nigeria was not simply a reflection of inconsistency or indecision. Rather, it constituted a deliberate strategy of ambiguity and flexibility, enabling Israel to navigate the competing demands of morality and realpolitik. Unlike France, which openly supported Biafra, or Britain and the Soviet Union, which aligned themselves clearly with the Nigerian Federal Government, Israel operated within a diplomatic grey zone. This position allowed it to respond to domestic and humanitarian pressures without fully sacrificing its long-term strategic interests. In this sense, Israel's conduct during the Nigerian Civil War illustrates a distinctive model of small-state diplomacy in international conflict. Lacking the capacity to shape outcomes through overt military intervention on the scale of great powers, Israel instead relied on indirect, covert, and adaptive strategies that maximised its influence while minimising diplomatic risk. The *dual-track policy* thus reveals how smaller states can navigate complex geopolitical environments by combining moral discourse, clandestine action, and pragmatic diplomacy. More broadly, it underscores the need to move beyond binary interpretations of foreign intervention such as humanitarianism versus strategic interest and to recognise the ways in which these logics can operate simultaneously within a single policy framework.

Comparative Perspectives and the Impact of Israel's Dual-Track Policy

Foreign intervention in the Nigerian Civil War extended well beyond Israel, with major powers such as Britain, France, and the Soviet Union adopting clearly defined positions that significantly shaped the trajectory of the conflict. Britain, as the former colonial authority, aligned firmly with the Nigerian Federal Government, providing military assistance and diplomatic backing in support of Nigeria's territorial integrity (Stremlau, 2015). Similarly, the Soviet Union supported the Federal side, viewing the conflict as of Cold War competition and seeking to expand its strategic influence in Africa (Oroke, 2019). In contrast, France openly supported the Biafran secessionist movement, supplying arms, diplomatic recognition, and humanitarian aid, motivated in part by its desire to counter Anglo-Soviet dominance in West Africa (Balogun, 1973).

Unlike Britain and the Soviet Union, it did not commit fully to the Nigerian Federal Government; nor, like France, did it openly defend Biafra. Instead, Israel pursued a *dual-track policy* that combined covert assistance to Biafra with the maintenance of formal

diplomatic relations with Nigeria. This ambiguous posture reflected Israel's unique position as a small state functioning within the constraints of postcolonial and Cold War geopolitics. While major powers acted in accordance with clearly defined global strategic interests, Israel's approach was shaped by the understanding or empathy pertaining to humanitarian discourse, domestic pressures, and the need to balance African diplomacy against Arab hostility (Levey, 2014; Heerten & Moses, 2014).

This comparative perspective is crucial for understanding both the nature and the consequences of Israel's involvement. Whereas the interventions of Britain, France, and the Soviet Union have often been interpreted in terms of decisive material impact, Israel's significance lies less in the scale of its contribution than in the form and strategy of its engagement. Working within a diplomatic grey zone, Israel exemplified a mode of intervention regarded by flexibility, ambiguity, and indirect influence. This not only differentiates it from the major powers but also affords a framework for assessing the far-reaching implications of its actions.

One of the most notable consequences of Israel's *dual-track policy* was its contribution to the prolongation of the conflict. As scholars such as Balogun (1973) have argued, the ability of Biafra to sustain resistance depended heavily on external sources of arms, funding, and logistical support. Israeli assistance, though limited comparatively, formed part of a network of foreign support. It is important to emphasise that Israel's role was contributory rather than decisive; its impact must be understood within the expansive ecosystem of foreign intervention rather than in isolation.

A second, more complex consequence was the intensification of the humanitarian crisis. Israel's provision of humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies, was intended to alleviate the severe suffering caused by the Federal blockade of Biafra. Yet this assistance operated within a paradoxical dynamic. By helping to sustain the secessionist administration and its war effort, humanitarian relief, it also contributed indirectly to prolonging the conditions such as famine and displacement that it sought to mitigate (Desgrandchamps et al., 2020). This dual effect highlights the entanglement of humanitarianism and military strategy, indicative that relief efforts in civil war contexts can have unintended and contradictory consequences.

In addition to its impact on the conduct of the war, Israel's *dual-track policy* had significant diplomatic repercussions. The Nigerian Federal Government increasingly interpreted Israel's covert support for Biafra as a violation of its sovereignty and an unwarranted interference in its internal affairs (Aluko, 1974). This perception contributed to a steady deterioration in Nigeria Israel relations, culminating in the severance of diplomatic ties in 1973. Nigeria's response was not merely bilateral; it reflected a broader shift towards pan-African solidarity and a more assertive stance against external intervention in African conflicts. For Israel, the consequences were equally profound.

The rupture with Nigeria one of Africa's most influential states contributed to its wider diplomatic isolation on the continent, as several other African countries reassessed their relations with Tel Aviv (Levey, 2014).

The Nigerian Civil War thus illustrates how even limited interventions by smaller states can generate disproportionate effects, particularly when they operate through ambiguous and indirect strategies. Generally, this case challenges conventional understandings of foreign intervention in civil wars, which often privileged the actions of great powers. Israel's involvement demonstrates that smaller states, despite their limited material capabilities, can exert meaningful influence through adaptive and hybrid strategies that combine covert action, humanitarian engagement, and diplomatic manoeuvring. In this sense, the Nigerian Civil War provides an important perspective for rethinking the dynamics of external involvement in postcolonial conflicts and the interplay between morality and *realpolitik* in international political relations.

Diplomatic and Foreign Policy Consequences

The foreign policy implications of the *dual-track policy* adopted by Israel in the Nigerian Civil War were far-reaching, as it altered the foreign policy direction of Nigeria and Israel in Africa. As Israel tried to walk a fine line between humanitarian involvement and its secret alliance with Biafra ultimately undermined its bilateral relationship with Nigeria and engendered repercussions. In the case of Nigeria, the war revealed how postcolonial sovereignty was frail in the presence of external intervention. Federal Government progressively saw the covert aid that Israel gave to Biafra as an affront to its territorial integrity and a disregard of historical collaboration between the two states, mainly in fields like agriculture, education, and infrastructure (Olusanya & Akindele, 1986). At the latter part of the conflict, Nigerian authorities publicly accused Israel of meddling in the country's internal matters, and relations between the two nations worsened (Aluko, 1974). It led to a climax in 1973 when Nigeria officially broke its diplomatic relations with Israel, and became more aligned to pan-African unity and non-alignment (Dauda, 2017).

The post-war period saw Nigeria take a more active and independent stance on diplomacy, focusing on regional integration and opposition to foreign influence. According to Adeyemo (2012), this was the time when the foreign policy orchestration based on African solidarity and good neighbourliness was solidified as a result of the Nigerian desire to protect its sovereignty and leadership in West Africa. In this respect, the participation of Israel in the war indirectly led to a repositioning of the Nigerian foreign policy by strengthening its dedication to self-reliant and regionally-oriented foreign policy.

For Israel, the consequences were equally profound but largely detrimental. Nigeria's decision to sever ties carried considerable weight due to its demographic, economic, and

political significance on the continent. Once relations with Nigeria collapsed, other African states followed suit, leading to a pattern of diplomatic disengagement that considerably weakened Israel's presence in Africa (Levey, 2014). This outcome undermined a principal pillar of Israeli foreign policy in the 1960s, which had prioritised the cultivation of African alliances as a counterbalance to Arab hostility.

The Jewish state's covert involvement in support of Biafra was viewed by some actors, including the Soviet Union, as destabilising and did not tally with the principles of state sovereignty (Heerten & Moses, 2014). The Nigerian Civil War exposed the limitations of Israel's attempt to, at the same time, pursue moral and strategic objectives through ambiguous means.

The Nigerian Civil War is a demonstration of how outside interference can affect the regional diplomatic alignment in the postcolonial situation. The post-war focus on African unity and fight against foreign influence in Nigeria was partly a reaction to the events of the conflict, such as the ambivalent role of Israel. Meanwhile, the war brought the structural limitations of small states in international politics to light. For Israel, the *dual-track policy* whilst innovative (in its attempt to reconcile humanitarian impulses with strategic imperatives) proved difficult to sustain over time. Its ambiguity, which initially enabled flexibility, ultimately caused mistrust and diplomatic isolation.

To this end, the Nigerian Civil War call attention to the weakness of small-state diplomacy: the strategy of balancing competing goals by pursuing covert and conflicting policies can lead to short-term benefits but cause long-term expenses. The example of Israel proves that such policies, though modular, are a threat to credibility and the subversion of alliances, especially in highly sensitive political settings like postcolonial Africa.

Lessons and Repetitions: From Biafra to Contemporary Nigeria-Israel Relations

The Nigerian Civil War not only exposed the contradictions inherent in Israel's foreign policy in Africa but also established patterns of engagement that have persisted in Nigeria-Israel relations in subsequent decades. This two-track policy of secretly aiding Biafra and still having official diplomatic relations with Lagos-Israel showed how a small state can act with ambiguity, with humanitarianism and pragmatism. Although this strategy produced short-term impact in the conflict, it also created long-term reputational costs, a pattern that remains active to this day to influence bilateral relations.

The decision of Nigeria to cut diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973 did not necessarily have a religious-based motive as it was based on political and diplomatic calculations as per the situation during the civil war and African solidarity as noted by Saleh Dauda, 2017. However, the process of restoring relations in the late 1980s and early 1990s became increasingly entangled with domestic religious dynamics. Christian and Muslim

constituencies interpreted rapprochement with Israel in divergent ways, thereby politicising foreign policy and complicating diplomatic engagement. This emergence is an extension of the civil war era when internal issues collided with external strategic interests in determining the foreign policy decisions of Nigeria.

This pattern of cautious and frequently ambiguous engagement has been reproduced by three factors which are interrelated. To begin with, the domestic constituencies such as religious organisations, political elites, and civil society actors have always shaped the attitude of Nigeria towards the state of Israel, usually limiting overt, direct alignment. Second, multilateral commitments, principally within the framework of the African Union and its predecessor, the Organisation of African Unity, have reinforced norms of solidarity that limit the extent of Nigeria's cooperation with Israel when its actions are contested internationally. This could be noticed in the recent (2025) Israel-Somaliland recognition and the contestation of African regional order. Third, the changing security and economic realities of counterterrorism collaboration, the acquisition of weapons, and technological transfer have presented incentives to engage on a regular basis, although in a discrete and tightly controlled way (Levey, 2014).

The widespread severance of diplomatic relations between African states and Israel in 1973 established a precedent for collective responses to perceived external interference or controversial foreign policies. The experience of rupture and subsequent restoration within Nigeria itself is still entrenched in elite discourse and presently has an influence on the contemporary decision-making. As a result, engagement with Israel is often approached with caution, shaped not only by existent considerations but also by the historical legacy of the civil war and its aftermath.

These tensions are still present today. Nigeria has at several times conformed to the African Union stands on denouncing Israeli policies in the Middle East, which is an indication of its adherence to the multilateral norms and the role of domestic political sensitivities. Concurrently, there are indications of continuous, albeit low profile, collaboration between the two states in security, intelligence and technological advancements. This duality reflects the trend set in the Nigerian Civil War: participation continues, though habitually in an indirect way, in a contested form, and branded in a manner that reduces political repercussions.

The continuation of these trends insist that the Nigerian Civil War was not just a historical event but rather a turning point in the history of Nigerian-Israel relations. It established a template wherein cooperation and caution coexist, shaped by the interaction of domestic pressures, regional commitments, and strategic interests. In this sense, the legacy of Israel's *dual-track policy* extends beyond the immediate context of the war, offering comprehensive insight into how historical experiences continue to enlighten contemporary diplomatic actions. As the case shows, although the strategies of ambiguity

can offer a certain level of short-term flexibility, they can produce cumulative tensions that reappear over time, especially in asymmetric, sensitive, and competing political expectations relationships.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to revisit the role of Israel in the Nigerian Civil War not merely as an instance of foreign intervention, but as a prism through which to view the ins and outs of small-state diplomacy in a post-colonial and Cold War world. The rationale behind this question has been to go beyond those accounts that have seen the role of Israel as either peripheral or explainable by a single explanatory prism be it humanitarian or strategic but rather to seek to comprehend how the two dimensions interacted in practice. Revisiting familiar sources through a different analytical perspective, the article has sought to establish that the importance of Israel's involvement is less in its scale than in the form it assumed.

The main result of the research is that Israel followed a *dual track policy*, at the same time, covertly supporting Biafra and having official diplomatic relations with the Nigerian Federal Government. This was not just an inconsistent or ad hoc response, but a conscious effort to bring into harmony the competing pressures of moral, domestic and strategic in a tight geopolitical space. Conceptually, this two-tiered diplomacy shows how small states can work in the interstices of international politics, making use of overt and covert instruments of influence as a way to solve mediate conflicts. It also points to the shortcomings of such tactics: whereas ambiguity may serve to give a short-term leeway, it can lead to long-term expenses in the form of suspicion, reputation loss, and diplomatic isolation.

Articles like those by Levey (2014) have rightly highlighted the strategic aspects of the Israeli policy in Africa, and Heerten and Moses (2014) have enlightened about the role of humanitarian discourse in influencing the reaction towards the Biafran crisis. These views are not disregarded by this article but instead it puts them into a dialogue showing them not to be mutually exclusive. It contributes to the fact that it validate that the policy of Israel was constituted through the *interaction* of these forces, and not by one of them at the cost of the other. In this regard, the results enrich the current interpretations by providing a more comprehensive and dynamic view of the Israeli decision making.

In addition to the particular example of Israel, the research has more general implications to the study of interstate relations and foreign intervention. First, it highlights the necessity to be more attentive to the role of small states, whose power is commonly carried out in indirect, flexible, and less evidently. Second, it also shows the long-running contradiction between the formal ideals of sovereignty based on the Westphalian system and the realities of external intervention in civil wars. Third, it emphasizes the

constraining and shaping influence of international and regional bodies especially in the African context, where the state behaviour and diplomatic alignments have been historically determined by norms of solidarity and non-interference.

Lastly, the Nigerian Civil War is a reminder of the fact that history still echoes in the present day international political relations. The patterns of cautious engagement, diplomatic balancing, and contested cooperation observed in Nigeria-Israel relations today reflect, in part, the legacy of the wartime dynamics discussed in this paper. In this respect, the case shows that the policies embraced by states during crisis may have lasting impacts, which do not only affect the short-term results, but also perceptions, alliances, and policy decisions in the long term.

In conclusion, this article has argued that Israel's involvement in the Nigerian Civil War is best understood not as an anomaly, but as an example of how states principally smaller ones circumnavigate the competing demands of morality and strategy in international politics. Foregrounding the concept of *dual-track diplomacy*, it offers a framework for rethought, reinterpreting foreign intervention in postcolonial conflicts and invites further research into the sophisticated and, at times, conflicting ways in which states exercise influence beyond their borders.

References

- Adeyemo, F. O. (2012). *Nigeria and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, 1960-2006* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Ibadan, Department of Political Science). Retrieved from <https://afribary.com/works/nigeria-and-the-palestinian-israeli-conflict-1960-2006/read>
- Aluko, O. (1974). Israel and Nigeria: Continuity and change in their relationship. *The African Review: A Journal of African Politics, Development and International Affairs*, 4(1), 43-59. Retrieved from. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45341312>
- Balogun, O. (1973). *The tragic years: Nigeria in crisis, 1966-1970*. Benin City, Nigeria: Ethiope Publishing Corporation.
- Dauda, S. (2017). *Theory and practice of diplomacy*. Abuja, Nigeria: Tabith Publishers.
- Desgrandchamps, M., Heerten, L., Oloruntoba, A. O., Ojo, K., & Taithe, B. (2020). Biafra, humanitarian intervention and history. *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs*, <https://doi.org/10.7227/jha.045>
- Guzansky Y. (2021) Israel's periphery doctrines: then and now. *Middle East Policy*. 28:88-100. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12579>
- Falola, T., & Ezekwem, O. (2016). *Writing the Nigeria-Biafra war*. Boydell & Brewer.

- Heerten, L., & Moses, A. D. (2014). The Nigeria-Biafra war: Postcolonial conflict and the question of genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16(2-3), 169-203 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.936700>
- Levey, Z. (2014). Israel, Nigeria, and the Biafra civil war, 1967-70. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16(2-3), 263-280. doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.936701
- Myschool.ng. (2024). *Nigeria's foreign policy and Israel*. Retrieved from <https://myschool.ng/classroom/government/28424>
- Nwogbaga, D. M. E. (2010). Nigeria-Israel relations: Prospects for a diversified and integrated economic development. *African Journal of Politics and Administrative Studies*, 5(1), 12-29.
- Obi-Ani, A. N., & Obi-Ani, P. (2020). Nigeria-Israeli relations: 'So fragile so emotional'. *South Asian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 1(3), 119-137. <https://doi.org/10.48165/sajssh.2020.1309>
- Olusanya, G. O., & Akindele, R. A. (1986). *The fundamentals of Nigeria's foreign policy and external economic relations*. University Press Ltd.
- Oruke, W. (2019). Foreign interest in post-colonial Nigeria and its impact on the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). *Journal of History and Military Studies*, 42-63. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344128853_Foreign_Interest_in_Post-Colonial_Nigeria_and_Its_Impact_on_the_Nigerian_Civil_War_1967-1970
- Rahs Open Lid. (2024). *Israel's exit from Africa, 1973: The road to diplomatic isolation*. Retrieved from <https://www.rah-open-lid.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Israels-Exit-from-Africa-1973-The-Road-to-Diplomatic-Isolation.pdf>
- Stremlau, J. J. (1977). *The international politics of the Nigerian Civil War*. Princeton University Press. Retrieved from <https://dokumen.pub/the-international-politics-of-the-nigerian-civil-war-1967-1970-9781400871285.html>.