

TRANSCRIPT from Aburi Meeting, January 5-7, 1967

TRANSCRIPT from the tape recordings of the Aburi Meeting, January 5-7, 1967

In Attendance:

Lt.-General Joe Ankrah of Ghana (Host)

Lt.-Colonel Yakubu Gowon, Chief of Army Staff of Nigeria (announced as 'Supreme Commander' while whereabouts of Ironsi was 'unknown')

Lt.-Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, Military Governor of Eastern Nigeria

Colonel Robert Adeyinka Adebayo, Military Governor of Western Nigeria

Lt.-Colonel Hassan Katsina, Military Governor of Northern Nigeria

Lt.-Colonel David Ejoor, Military Governor of Mid-Western Nigeria

Major Mobolaji Johnson, Military Governor of Lagos

Alhaji Kam Selem, Deputy Inspector-General of Police

Mr. T. Omo-Bare

Commodore Akinwale Wey, Chief of Naval Staff

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The Main Topic: Re-Organizing Nigeria

Attitudes at Aburi

a. How the military looks at the politicians

General Ankrah (Ghana): I will not like to dwell rigidly on any point whatsoever because I feel this is a domestic affair of Nigeria and, as I have always said, it is not difficult for military people to understand each other. It is a saying that if Generals were to meet and discuss frontiers, wars or even go into the details to forestall war, there will never be any differences or discrepancies but unity and understanding. There will be no war because the two old boys will meet at the frontier and tell each other: 'Old boy, we are not going to commit our boys to die, come on, let us keep the politicians out' and that is the end. I am quite confident that having met here to-day, you will continue and achieve what you are here for.

What I want to stress is this, that through the annals of history we have not seen failures with military statesmen and when military personnel do take over the reins of Government they have proved their worth and, I am sure and confident that the

Military regimes that have been saddled with the onerous responsibility of rebuilding and reconstructing the various countries in Africa will not let us down.

You are aware that in Nigeria now the whole world is looking up to you as military men and if there is any failure to reunify or even bring perfect understanding to Nigeria as a whole, you will find that the blame will rest with us all through the centuries. There is no gainsaying this whatsoever.

Whatever the situation we are soldiers and soldiers are always statesmen not politicians. They deal with a little bit of politics and diplomacy when the time comes but they are statesmen. The people first and they themselves second but if you think like the politicians do that they want fame or they want to be heard of and neglect your people then, of course, I am quite sure that we as soldiers will live to regret, even our future generations will live to regret. They will be blaming us whenever our names are called or mentioned....

Major Johnson: Gentlemen, if I can start talking on this one, please do not think I am taking undue advantage. Quite honestly I think we all know what brought this country to where we are to-day and while talking yesterday Emeka [first name of Lt.-Col. Ojukwu] touched on a point of how, due to the situation, the politicians got what they have been waiting for to come in. While I very much welcome this Item 4 and while I know that definitely we are not going to be in Government forever, I will like to say that, please for the next six months let us leave everything that will bring the politicians back into the limelight out of the question. Let us go on all these things we have been discussing since yesterday because this is on the basis at which we can get our country back on its feet. Once we can get the papers on these things out and we see them working then we can call the Ad Hoc Constitutional Committee to come and discuss but for now they are just going to confuse the issues more if you bring them out to come and talk anything again. I will say let the Military Government continue for now and after working for six months and we see how far we can go before we start thinking of calling these people back.

Commodore Wey: I 100% support what you have said. Candidly if there had ever been a time in my life when I thought somebody had hurt me sufficiently for me to wish to kill him it was when one of these fellows opened his mouth too wide. I think we should let them stay where they are for the moment. It was simply because we could not get together and handle our affairs. Now that we have established the

basis under which we can work please let us leave them where they are and let us try and see how far we can work.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: On this statement, Gentlemen, a lot depends on what the Ad Hoc Constitutional Committee is. I agree indeed that regarding other Regions it was indeed a platform for politicians, in the East it was not. I did not send politicians to it but be it as it may, if we say we are going to continue then we must obviously get quite satisfied the terms of running this thing properly. We have got to be able to meet and I said it outside and I repeat it here, I, as the Military Governor of the East cannot meet anywhere in Nigeria where there are Northern troops.

b. The events of 29 July and the issue of Supreme Commander: the Colonels speak

Major Johnson: Sir, before we go on if I may say something. I am happy we have got to this point again. I had wanted to take this Conference back all along because as my people say 'If you still have lice in your head, there will still be blood on your fingers :'. May I ask one question, gentlemen, is there a Central Government in Nigeria to-day?

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: That question is such a simple one and anyone who has been listening to what I have been saying all the time would know that I do not see a Central Government in Nigeria to-day.

Major Johnson: Thank you, Gentlemen. I think this is the crux of the whole thing and I think if I can take you back this can be a personality clash or something.

I am saying here to-day that this is the backbone of our problem. As far as the Governor of the East is concerned there is no central government in Nigeria. You say, Supreme Commander, but as far as he is concerned there is no Supreme Commander. I think this is where we must start from, gentlemen. Why is he not accepting that there is a Supreme Commander and we accept there is a Supreme Commander.

This brings me to this Conference that was held in August. As was rightly said, this Committee was a Steering Committee. We are all Military personnel here and we know one thing. We have all been pointing accusing fingers at politicians that they used to take military decisions without military men.

The main problem now is that as far as the East is concerned, there is no Central Government. Why? This is what we must find out. I mentioned something about personality clash. I remember that there was a long letter written by the Governor of the East sometime ago referring to the hierarchy in the Army, the policy on seniority and things like that. He said among other things in the letter that if even Lt.-Col. Yakubu Gowon is Supreme Commander is he not right to ask whether it is for a period or something. For all the East knows the former Supreme Commander is only missing and until such a time that they know his whereabouts they do not know any other Supreme Commander. These are the points that have been brought out by the East.

Gentlemen, we said this morning that we have come with open minds and we must hit the nail at the head. The East should tell us now what are their views, what are the conditions they want to demand before they can say that there is a Central Government in Nigeria. For all we know now, nobody has seceded, the East is still part of Nigeria, the West, the North and we know Nigeria as a Federation.

Lt.-Col. Ejoor: The Mid-West please.

Major Johnson: And Lagos. Nigeria is still a Federation and in a Federation there is a Central Government. Where is this Central Government and who is Head of this Central Government? Gentlemen, unless we clear this one, all what we are discussing will not be good enough. What are the conditions the East demand before they can recognise what the rest of us recognise as the Central Government?

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: I agree with you in essence on what you have just said, Bolaji [First name of Major Johnson], but the last bit is badly put. If you will forgive me it is not 'What conditions do they demand before....'

If the problem is that we are trying to see how to solve the problem of Government in the centre then I will come in. I will seek your indulgence as I go a little bit back into what a number of people would perhaps wish to call history.

At a certain stage, we all accepted General Ironsi as the Supreme Commander and Head of the National Military Government. During his regime we met or rather whilst he was about we met as often as it was practicable, and sat and jointly discussed and took decisions. When the decisions were good we all shared the kudos, when those decisions were bad it is only natural that we should all share the blame.

On the 29th of July, whilst he was visiting the Governor of the West, he was said to be besieged in that residence in Ibadan and later kidnapped, further abducted. Subsequent to that, it appeared in his absence the normal thing was whoever is the next senior person to manage the affairs of this country until such a time as he reappeared; or it was necessary he was deposed or if he had suffered certain accident, until such a time as the circumstances were made known. Which ever is the case, the question of the headship of the Government and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces would normally be subjected to a discussion and agreement unless, of course, one party felt he was strong enough to push everybody aside and get to the seat.

When this affair of the 29th July occurred, I remember for certain, the first 24 hours nobody thought it necessary to contact the East from Lagos. I made the contact later and I know the advice I gave Brigadier Ogundipe at that time. I said to him, 'Sir, the situation is so confused that I feel that somebody must take control immediately. Also, I would suggest that you go on to the air and tell the country what has happened and that you were taking control of the situation.' Then I was told about concern for the whole country. I knew that if this thing resolved itself into factions we would get ourselves into so much trouble that we would never or we would find it difficult to get out. I maintained and still do that the answer would have been for the responsible officers of the Army to get together thereby trying to get the Army together to solve the problem that we had on our hands. I said to him 'As soon as you have made your speech I guarantee you within 30 minutes, I needed time to write my own, in 30 minutes I would come on to the air in the East and say that I, the entire Army in the East and the entire people in the East wholeheartedly support you.'

Forgive me, David [first name of Lt.-Col. Ejoor], that I have never said this to you, but I told him too that I was sure that within fifteen minutes you would say the same in the interest of the country as a whole. He told me that he thought it was a good idea but it did not seem likely that it would be accepted by the faction.

Very soon after, I had occasion to talk to you, Jack [nickname of Lt.-Col. Gowon], I did mention amongst other things, two things. The first one was this question of solving the problem and I thought the Army together should solve it. I said also that any break at this time from our normal line would write in something into the Nigerian Army which is bigger than all of us and that thing is indiscipline. How can you ride above people's heads and sit in Lagos purely because you are at the Head of a group who have their fingers poised on the trigger? If you do it you remain forever a living example of that indiscipline which we want to get rid of because tomorrow a Corporal will think because he has his finger on the trigger he could just take over the company from the Major Commanding the company and so on. I knew then that we were heading for something terrible. Despite that and by force of circumstance as we did talk on the telephone, I think twice, you brought up the question of supreme command and I made quite plain my objections, but despite those objections you announced yourself as the Supreme Commander. Now, Supreme Commander by virtue of the fact that you head or that you are acceptable to people who had mutinied against their Commander, kidnapped him and taken him away? By virtue of the support of Officers and men who had in the dead of night murdered their brother Officers, by virtue of the fact that you stood at the head of a group who had turned their brother Officers from the Eastern Region out of the barracks which they shared? Our people came home, there are other circumstances which even make the return more tragic. Immediately after I had opportunity to speak to you again, I said on that occasion that there had been too much killing in Nigeria and it was my sincere hope that we can stop these killings. I said then, and have continued to say that in the interest of peace I would co-operate with you to stop the fighting, to stop the killing but I would not recognise.

I would not recognise because as I said we have a Supreme Commander who is missing. I would not recognise and to underline the validity of that claim of mine you appointed another Officer, be he senior to you, Acting Governor in the West, presumably acting for the Governor who was then abducted and that I saw no reason why your position would not then be acting. From there I think we started parting our ways because it was clear that the hold on Lagos was by force of conquest. Now, these things do happen in the world, we are all military Officers. If an Officer is dead 'Oh! he was a fine soldier', we drop the national flag on him, we give him due honours and that is all. The next person steps in. So, the actual fact in itself

is a small thing with military men but hierarchy, order is very important, discipline are sine qua non for any organisation which prides itself for being called an Army. So, the mutiny had occurred, the mutineer seemed in control of the North, the West, Lagos. By international standards when that does happen then a de facto situation is created immediately where whoever is in a position get a de facto recognition of himself in a position over the area he controls. In this situation, Nigeria resolved itself into three areas. The Lagos, West and North group, the Mid-West, the East. What should have been done is for us to get round to discuss the future, how to carry on in the absence of our Supreme Commander.

We could not get together because of the situation so we sent our accredited representatives, delegates of Governments and personal representatives of Governors to Lagos to try and resolve certain issues on bringing normalcy to the country. They met and unanimously agreed to certain points.

Bolaji, I think in fact from this, if nothing else you do know what I consider went wrong. Perhaps at this juncture I might stop for others to contribute otherwise I would go on and tell you what I consider to be my solution to the problem even now, irrespective of the amount of water that had gone under the bridge. I think there is still a solution provided we are honest with ourselves and we are really very serious about solving this problem. I agree with you it is vital, it is crucial, without it I do not think we can really go anywhere. I leave it for the time being.

Col. Adebayo: I think Emeka has narrated what happened on the 29th July and thereafter. We have all agreed and I am sure you still agree that what we are looking for now is a solution for the future. I do not want us to go into the past anymore, we want a solution for the future. I will suggest with the permission of the other members here that we ask Emeka to give us his solution. Thereafter there might be some others too who would have their own solutions, then we can make a compromise from the solutions we get.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: Gentlemen, General Ankrah told us not to go back into the past, if we are to go back into the past we will sit here for two months talking. Let us forget the past and I agree with Robert [first name of Col. Adebayo] that we ask the East to tell us their solution. If their solution is quite acceptable then we adopt it, amend or whatever we think is good for the country for peace. We are not going to say ourselves what efforts we have put in individually; let us find peace for Nigeria. This

is the major issue, unless this is done whatever we are going to discuss is not going to work out well.

Lt.-Col. Ejoor: I believe that before we start suggesting solutions we must examine certain principles vis a vis the Governors. To me, we should not go too far into history but there is one valid point which must be considered and that is the coup we have had so far. The January 15 one was a failure and the Army came in to correct it, the one of the 29th I personally believe was a mutiny to start with but it has now turned out to be a coup. If it is a coup we have to ask ourselves 'is it a successful coup or is it a partial one ?' I believe it is a partial one, it is not a fully successful one. This is the main point which has brought us here, trying to negotiate as opposed to receiving orders from the Commander. I think we must bear this in mind in reaching a decision or a Resolution affecting the re-organisation of the Army. To-day, the Army is faced with four main problems.

Firstly, the problem of leadership; Secondly, the crisis of confidence amongst Officers and amongst the soldiers; Thirdly, the chain of command is badly disrupted; and Fourthly, we cannot now have any Nigerian from anywhere serving in the same unit as an effective unit of the Army.

These are bare facts and whatever solution we evolve must go to solve these main problems. I leave these basic principles and what solutions offered should be considered alongside these problems.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: David spoke on re-organisation but the current topic is on Bolaji's point which Emeka narrated. I think this is the major point.

Lt.-Col. Ejoor: When you consider leadership you have to tell us what happened to the former leader.

Commodore Wey: Gentlemen, I think I have been properly placed in this issue from the 15th of January up till now. Unfortunately, I do not put them down because I think I can carry quite a bit in my head. The whole issue is unfortunate, it has happened and it has happened. The truth now is that we want to repair, we do not intend to point accusing fingers at anybody.

When the trouble of the 29th July started I was present, you came and joined us, therefore, I can tell any other person better. I was there when you phoned Brigadier Ogundipe and I knew what you said. At one stage, it was even said that I carried him in my ship and took him out to sea.

I must say one thing that it is impossible for any man to expect to command any unit which he has not got control over. Bolaji would bear witness, he was there, he started it. He was the one who went out first and came back to say that a Private refused to take orders from him; it all happened in the Police Headquarters.

The Inspector-General complained, I went into it and I said if they cannot take orders from an Army Officer like themselves they will not take from a Naval Officer. I retired and called Brigadier Ogundipe. He went out and if an ordinary Sergeant can tell a Brigadier 'I do not take orders from you, until my Captain comes,' I think this was the limit and this is the truth about it. Therefore, it would have been very unfair to Ogundipe or any other person for that matter to take command and there is no point accepting to command a unit over which you have no control.

It was after that negotiations started, I do not know what conversation went on between Ogundipe and Jack. On the long run I was consulted and what I have just said now was exactly my advice. Bob was with me, I went out and we did not finish until two o'clock in the morning. Jack then came into the issue, how he got there I have got the story; he himself has never told me. I have been doing private investigations myself. I knew how he got into Ikeja and how it came about.

I want to repeat that if we did not have the opportunity of having Jack to accept, God knows we would have been all finished. If you remember, you dragged me out, things changed. I do not think people can appreciate the difficulty we were in, therefore, if anybody accepted to lead them candidly I doff my hat for him, I accept it purely from the point of respect. If 55 million people can be saved let us forget everything about position and for God's sake because of our 55 million people let us forget our personal pride. Whether it was a coup or a mutiny let us forget it. If this man comes out and everybody accepts him, please let us accept him.

One thing I would like to repeat, I am a sailor and I want to remain a sailor. I do not see why you soldiers should not remain soldiers. We were not trained to be politicians, let us run the Government, draw up a Constitution, hand-over to the politicians and we get back into our uniforms.

Whatever people may say, I think I will take this advantage to tell you here that when all of you were appointed Governors I was one of those who sat and appointed you Governors but right does not come into this at all; please let us forget personal feelings. I know my rank but if it is the wish of the 55 million people, please let us put our hearts into our pockets and forget our personal pride.

Personally, I am 100 per cent in support that we should mention the whereabouts of Ironsi, even I have advised on this. When that has been done, he is a Head of State and he should be given the proper honour; thereafter, who-so-ever is in the Chair now let us help him to run the country peacefully, no more bloodshed, we have shed enough. We cannot create why should we destroy. If we can help to save please let us do so but we must say the whereabouts of Ironsi. He is a Head of State and we should give him his due respect as a Head of State. It is a temporary issue, four, five years, maybe I would have retired by then.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: It is all well and good, Gentlemen, but I will be vehement on this. The point is that if a room is dirty you do not sweep the dirt under the carpet because whenever you raise the carpet the dirt will be there. It is not so simple as all that. Indeed, on the very principle that you have enunciated here, it is a question of command and control. I like to know who will stand up here and tell me that he commands and controls the Eastern Army or the Army in the East.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: You alone.

Commodore Wey: I can tell you also here now that you are doing it illegally because when we had the first Government no Governor was supposed to have the command of any Army.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: You have started on the basis of the principles of command and control. If you control a group who will take orders from you, according to you,

everybody doffs his hat, well done. Right, that person you doff your hat to cannot command and control those under him and indeed those of the East. What do you do to that?

Commodore Wey: That is why we are here.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: This is why we are here to solve the problem. You command the East, if you want to come into Nigeria come into Nigeria and that is that.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: I am not out.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: This is the problem but if we are to go into the basis of coup and mutiny we will be here for months. I have seen an Army mutiny in Kano and if you see me trembling you will know what a mutiny is. You were the first I rang and for two good days I saw a real mutiny when a C.O. of Northern origin commanding soldiers of Northern origin had to run away. Please, we have all come not to raise issues of the past, let us forget the past and come to the problem. Say what you want to say, let us go into the matter and discuss it.

Mr. T. Omo-Bare: Before we ask Emeka to give a solution will it not be advisable that somebody should say what happened to Ironsi

Major Johnson: I support him fully.

Alhaji Kam Selem: If I may just say a few words. I am not a military man, but at that time it was just impossible for anybody else to take command of the country. As far as I know even the present Supreme Commander had to be persuaded to take over the Government. The Senior Officers you are talking about could not possibly accept the leadership of the country at that time. What could we do in a situation like that and the country was kept for 48 hours and nobody knew what was happening. As far as I know he has no ambition to remain in this present post. As soon as the situation in the country returns to normal and the problems are solved he will resign. I associate myself with all the Governors who said we should give the present Supreme Commander the respect he deserves. I was present through the whole

trouble from January 15 and most of the things took place in my office. As other speakers said, if the Governor of the East has a solution let us hear the solution.

Lt.-Col. Ejoor: Before we hear the solution, we want to know what happened to Ironsi and Fajuyi.

Lt.-Col. Gowon: If a public statement is required I am prepared to make one now. I have never been afraid to make a public statement anywhere. Left to me it would have been announced the day I knew about it and immediately I took the people that should know into confidence. I have explained this to my Colleagues in absolute sincerity and honesty. I had wanted to make the announcement before this meeting but unfortunately I was unable to do so. In any case, I want to make this announcement very shortly, and if you require it now I will say it. If you wish I can give the information in confidence and we can work on that.

Alhaji Kam Selem: I think the statement should be made in Nigeria so that the necessary honour can be given.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: This was what happened after the January coup. We agreed to announce the names of all the Senior Officers killed but there was fear all over. Let us combine the whole story ready, do the whole thing respectably and solve the problem.

Commodore Wey: Gentlemen, I would like to suggest this. I do not think there is anybody sitting on this table who would say that until today he did not know about the situation. In short, it is a public statement that is required and now we are going to have it in the scribe's book. We know the position and an announcement will be made as soon as we get back home.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: On this question of announcement and as you have all diagnosed, a lot depends on the public statement. The longer it is kept everything would remain uncertain, so that it is necessary to determine here how we are going to make this announcement. When?

Col. Adebayo: The best thing is to tell us here now what happened to Ironsi then when we get home and we issue our communique, we can make the public statement.

Lt.-Col. Gowon: There is a Head of State and at the moment we are all assuming something serious or tragic has happened to him. He is a Head of State, we cannot just sit down here and discuss it. As I said, it is my responsibility to make the announcement in due course and I will make it in due course. I have already made up my mind that this would be done within the next week or two.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: I am not trying to be difficult on the issue but perhaps you will agree that this issue affects the area I am governing more than any other area. If it is in due course that the announcement is going to be made I would respectfully suggest that a statement would be in due course. Let us decide, if we want the Secretaries to move out, they can move out. If we want everybody out, let them go out for five minutes, the microphones can be taken away or we can move down there. Gentlemen, if even the circumstances mean quite a lot, we can move away from this table, have a quick chat and come back to continue.

Commodore Wey: I support that.

c. The problem of the army

Lt.-Col. Gowon: I think all of us have at one time or the other discussed the situation in the country with regard to the reorganisation of the Army. With reference to 3 (b) 'the implementation of the agreement reached on 9th August' this is on the disposition of Army personnel, that they should go back to their region of origin. This recommendation was made by the Ad Hoc Committee which consisted of Secretaries to the Military Governors, advisers and representatives of Regional Governors. They did not have any mandate to decide anything other than to come and express their feelings and make recommendations. Their recommendations, of course, would be considered by the Regional Governors. I think the recommendation says:

It was accordingly agreed that as far as possible the Army personnel should be posted to barracks in their Regions of origin with immediate effect as an interim measure. Having regard to its peculiar position, the question of maintenance of

peace and security in Lagos should be left with the Supreme Commander in consultation with the Military Governors.

This question of movement of troops to their Region of origin arose from the fact that at the time there was so much misunderstanding, so much clash and killings between troops of Northern origin and troops of Eastern origin. I discussed this on the telephone with Emeka and I told him that 'Honestly, my consideration is to save the lives of these boys and the only way to do it is to remove the troops back to barracks in their Region of origin. ' Emeka also told me that there were a number of threats to his life and any moment the troops in Enugu of Northern origin could mutiny and his life and the lives of the people of Eastern Nigeria would be in danger. I agreed with him and said the best thing we could do was to send them back to their Region of origin and some of the boys were already escaping from their units. We agreed to repatriate all troops of Northern origin from the East and those of Eastern origin particularly Ibo speaking from the other major units because the clashes were severest within major units.

As far as I was concerned I did not think the problem was in other units because the feeling at that time was that it was the Northern versus Eastern boys as a result of some things that had happened in the past which had been with us for a long time. If you remember, Emeka, you said something about the boys in the services returning and I agreed to this reluctantly but as far as the major units were concerned, I thought that was necessary. If we can mix up a little now this will certainly be a good basis for future coming together. If we separate totally we will sort of probably get further and further apart and each Region may have an independent Army. I think I have said enough as far as the review of the current situation with reference to the organisation of the Army is concerned and the implementation of the agreement of 9th August. I think we can now discuss this point and later on come to some sort of agreement on the subject....

Lt.-Col. Gowon: I think we can now go to the question of the organisation of the Nigerian Army. There was a Committee that was set up in August or September to think on the re-organisation of the Nigerian Army and I think they produced a paper which we sent to all Military Governors to comment upon and from that we will work out the question of re-organisation. This is something on a nation's security and I think we should be very careful about it. This is the truth about defence in the world today.

If I can say something about my idea for the re-organisation of the Army. I will be very brief. I think that the Nigerian Army today probably would not be able to remain exactly as it was before January 15 or July 29. There has been so much fear generated between ourselves as a result of events since the beginning of 1966 that there is something to be said towards the modification of the present stand. There are two extremes on this. One sort of saying that we remain exactly as we were before January 15 and the other which says, we go completely on Regional basis. I think those are the two extremes. In the middle of course, you have got the possibility of having an Army predominantly people of that Region in their Region.

If I can express my own view or if you like you can call it my philosophy. As far as the Nigerian Army is concerned we cannot get everybody to where he was before January 15 or July 29. If we want to go to the other extreme of having Regional Armies we are trying to have the beginning of the arms race which is what we are trying to do away with. These Regional Armies will turn into private armies and before we know what we are doing we will start having internal troubles within the private armies and, of course, the whole country will be in flames. My thinking is that I do not feel that the basis of trust and confidence has been completely broken, it has been disrupted, it has been shaken but with little mixing and jingling we have got between people, I am quite convinced that it would form the basis of probably a more realistic mixing together in the future. If every Region wants to go its own way and think one day we will meet again, I feel that it may not work properly....

On immediate re-organisation, one would like to see first of all proper command and control. Secondly, we all agreed that most of the soldiers in each Region should come from that Region.

The East and the Mid-West are lucky they have all their people there, unfortunately in the West, I have not got enough Westerners in the place and the people in the West are very afraid now because a lot of their own people were killed during January, July and August. I have tried to clear the fear from them but still they insist on having more Yorubas than they have at the moment. I know there are not enough Yorubas in the Army and those who are there are mostly tradesmen. I do not want to disrupt other units, but from what I said when we last met in Lagos, we can find an immediate solution to the Yoruba problem. That is, try and continue on the normal quota business which we started in Zaria and as a crash programme we should use Abeokuta area as a crash programme training centre for Westerners, for Mid-Westerners who cannot go to Zaria and possibly for the Easterners who cannot go to Zaria at the moment.

I still feel very strongly about this, this is the only way to clear the problem of the Yorubas and this is the only way we can get the confidence of the people of the West because they feel they are the only people now being helped because there are not enough Yorubas in the Army. The moment we can clear this side and we get command and control properly established, I do not think there will be any more problem That is the immediate reorganisation which I would like now but the long term one is on the paper given to us by the committee which was appointed. It is a very good paper and I am still commenting on it.

d. The information media blame

Lt.-Col. Gowon: On the Government Information Media, I think all the Government Information Media in the country have done terribly bad. Emeka would say the New Nigerian has been very unkind to the East

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: And the Post which I pay for.

Lt.-Col. Gowon: Sometime I feel my problem is not with anyone but the Outlook.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: All the other information media have done a lot. When the Information Media in a country completely closed their eyes to what was happening, I think it is a dangerous thing.

Major Johnson: Let us agree it is the situation.

Lt.-Col. Ejoor: All of them have committed one crime or the other.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: The Outlook is the worst of them.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: The Outlook is not the worst, the Post which we all in fact pay for is the worst followed closely by the New Nigerian.

Mr. T. Omo-Bare: Let us make a general statement on all of them, no distinction.

Lt.-Col. Gowon: I think we agreed that all Government Information Media should desist from making inflammatory publications that would worsen the situation in the country.

e. The administrative arrangements for the future

Lt.-Col. Gowon: I personally think Decree 34 is worth looking into. I agree that the Supreme Military Council should sit on this, I think even in one of my addresses I said I would do away with any Decree that certainly tended to go towards too much centralisation and if you feel strongly about this, very good, they can be looked into. I think we will resurrect this one when we go back home and take decisions on them.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: We will not discuss the details but I am anxious that we find solutions. Whatever we do here we set a time for because there has been so much going on. What I am bringing up at this meeting are the things which generate the sort of suspicion we are trying very hard to avoid. If we can set a time limit I would be agreeable that all the parts of Decrees and Decrees that assume overcentralisation will be repealed.

Commodore Wey: Will be looked into, supposing it is a good one?

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: Centralisation is a word that stinks in Nigeria to-day. For that 10,000 people have been killed....

Lt.-Col. Hassan: We are not going back on the question of Government. I think we better make it clear what form of Government because up till now Emeka has been saying he does not recognise the Federal Government of Nigeria. This is the main

point. Let us make it clear, is the East agreeing to the present Federal Government? If not what is the East thinking should be the form of Federal Government?

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: I have said that a Government by a Council run perhaps the same as we have to-day with a Chairman with limited powers and we limit the powers here....

Col. Adebayo: I do not think we should flog this thing too much. I think quite rightly a lot of powers of the Regions have been taken from them by centralising most of them, this was by some of the Decrees made by Lagos before 29th July. I think this must be looked into, the Decrees repealed and the powers must go back to the Regions.

Mr. T. Omo-Bare: Why not use the word, reviewed. We can hold a meeting when we get back home and review these Decrees.

Col. Adebayo: Can we then say that all our Solicitors-General get together and discuss these Decrees?

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: Let us go through the points we know, we know we had a Federation before 15th January, the powers go back to the Regions and from there we try to put things right. All this talk about review, review and for the next six months they will not be reviewed.

Commodore Wey: As far as I am concerned this Government is known as the Military Government and all the Decrees produced so far were produced by the Army, therefore, let us not blame ourselves, let us look into the Decrees and find the ones we can send back. You were in the Council when we made these Decrees.

Alhaji Kam Selem: I think the point he made is good but it is not a matter for us to decide. We have to look into these things. Let the Solicitors-General meet, bring their lists and put up recommendations.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: The 'legal boys' have looked into it and said 'repeal'. If some 'legal boys' in some regions refuse to work it is not my fault. These are the things that cause a lot of trouble.

Col. Adebayo: Let us give them a date when they should meet....

Mr. T. Omo-Bare: The Governors should go back and tell their men to meet at Benin on a certain date.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: The Ministry of Justice in Lagos

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: He will give the instruction in Lagos and I will give the instruction in Enugu.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: Lagos is the one to say let us meet at such and such a date.

Col. Adebayo: We are giving them instruction from this meeting.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: It is not Lagos. This is the crucial point about this Government.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: Let us take this question honestly, the East has not recognised the Federal Government, I think you better secede and let the three of us join together.

Lt.-Gen. Ankrah: There is no question of secession when you come here.

Col. Adebayo: What he is saying is that let this meeting decide on the date they are meeting somewhere and when we get back home we will tell our Solicitors-General that they are meeting at such and such a date.

Major Johnson: We can take a date here but I see what Lt.-Col. Hassan is getting at. Usually anything you do in a Federal Government, instructions come from the nerve centre and that nerve centre for all we know is Lagos. It is Lagos that will tell the Regions 'You send your Solicitors-General to meet at Benin at so and so date....' Personally, I feel we have a duty to the people, we should forget about ourselves at the moment. We must put behind our minds that we are all soldiers and we are all likely to go back to the Army after this. All we need now is to find a solution to the problem of Nigeria and that solution must be a sincere one....

I know the Ghana system is working well; if we had started with that system from the beginning it would have been a different thing. There is nothing wrong with our own system, only the timing is bad, it will be bad if we change it now and I think we must make our own organisation workable....

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: I have to come in again. I do not agree with 90 per cent of what you have just said. I have used the analogy of sweeping dirt under the carpet, I again used the question of the ostrich posture burying our heads in the sand and hoping everything is all right. The fact remains that in the year 1966, Nigeria has gone through a turmoil and as Jack himself said, the basis for real unity in this..

Lt.-Col. Gowon: Unitary system of Government, please, not the question of unity.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: You made an important and realistic declaration in which you said 'Our difficulties in the past have been how to agree on the form which such an association should take and the task of my Government', meaning yours, 'is to provide facilities for the widest and fullest consultations at all levels on all vital matters of national interest before a decision is taken.' In the past we have been too presumptuous and have acted on such presumptions. Too often we presume that we know what the people desired. In one or two cases hasty decisions were taken without sufficient consultation. Based on that and knowing what has gone, therefore any government set up now in Nigeria that does not take into cognisance Regional loyalties is complete eye-wash. The Federal Government or support of Gowon or support of anybody, or of Emeka, whatever it is, is neither here nor there. What we want is that certain things were wrong, what are they, let us put them right. When I said Chairman, you can call him Chairman and still call him Governor. The fact still remains, it is really a nomenclature on functions and this is the crux of the matter. On the basis on which he assumed the position in Lagos, it is not possible for the East to accept blindly the leadership from Lagos. For this we have fought, we have struggled

for in the past few years. For this the East will continue to struggle and fight if necessary, but thank God we have said there will be no force.

Lt.-Col. Gowon: You can thank God but your attitude is what will say.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: The point I am making is that this Council of ours whoever we decide should sit on the Chair would have limited functions and only act with our agreement. This was what caused the last downfall. We all know it, there were so many times that we quarreled about this, argued about this, a number of things went down and not fully understood elsewhere. After all, we were all there when Decree No. 34 was made. The point was, amongst the Governors and senior officers, we knew, and we saw it and left it. The people did not, they felt it and re-acted, so we are told. If we are not going to fall into that trap again let us here agree that whoever sits on the chair can only act after consultation . . . and his action would, of course, be limited by our own agreement....

The question of Government, Gentlemen. It would be entirely unrealistic not to take into full cognisance what has happened in the country. There was a mutiny in the Army on January 15, Army leaders from all parts of the country got together halted it and set up a Government. Until May there was a massacre which the Army leaders in their entirety regretted; based on the good faith generated by the realistic way in which the Army or the Armed Forces tackled the problem, it was possible for populations to continue to go back to their areas of domicile and continue living side by side with one another.

Come July, there was another mutiny in the Army as a result of which Jack assumed the title Supreme Commander. This title certainly is contrary to my own views as a member of the Supreme Military Council.... By September the molestations and the killings of Easterners had assumed such large proportions that Easterners everywhere outside the East lost complete faith in a Federal Government that could not offer the basic need to their citizen, that is to offer the citizen protection. The citizens from the East, therefore, sought that protection within their ethnic groups in the East. Contrary to sentiments and all advice, everybody thought the East was going to revenge.

I will say this here because it is no boast that but for my own personality in the crisis the East would have thrown itself completely into a revenge. I halted it because I

foresaw that anybody that started an inter-tribal civil war would never be able to control it. I was absolutely certain that once we get into civil war it would take us at least 25 years to sort out. Contrary to all expectation I sent our delegates from the East to the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference. During this, contrary to what should have been indeed the Military Government's way of doing things, I think a genuine mistake, politicians found themselves for the first time in the forefront of national discussions and, as usual instead of facing the problem before them sought to gain personal triumphs and advantage. The East at the Conference was not doing very well, the molestations continued, the gory details I will spare you....

In this case unfortunately, Gentlemen, Officers and men of Eastern Nigeria origin who had moved from other parts of the country know the names, the faces of individuals who perpetrated these atrocities. Mention a name, we know who killed him, mention somebody we know who at least hounded him out of his barracks. So, Gentlemen, for as long as that situation exists men from Eastern Nigeria would find it utterly impossible to stay in the same barracks, feed in the same mess, fight from the same trenches as men in the Army from Northern Nigeria, they would find this impossible because we know it.

My policy has been that of ensuring the prevention of further killing. If we do not take cognisance of all these and we put our men together and mix up we write in Gentlemen, vendetta into our Armed Forces and once it becomes vendetta it becomes extremely difficult for us to solve because they will stay by force in the same barracks but each Commanding Officer will never be sure when his day will come.

For these basic reasons, separation of the forces, the separation of the population, I, in all sincerity, in order to avoid further friction and further killing, do submit that the only realistic form of Government to-day until tempers can cool is such that will move people slightly apart and a Government that controls the various entities through people of their areas. It is better that we move slightly apart and survive, it is much worse that we move closer and perish in the collision. Therefore, I say no single one person to-day in Nigeria can command the entire loyalty of the people of Nigeria. People can command loyalties of various groups and, therefore, to save the suspicion, to enable us settle down it is essential that whatever form of Government we have in the centre must be limited and controlled by a consensus which we all agree. It is easier for people at the top to be reasonable, it is a different thing for people lower down and it is that that makes me say that Nigeria wide content should be at the highest possible level until such a time as tempers have cooled and

tensions have come down. This is the basic principle, if we are agreeable on it then we go into the matters of detail.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: I do agree basically with the principles that have been mentioned by Emeka, but starting from May, I think, in his statement and in what you mentioned earlier, we that are here to-day know what we have done and we know what we have been doing to console and to stop the killings of the people of the East. On the other side, you may not know that all of us here on this table have done so much also, risking our lives and, as you mentioned, the whole thing is at the lower level. If you know how much it is at the lower level and how much we have tried to console the people to stop all these movements and mass killings, you will give me and others a medal tonight.

However, I do agree that at the moment the confidence at the lower level has to be restored and it will take time to get confidence because it is a known fact that the confidence now both in the East and in the North is not yet there. We have tried our best to see that the ordinary man in the street understands the difficulties as already mentioned by Emeka that may face the country, a complete civil war. However, we have done our best and we will continue to do our best but all the same I agree that whatever form of association we are to discuss has to be at the top; to make me believe that tomorrow a Northern soldier will stay in the same barracks within the next few months with an Eastern soldier, the confidence is just not there. With the civilians I would agree because there are so many that have written to us, we have so many from the East who still want to come back but I cannot really say to them 'It is true, go and reside in such and such a place' because if he comes back and something happens to him I will have the feeling that it is my responsibility to save the life of that individual and I told him to come back and he has been killed.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: The Easterner who wanted to come back to the North I tried actively to stop because I know the Easterner, I know what he is going to do when he goes back to the North and I would be grateful if you discourage him.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: I encouraged some and discouraged some because I feel it is my responsibility. This was what made me face the mutiny in Kano, soldiers were ready to shoot me but all the same it is my responsibility to save lives and I did it. However, I feel that on the civilian side we can do it gradually but at the Army level that will give us great difficulty. I feel we should concentrate now on the form of association we want at the higher level not promises that an Eastern soldier and a Northern

soldier can mix together tomorrow, the chances of their mixing together is about 35 per cent but not up to 45 per cent yet. I think that the form of Government that we should have should be discussed at the higher level and then we can try within our territories to bring confidence back gradually. We may say that the confidence is there but right at the bottom it is not there and I am sure Robert will agree. Even right now we have divisions within the Regions in the North, the West, the Mid-West, even in the East, the Rivers people want to go. Therefore, we better try to keep the big groups together at the moment and gradually we start mixing together.

Lt.-Col. Ejoor: I do not think I will recount the details which have been mentioned but the salient point which we want to consider is that since there is no one person that has absolute control of the Armed Forces, it is now difficult for us to accept one authority and I think this is the main point which Emeka has tried to make.

We can tackle it in two ways. First, by removing the subject of objection in the lower group, that is by separating the soldiers in the mean time to build confidence until we can bring them together.

Secondly, since we are working in good faith among ourselves we have to repose the responsibility for each group of the Army on those personalities until we are in a position to merge together. With this progression from a Federal set up it only means we have to look very closely into the central powers which are supposed to be those of the Supreme Commander and see how best we can limit these in such a way that the actions are acceptable, to the various Regions. I would like this body to be maintained, the Supreme Military Council must be maintained but we have to reconstruct the duties or the powers of the Supreme Military Council in order to give effect to the other functions that will restore confidence within the various Regions and then in general. I do not think our answer here is to start re-organising the Council but to look into the functions and to specify very definitely what it can do and what it cannot do. If we do that we would go a long way in restoring confidence within the Regions. When this is restored we hope gradually we shall build up, it will be a matter of time and it will come automatically but we will want a strong centre....

Col. Adebayo: I think I should come in here. Two points have been made, one on the Government side and the second which is inter-related to the Government side, the Army. This is a Military Government or Military rule and as such we are military people and must get ourselves together first. If we do not sort ourselves out I cannot see how we can confidently rule the country. I agree entirely with Emeka, Hassan

and David. I think it will be simpler on the Government side if we can restore the confidence of the population which we have not got at the moment. Even in the West the Yorubas are afraid of moving around with the Northern troops because they feel 'Well, they have done something to the Easterners may be it is our turn next....' I think I would agree with the majority here that our association should be tightened up at the top and see whether we can bring that association down to the ground when the time comes, when the troops have more confidence in themselves. As Jack and myself have always said, we do not want to break the Army completely into pieces because it will be very very dangerous to any one of us if we break the Army into pieces. If we can tighten up the Army on top then those who are on top will gradually have the confidence of the troops back but I agree entirely that we must separate these troops.

If there are areas where some people can work together, we can go into detail on that but in general I think one should agree that there should be separation from the bottom but not on top.

On the Government side, the problem has been half resolved. We agreed yesterday that our Solicitors-General should get together on the 14th and see what part of the Decrees we can repeal later on and submit their recommendations. I think if we can go back as at 14th January, 1966, I think half of the problem on the Government side is resolved. Then if we want to go through the functions of the Supreme Commander and see what the Regions can take on it will be all right. But, personally, I would say we only repeal those Decrees that were passed after 15th January, 1966 but I think we should revert to what the country was as at 14th January, 1966, that is Regional autonomy.

Lt.-Col. Ejoor: On that point, the implication is that the Civilian Government will have to come back.

Col. Adebayo: What we are doing is that we are trying to get a solution for us Military people to rule, the question of civilians coming back is a different exercise altogether. You repeal all the Decrees made that affected some of the powers of the Regional Governments.

In fact Decree No. 1 is one of them, there are certain parts of Decree No. 1 which should be repealed.... We can go through all the Decrees that have been passed, that will solve our problems and bring the Regional powers back to the Regions....

If we agree on that I see no reason why we should go through the functions and the powers of the Supreme Commander because at the Supreme Military Council a joint decision is always made but unfortunately we could not meet since July 29 and there are areas in which the Federal Executive Council in Lagos could meet without the Regional Governors but on things affecting the Regions the Regional Governors must either attend the meeting or be consulted before passing it into law. If we all agree that we repeal Decrees that affect Regional powers and leave the Supreme Military Council to continue and the Federal Executive Council to continue I think half of our job is done.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: Again, whilst I agree with Bob I think what he has said has not gone far enough. It has not gone far enough in that before January 15 certainly the Armed Forces were one. These are crucial to whatever we decide to do and, therefore, whilst I agree that the Supreme Military Council should stay, I feel that here we must write it down in our decisions quite categorically that the legislative and executive authority of the Federal Military Government shall be vested in the Supreme Military Council because previously it had been vested in the Supreme Commander.

Col. Adebayo: No.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: The actions have been such.

Col. Adebayo: Actions, yes.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: If we are not going to get ourselves into another friction, I think this must really be spelt out, 80 that, what I envisage is that whoever is at the top is a constitutional chap, constitutional within the context of the Military Government. That is, he is the titular head but he would only act when we have met and taken a decision. It is in fact for that reason that I suggested yesterday, so as not to get it confused ever again, that whoever we choose should be the Chairman of a Military

Council. Indeed, I have gone on to say or rather I would like to say that he should again be a Titular Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and that he shall perform such functions as are performed by a Constitutional Head of State. By so doing we have limited the powers, by so doing our people will have the confidence that whatever he says must at least have been referred to us all and that we are doing it in the best interest of the entirety rather than saying that this chap is there he is a Northerner and suspect every action of his, this chap is there an Easterner, he must be pushing only Eastern things for the Eastern good. If we spell it out as I have just said I think we would go a long way.

I will go further and I will give you the papers of what I suggest.

Papers passed to Members of the Supreme Military Council

Major Johnson: Before we go into the details of this, I would like to add one or two points.... We must first of all face the social problems in our country.

What you have just enumerated, I am sure, in principle has been the intention of the Federal Military Government since January. General Ironsi, all of us will remember, used to say 'Look, it is easy to be a dictator but it is not easy to try not to be one.' There are several occasions when he would say 'Look, we all take these decisions' even at Council meetings and putting his hand down he would say 'any comments.' I am sure this has been the genuine intention of everybody in the Military Government, nobody wants to be a dictator. I know there could be technical hitches, that in practice we have deviated from it but from what you have said I am sure it is the intention of every military member here, nobody has got any personal aspiration, we are all just longing to get this country back on its feet. So, the decisions being taken jointly I am sure is everybody's welcome.

The nomenclature now is something different. Again, I tie this one up with social. This is why I believe, let us remain with the nomenclature we have got. Supreme Military Council, Federal Executive Council, Regional Executive Council, these are what we are talking about but it is within us. We have said now that we must start this thing from the top. If we know we want unity eventually which we know cannot be built now it is from the top and if we do not show the genuine intention right from the top I do not see what we are going to pass on to the lower people. Those of us here now should know how we want it to be functioning. We know we have agreed,

we are going to put it down there that Supreme Commander you will be the man in Lagos to do normal day to day things that were done by the Ministers and this should be carried out with Members of the Executive Council in Lagos. He never takes any decision by himself for all I know although there could be some hitches as I have said and things to include the Regions the Regional Governments will come in and if it is not important they send a memo for them to comment. We say this is what we have agreed upon and it goes on. I do not think we should deviate from this....

Gentlemen, it is not anybody's intention to remain head-up in Nigeria, it is not anybody's ambition that he wants to be Governor. It has come on us and we are doing national service now for our country. When they talk about the history of Nigeria because after all 10 years in our lives is a long time but in the life of a nation it, is a very small time. We are going to pass away one day but what are we going to give to posterity, that is what we should think about now. Personal ambition, what this man should be or that man, we must forget it.

I welcome what Col. Ojukwu said, we take a joint decision, that is what we have been doing but the nomenclature I say, let it remain....The only thing I would like to add is because of the state of the Army itself today I would like to see an effective Commander of the Army. I would like to have an effective Commander and on top of that I would like to see that we break the command of the Army into Area commands. I hate to use Regional commands, I would say Area commands and have effective command on the Area commands and then an effective command for the Army itself. That will assist the Supreme Commander himself from going into detail on Army matters. He can still be the Head of the Armed Forces but that will assist him in going into detail on Army problems. I do not think personally that the Chief of Staff (Army) is effective. He is the Staff Officer, I was Chief of Staff, you were Chief of Staff and you all know that we want somebody who can really command, go to the ground everytime and see that the Officers and the troops are doing the right thing. That is what I would like to add to what I said before but I think the nomenclature should remain.

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: I will object completely to that last one. We started by agreeing that nobody can effectively command the entire Army. Any attempt to put somebody and say he commands the entire Army is 'eyewash' it does not work, not in the present circumstances. Therefore, we must accept that the Army would be Regionalised whether we like the name or not we all understand what we mean by that.

I do not think what we need at the moment is Supreme Commander because Supreme Commander does involve commanding. I think what you need is a Commander-in- Chief who is just titular so that people will take orders from people, at least, they have confidence in. Whoever you put in Lagos, I say this, will not command the loyalty of the East if that person is not acceptable to the East, this is the fact of to-day. So many things have happened and we do no longer trust each other.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: This is taking us back on the whole issue of Nigerian history....

Lt.-Col. Ojukwu: I said there should be a co-ordinating group to which each Region would send somebody but just for the facade of Nigeria there should be a titular Commander-in- Chief not a Supreme Commander which involves and which means somebody who commands over and above the various entities. Perhaps after we have created and generated certain confidence we could again have a Supreme Commander but it is not feasible to-day this is what I am saying.

Lt.-Col. Hassan: With respect, to summarise the whole thing the Eastern Region will not recognise whoever is the Supreme Commander in the form of association we are now in and it means a repetition of the whole history of Nigeria when the politicians were there, to strive to put either a Northerner or an Easterner at the top. It must be an Easterner for the Easterners to believe or a Northerner for the Northerners to believe. To summarise, the Eastern people will not recognise anybody in Lagos unless he is an Easterner.

Col. Adebayo: I do not think we should put it that way.

Mr. T. Omo-Bare: I would like to make a statement. I would like to request with respect that we adjourn to private session and iron out this matter because there is a lot involved in it. We cannot sit here on this round table and divide Nigeria because the talks are moving towards Regionalisation of everything and I do not think it is safe and we are right to divide Nigeria up on this table. If we retire into private session we might be able to thrash it out there. We will be able to say everything in our minds and then come back with a Resolution.

Lt.-Col. Gowon: If that is agreed we can retire then.

A SUMMARY OF THE ABURI AGREEMENT

by

Temple Chima Ubochi

(<http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication/ubochi/082908.html>)

The Supreme Military Council that subsequently met at Aburi, Ghana, on 4th and 5th January, 1967 agreed on the following:

1. To resolve the question of leadership within the army, restore the chain of command which had become badly disrupted, and examine the crisis of confidence amongst the officers and soldiers which had rendered it impossible for them intermingle;
2. To evolve ways and means of carrying on the responsibility of administering the country until a new constitution had been determined; and
3. To tackle realistically the problems of displaced persons. These considerations were reflected in the agenda which was agreed upon by members of the Supreme Military Council.

On the first day of the meeting, the Military Governor of the East put forward a resolution, which the meeting endorsed, calling on the military leaders to renounce the use of force as a means of settling the Nigerian crisis. It was this resolution which was embodied in a communiqué issued by the Council at the end of the first day of the meeting.

After deliberating anxiously and seriously on the reorganization, administration and control of the Army, the meeting reached agreements on the following lines:

1. The Army to be governed by the Supreme Military Council under a chairman to be known as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Federal Military Government.
2. Establishment of a Military Headquarters comprising equal representation from the Regions and headed by a Chief of Staff.
3. Creation of Area Commands corresponding to existing Regions and under the charge of Area Commanders.

4. Matters of policy, including appointments and promotions to top executive posts in the Armed Forces and the Police, to be dealt with by the Supreme Military Council.
5. During the period of the Military Government, Military Governors will have control over Area Commands for internal security.
6. Creation of a Lagos Garrison including Ikeja Barracks.

It was further agreed by the Supreme Military Council that a Military Committee comprising representatives of the Regions should meet within two weeks from the date of receiving instructions to prepare statistics which would show:

1. Present strength of Nigerian Army;
2. Deficiency in each sector of each unit;
3. The size appropriate for the country and each Area Command;
4. Additional requirement for the country and each Area Command.

Pending the completion of the work of the Committee, it was agreed by the Council that further recruitment of soldiers throughout the country should cease.

On the implementation of the agreement reached by representatives of the Military Leaders on 9th August, 1966, the Council reaffirmed the principle that Army personnel of Northern origin should return to the North from the West. In order to meet the security needs of the West it was agreed that a crash programme of recruitment and training was necessary but that the details should be examined after the Military Committee had finished its work.

It was in the course of discussing the reorganization of the Army that the crucial issue of the assumption by Lt. Col. Gowon of the offices of Supreme Commander and Head of the Federal Military Government arose. The Governor of the East, in explaining why it was impossible for him to recognize Lt. Col. Gowon as Supreme Commander, pointed out that the fate of Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi, the legitimate Supreme Commander, was yet unknown and so no one could succeed him; that in the absence of Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi whoever was the next senior officer in rank should manage the affairs of the country; and that the East was never party to any decision to appoint Lt. Col. Gowon Supreme Commander. Subsequently, Lt. Col. Gowon volunteered information regarding the murder of the Major General and his host, Lt. Col. Adekunle Fajuyi, on 29th July, 1966. The Supreme Military Council decided to accord the late military leaders the full honours due to them.

The Supreme Military Council recognized that with the demise of Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi no other Military Leader could command the support of the entire Nigerian Army and that a new arrangement was necessary for an effective administration of the whole country. The Council also took cognizance of the fact that extreme centralization had been the bane of the Military Regime in the past and that it was essential to re-define the powers of the Federal Military Government vis-à-vis the Regional Military Governments in order to ensure public confidence and co-operation.

When the Supreme Military Council resumed its deliberations at Aburi on 5th January, after members had spent the night at their various posts with their advisers, it proceeded to discuss the powers of the Federal Military Government vis-à-vis the Regional Governments. The upshot was that the Council re-affirmed its previous decisions on the reorganization of the Army and also took the following additional decisions:

On appointments to certain posts:

The following appointments must be approved by the Supreme Military Council:

1. Diplomatic and Consular posts.
2. Senior posts in the Armed Forces and the Police.
3. Super-scale Federal Civil Service and Federal Corporation posts.

On the functioning of the Supreme Military Council: Any decisions affecting the whole country must be determined by the Supreme Military Council. Where a meeting is not possible such a matter must be referred to Military Governors for comment and concurrence. That all the Law Officers of the Federation should meet in Benin on the 14th January and list all the Decrees and provisions of Decrees concerned so that they may be repealed not later than 21st January, if possible.

That for at least the next six months, there should be purely a Military Government, having nothing to do whatsoever with politicians.

The next item discussed was the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference which Lt. Col. Gowon had unilaterally dissolved on 30th November, 1966. The Council agreed that the Conference should resume sitting as soon as practicable to continue from where it left off, and that the question of implementing the unanimous recommendations of the Conference in September, 1966 should be considered at a later meeting of the Supreme Military Council.

Finally, on the problem of displaced persons, the relevant section of the Official Minutes of the Council reads as follows:

1. On rehabilitation, that Finance Permanent Secretaries should resume their meeting within two weeks and submit recommendations and that each Region should send three representatives to the meeting;
2. On employment and recovery of property, that civil servants and Corporation staff (including daily paid employees) who have not been absorbed should continue to be paid their full salaries until 31st March, 1967 provided they have not got alternative employment, and that the Military Governors of the East, West and Mid-West should send representatives (Police Commissioners) to meet and discuss the problem of recovery of property left behind by displaced persons.