

military rivalries that followed the overthrow of civilians, Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi's military regime was bedeviled by a futile attempt to cancel federalism from the Nigerian political process. Yakubu Gowon, who succeeded Aguiyi-Ironsi, learnt the political lessons of federalism well. The natural military impulse towards centralized order was tamed in the early years of military rule by the imperatives of the Nigerian Civil War. In order to prosecute and win that war, the Nigerian Federal Government had to appeal to the regional and ethnic loyalties of minority ethnic groups in southeastern and southwestern Nigeria whose autonomies were threatened by secessionist Biafra. They were indeed told that the Federal Nigerian Government would not do unto them what Biafra was about to do to them – by assuming their regional powers. Thus, during the Nigerian Civil War federalism grew.

In the aftermath of the Civil War (1970-75), under Yakubu Gowon's continued military rule, federalism flourished. Military governors hailed from their native regions, as it was during Civil War years. They were usually powerful men and ran autonomous governments. For instance, the military government of Midwest Region built the Midwest Institute of Technology (which became University of Benin) despite opposition from Gowon's central government. Similarly, the military governments of Midwest and Rivers jointly embarked on the building of the Warri-Port Harcourt road against expressed opposition from Gowon.

Within the military, however, field officers who fought the war were resentful of the military governors and often berated what they considered to be Gowon's weakness in controlling the Regional military governors. Two of these, Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo, both veterans of the Nigerian Civil War, overthrew Gowon's regime in 1975 in a popular coup d'etat. Muhammed's and Obasanjo's forceful reversals of the powers of the regions virtually canceled federalism from Nigerian governance in a few short years.

Muhammed/Obasanjo's Centralization Mania and the Misfortunes of Nigerian Federalism

The hard-won principles, processes, and practices of federalism quickly came under attack from Muhammed and Obasanjo. They came to power in good economic times of oil boom in which the economic question was not production but consumption. The Federation Account, set up to regulate the distribution of common funds among the governments of the Federation, became a Federal account controlled by the all-powerful and all-knowing Federal Military Government which overrode existing constitutional formulas for distributing common funds. There was little opposition. A new practice of appointing loyal