

Politics, War and Leadership Agendas in Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Command*

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Abstract

*Effective leadership is crucial for guidance towards shared objectives. This study analyses Olusegun Obasanjo's memoir, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*, to explore its significance in understanding the intersections of politics, war, and leadership. Obasanjo's role as a military commander during the Nigerian Civil War offers valuable insights into leadership dynamics in challenging contexts. Despite provoking severe criticisms, scholarly attention to the memoir remains limited. Using transformational leadership theory, this study undertakes a textual analysis of *My Command*, highlighting Obasanjo's leadership principles and their impact on actions and decisions during the conflict. The memoir illuminates power dynamics, war realities, and the importance of effective leadership in crises. Also, Obasanjo emphasises national unity as the bedrock of stability and progress. The memoir serves as a valuable resource for political education, providing insights into Nigeria's history, politics, and the role of effective leadership and unity for national development.*

Keywords: History, Nigerian Civil War, politics, transformational leadership, memoir,, unity

1. Introduction

Effective leadership is crucial in guiding individuals and organisations toward shared goals. Yukl (2006, p. 8) describes leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives”. Also, Northouse (2010, p. 3) defines leadership as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal”. These definitions point to various key components of the concept of leadership: (a) it is a process; (b) it entails influencing others; (c) it occurs in the context of a group; (d) it entails goal attainment; and (e) these goals are shared by leaders and their followers. In the military context, Roberts (2018) avers that leadership is paramount to the success of any army. Leadership assumes a critical role as it not only influences strategic decision-making but also shapes the morale and cohesion of forces, thereby playing a decisive role in the success or failure of military operations during times of war. Leaders not only make life and death decisions but directly control the climate and quality of life of their subordinates. This underscores the importance of Olusegun Obasanjo’s memoir, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*.

In the memoir, Obasanjo, a prominent figure in Nigerian politics and military history, who later served as both a military and civilian president, offers a unique and invaluable viewpoint on the complex connections between politics, war, and leadership. This memoir explores his experiences during a critical juncture in Nigerian history – the 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War and the country’s complex political environment. The Nigerian Civil War, often referred to as the Biafra War, is a crucial part of the country’s history. The war began, as vividly described by Obasanjo, with the resounding echo of the initial gunshot on the morning of July 6, 1967. In sobering words, he declared, “The war had started” (Obasanjo 2015, p.18). This powerful statement kicked off a series of events that would ultimately alter Nigeria’s history. The war’s beginning reflected a nation grappling with ethnic and political tensions and moving nearer the precipice of disintegration. In this tense atmosphere, the federal government faced numerous challenges, including scarce resources, demoralised troops, lack of equipment, and strong opposing global views.

In *My Command*, first published in 1980, Obasanjo shares not only his journey but also a unique look into the turbulent events that transpired in the country, which culminated in his position as a military commander during the Civil War. His narrative poses crucial questions regarding the place of politics in military operations, the ethical and strategic challenges that leaders must

resolve in times of war, and the long-term effects of these choices on a country's fate. It is in light of this that this study analyses the leadership role of Obasanjo during the Nigerian Civil War. With the aid of transformational leadership theory, this paper explores the multifaceted aspects of Obasanjo's role by examining how transformative leadership principles manifested in his actions and decisions throughout this historical conflict. It also provides valuable insights into leadership dynamics in challenging contexts, particularly in the context of national unity and resilience, as depicted in Obasanjo's memoir.

The next section discusses Nigeria's political landscape and events leading to the Civil War. This is followed by a review of relevant literature, the theoretical framework, the methodology of the study, and the analysis of the memoir.

1. Nigeria and the Civil War

The memoir, *My Command*, opens against a backdrop of the colonial experience in Nigeria. Scholars have averred that the historical antecedents that precipitated the Nigerian civil war lie in the anomalous construction of the Nigerian State by the British colonisers, "the so-called Mistake of 1914' and its attendant malcontents, as well as the unrestrained conflicts over control of state power" (Osaghae & Onwudiwe 2002, p. 3). Madiebo (1980) contends that the roots of the civil war can be traced back to the divide-and-rule system of government introduced by Britain into the country. According to him, this divide-and-rule system underscored distinctions among the diverse ethnic groups and fostered social apartheid which led to division, animosity, detrimental rivalries, and marked developmental disparities among the various peoples of the nation. Consequently, he asserts that, following independence, the struggle to solidify this legacy of political and military dominance by a specific section of Nigeria over the rest of the Federation escalated and devolved into coups and the ensuing violent civil war.

Obasanjo's memoir provides a comprehensive exploration of the pre-war political landscape in Nigeria, revealing a complex interplay of factors that set the stage for the conflict. It explores Nigeria's colonial history and the legacy of ethnic diversity left by British colonial rule. It discusses how colonial policies and administrative divisions laid the groundwork for ethno-regional tensions that would later contribute to the conflict. Obasanjo states:

All the political leaders who had strong and firm bases in the regions fought hard for maximum powers for the regions which weakened the centre. At the same time, the ugly embers of

tribalism and sectionalism had been fanned into a deadly flame by all political leaders. These leaders rode on the crest of this cancerous tribalism, and the ignorance of the people, to power, at the expense of national unity and the nation. Instead of regionalism ensuring and preserving national unity, it became its bane. There was diffusion instead of fusion of the three units. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 4).

With the granting of independence in 1960, more issues came up. Nigeria faced a series of political challenges arising from imbalanced political divisions, the structure of the federal constitution and its operational spirit. During the elections that ushered in the First Republic and gave birth to the formation of the immediate post-independence government in Nigeria, the major political parties in the nation were regionally based, with the leadership of those parties provided by people of the dominant ethnic group in each of the regions.

The First Republic was marked by crises, allegations of electoral fraud and a growing sense of instability. Obasanjo states:

Then came the biggest crisis of them all – the general election of 1964. The election was alleged to be neither free nor fair. All devices were said to have been used by the ruling parties in the regions to eliminate opponents... The Chairman of the Electoral Commission himself admitted there were proven irregularities. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 7)

However, the Western Regional Election of 1965 was worse:

the rigging and irregularities in this election were alleged to have been more brazen and more shameful. Law and order broke down completely, leading to an almost complete state of anarchy. Arson and indiscriminate killings were committed by a private army of thugs. Law-abiding citizens lived in constant fear for their lives and property. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 7)

This turbulent political climate set the stage for the military's intervention in Nigerian politics with the first coup on January 15, 1966. The aim of the coup, which brought in Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi as head of state, was to "establish a strong, unified and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife" (Obasanjo 2015, pp. 7-8). There was a counter-coup on July 29, 1966, that ushered in Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon on August 1, 1966, as the new Nigerian political leader being the most senior army officer of

Northern origin (Obasanjo 2015, p. 9). However, the military's intervention in politics in 1966 further worsened the country's political challenges. Also, a spate of violence erupted between the Hausa and the Igbos in Northern Nigeria following the first military coup of 1966. The violence prompted thousands of Igbos to flee the region. In a broadcast to the people of the North on September 29, 1966, Gowon said:

I receive complaints daily that up till now Easterners living in the North are being killed and molested and their property looted. It appears that it is going beyond reason and is now at a point of recklessness and irresponsibility". (Obasanjo 2015, p. 10)

However, Nigeria's military government failed to guarantee security for the Igbos. Thus, the Military Governor of the Eastern region, Lieutenant Colonel Emeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, led a move for the secession of the region from Nigeria. Meetings and peace efforts to prevent the secession bid hit the rocks when twelve states were created throughout the country by Gowon on May 27, 1967 (Obasanjo 2015, p. 17). Elaigwu observes that the state creation was a key element in the federal government's reaction to the impending secession move:

While Gowon denied that the creation of states was a political manoeuvre against the so-called Ibo desire for self-determination, there is no doubt that it was partially aimed at diluting support for secession. From available evidence, states might have been created without the threat or imminence of secession, but it can be argued that the latter affected the actual creation of states when it was done. (Elaigwu 1986, p. 102)

Thus, the strategy of creating states served four primary objectives: it significantly eroded backing for secession in the ethnic minority regions of Eastern Nigeria; it fulfilled the aspirations of certain ethnic minorities for independent states; it rectified the regional imbalance between the North and the South by establishing an equal number of states in both regions; and it transformed the dynamics of the relationship between the central government and the states. Obasanjo notes that Enugu reacted quickly and decisively by declaring the "Eastern Region of Nigeria as the independent sovereign state of 'Biafra' on 30 May 1967" (Obasanjo 2015, p. 16). This proved to be the final trigger for the war. All diplomatic efforts to reunite the Eastern Region with the rest of Nigeria failed; and on July 6, 1967, war broke out between Nigeria

and Biafra. Obasanjo asserts that “No self-respecting leader would take Ojukwu’s bluff and treasonable act of secession without reacting with all the force at his disposal” (Obasanjo 2015, p. 18). Thus began a thirty-month-long traumatic war which ended after Biafra surrendered.

A sequence of events unfolded, profoundly shaping Nigeria’s historical trajectory. The war’s commencement reflected a nation on the verge of disintegration, grappling with intensified ethnic and political tensions. Within this tense environment, the federal government encountered numerous challenges, including scarce resources, demoralized troops, a severe shortage of equipment, and the loss of many towns to the Biafran side. Obasanjo notes that,

The Federal success in the Northern areas of operation was completely and effectively nullified by the rebel recapture of Owerri on 26 April, 1969. The seriousness of the situation on the war front, especially in the southern area of operations, dawned on officers and officials alike in Lagos. Frantic efforts were being made to contain the rebels within Owerri. The rebels, having discovered a point of weakness, put everything they had against the 3 Marine Commando Division to widen the dent in the Division’s defences into a crack. The loss of Owerri was quickly followed by the loss of Oguta. The morale of the Division sagged further as the rebels pressed for the recapture of Port Harcourt and the oil-producing areas. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 83)

These setbacks led to the reorganisation of the war operations and change of commanders in the three Divisions of the Army which was announced on May 12, 1969. Obasanjo was put in charge of the 3 Marine Commando Division. His arrival in Port Harcourt marked the commencement of a strategic campaign to secure not only victory in the war but to also capture the hearts and minds of the soldiers. Demonstrating an astute understanding of both human dynamics and the intricacies of warfare, and recognising the vital role of individuals in warfare, he perceptively asserts that, “Men are still the most important instrument in the art of war. Without them, other machines, equipment and instruments of war are useless, no matter how sophisticated” (Obasanjo 2015, p. 95). A fundamental leadership agenda that runs through Obasanjo’s narrative is his commitment to nation-building and the preservation of Nigeria’s unity. The Nigerian Civil War posed a severe threat to the nation’s territorial integrity, and Obasanjo’s role as a military leader was

intrinsically tied to this agenda. His leadership in the war was driven by a deep-seated desire to prevent the disintegration of Nigeria. He states:

As a field commander who was reasonably conversant with the genesis of the civil war and who is an incurable optimist as far as the Nigerian nation, its unity, stability and future progress are concerned, I set to crush rebellion, to end secession and to bloody the heads of rebels without bowing their spirit. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 228)

To achieve this agenda, Obasanjo launched “Operation Tail Wind”, which helped to bring the debilitating civil war to a quick end. He accepted the surrender of the Biafran forces in January 1970.

2. A Review of Studies on Obasanjo's *My Command*

Previous studies, including Odebunmi (2019), Osisanwo and Adegbenro (2021), and Aguru (2022), have largely focused on Olusegun Obasanjo's memoir, *My Watch*, while his memoir, *My Command*, has not enjoyed much scholarly attention. Major references to the memoir are in the form of reviews, newspaper commentaries and rejoinders in the memoirs of some of the officers who fought in the Civil War or those affected by the content of the memoir. For instance, Alabi-Isama (2013), in his account of the Nigerian Civil War, devoted a whole chapter of his memoir to the criticism of *My Command*. He offers a critical perspective on Obasanjo's memoir, asserting that it leans more towards self-glorification than an accurate portrayal of military events during the Nigerian Civil War, particularly within the operational domain of the 3rd Marine Commando (3MCDO). In his analysis, Alabi-Isama contends that *My Command* is largely a work of fiction rather than a reliable historical account.

In the same vein, Ekwe-Ekwe (2012), in his analysis of the memoir, offers a scathing critique of Obasanjo's involvement in the destruction of an International Red Cross aircraft in May 1969. Ekwe-Ekwe highlights the gravity of the incident, emphasising its crucial significance within the context of the Igbo blockade. He delves into Obasanjo's mindset and the subsequent fulfilment of this directive, depicting Obasanjo's satisfaction with the incident as perverse and revolting. He condemns Obasanjo's actions as horrendous and fiendish, underscoring the loss of life resulting from the downing of the relief-bearing plane. He emphasizes the profound impact this event had on the morale of the Air Force and the troops, portraying Obasanjo as a commanding brute who revels in the aftermath of his crime.

On his part, Soyinka (2006) reflects on his role in the Nigerian Civil War, particularly his relationship with General Olusegun Obasanjo and his involvement in negotiating with Colonel Victor Banjo, who was on the Biafran side. Soyinka recounts serving as an emissary between Banjo and Obasanjo, requesting easy passage for Banjo's troops through Obasanjo's command and into Lagos. However, he expresses profound frustration with Obasanjo's attempts to distort historical truth, highlighting the personal toll of witnessing the manipulation of events in which he played a part. He finds it intolerable that Obasanjo would rewrite history to serve his own agenda, describing the experience as frustrating. However, as noted by Oriaku (2002), memoirists of the Nigerian Civil War all aspire to tell the truth from each writer's perspective, thereby explaining their roles in the conflict and interpreting the history of the war from their personal narrow perspectives. This paper is, therefore, a departure from the previous studies reviewed as it focuses on the importance of leadership in crisis situations from the perspective of Obasanjo as depicted in *My Command*.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts James MacGregor Burns' and Bernard Bass' Transformational Leadership Theory. Transformational leadership emerged as a significant leadership style that linked the roles of leaders and followers. Transformational leaders are believed to tap the potential and motives of followers to make it easier to reach the goals of the team. Burns introduced the concept of "transforming leadership" in 1978 to describe a relationship in which "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (1978, p. 20). Bernard Bass (1998, p. 26) extends Burns' concept to describe those who motivate followers to greater achievement by presenting followers with a compelling vision and encouraging them to transcend their interests for those of the group or unit. Transformational leaders motivate followers by affecting followers' values and beliefs, which in turn influences behaviours. They typically emerge in moments of profound societal crises, offering solutions rooted in these values.

A key part of the theory is the four leadership factors or behaviours, often referred to as the 4Is, which characterise transformational leadership as identified by Bass and Avolio (1992, p. 22). These are idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration:

- **Idealised Influence** – the leader acts as a role model, earning the trust and confidence of followers through proven benevolence, competency, honesty and authenticity. This relates to performance and morals. Followers are inspired to emulate the leader's behaviour.
- **Inspirational Motivation** – the leader develops and articulates a clear and compelling vision. They communicate that the status quo is not acceptable and there is a need to move towards a desired future state. They communicate this vision effectively, fostering enthusiasm and commitment among the followers.
- **Intellectual Stimulation** – the leader encourages followers to explore new ways of doing things and create something that has not been there before. They challenge beliefs and assumptions and invite followers to try for more and exceed their expectations of what they can achieve. They encourage critical thinking, open communication, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. This helps to foster an environment of continuous improvement.
- **Individualised Consideration** – the leader works to understand the needs and feelings of their followers and helps them to grow. They aim to learn an individual's motivations, skills and passions, connect them to the shared goals and help to remove obstacles. This approach encourages and helps people feel liked, competent, and autonomous.

Fundamentally, in the military context, transformational leadership is a style in which commanders inspire, motivate, influence and stimulate soldiers to foster exceptional trust and belief, aligning them towards shared objectives.

4. Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative textual analysis approach, specifically employing the technique of close reading, to explore the themes of politics, war, and leadership agendas in the memoir. These were analysed using the elements of the transformational leadership theory. Excerpts that reflect these elements (idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration) were drawn from the text and analysed. These excerpts were randomly selected as they demonstrate Obasanjo's perspective on transformational leadership and its importance in inspiring collaboration, trust, and shared vision, fostering strong political ties through empowerment and mutual respect.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This section presents an analysis of the memoir in line with the four identified elements of the transformational leadership theory, namely: idealised

influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Each of these elements is analysed below.

6. 1. Idealised Influence in *My Command*

Idealised influence, as demonstrated by Obasanjo in the memoir, is notably characterised by consistency and a commitment to setting high ethical standards. Idealised influence also occurs when the leader does the right thing and engenders the trust and respect of his or her followers (Walumbwa, Christensen & Muchiri, 2013). Obasanjo's punctuality on his first day after assuming command, arriving at work by 8 a.m., serves as an illustrative example:

During the briefing by one of the Staff Officers of the Divisional Headquarters, I had been told that work normally started at 9 a.m. and that I was expected to come to the office at about 10 a.m. I did not say anything to this. But I have always remembered General Eisenhower's philosophy about work to the effect that a man who fails to do half the day's work by ten o'clock runs the risk of leaving the other half undone. On 17 May 1969, my first day to work in Port Harcourt. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 92)

This consistency in adhering to a specific standard of conduct reinforces his image as a role model and fosters trust among his followers. By consistently demonstrating punctuality, Obasanjo establishes a clear expectation for his team regarding professionalism and dedication. Punctuality is a visible and tangible manifestation of a leader's commitment to their responsibilities, and in Obasanjo's case, it sets a positive tone for the entire command. Members of his command are likely to interpret this consistency as a reflection of his strong work ethic and dedication to the mission. Furthermore, this act of idealised influence goes beyond mere symbolism; it conveys a message that Obasanjo values time, discipline and the importance of being a reliable leader. Such actions contribute to the development of a positive organisational culture where individuals are inspired to emulate these qualities, promoting a shared commitment to excellence (Schein and Schein, 2017).

Another element of idealised influence demonstrated by Obasanjo in the memoir is accessibility as revealed in the excerpt below:

At the entrance to my office there was a warning signboard: 'Enter at the pain of Death'. I removed the notice and flung it some fifty metres. Later I saw through the window a soldier

picking it up with delight, carrying it high above his head and breaking the board into pieces. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 92)

In other words, a military commander who is easy to approach embodies idealised influence, thereby gaining trust and inspiring the soldiers (Brandebo, 2015). Effective communication and genuine concern for well-being foster unit cohesion, optimising morale and mission success. This transformational leadership approach ensures a positive and influential impact on the entire military unit, enhancing overall effectiveness. The impact of Obasanjo's idealised influence on his followers is profound and this is noted throughout the narrative. The text suggests that followers view him as more than just a leader; they see him as a role model worthy of emulation. The admiration for Obasanjo's character and leadership qualities is expressed by individuals within his circle, reinforcing the notion that idealised influence has a profound effect on shaping followers' attitudes and behaviours.

Another element of idealised influence in transformational leadership is showing genuine concern for the well-being and development of the followers. Leaders who care about their team foster a positive and supportive environment (Walumbwa, Christensen & Muchiri, 2013). This involves understanding individual needs, providing guidance and offering resources for personal growth. Demonstrating empathy and actively addressing challenges build trust and loyalty. When leaders prioritize the holistic well-being of their followers, it creates a culture of mutual respect and shared goals. This commitment not only enhances individual morale but also contributes to a cohesive and motivated team, ultimately leading to increased productivity and organizational success. This was continuously demonstrated by Obasanjo. He highlights his commitment to the soldiers' welfare: "I had to improve the welfare of all ranks within the formation and make the officers close their ranks...I made it compulsory and conditional for release of funds for salaries and other expenses that the rendering of strength returns of both soldiers and civilians should be made monthly" (Obasanjo 2015, p. 120).

In another instance, emphasising the importance of full salary payment, he reflects his belief that prioritizing soldiers' well-being, including accommodation, food and salaries, is essential for optimal performance and leadership effectiveness:

Only on one subject did I make up my mind before leaving Lagos – full payment of salaries to all soldiers. As an officer cadet, I had been taught that to get the best out of my men, I

should take particular interest in their welfare, especially in their accommodation, food, salaries in full. (Obasanjo 2015, pp. 93-94)

Thus, by prioritizing the welfare of soldiers and recognising the significance of fair compensation, Obasanjo underscores the belief that addressing basic needs is fundamental for fostering a motivated and effective military force. Another element of idealised influence exhibited in the memoir is that of leading from the front. When a military leader leads from the front, they are physically present at the forefront of operations, actively engaging in the challenges and tasks alongside their subordinates. Roberts (2018) notes:

To inspire troops, leaders must instill a pervasive attitude to motivate their troops to advance under withering fire or hold a seemingly untenable position. To accomplish this, leaders must be present at the forward edge of the battle area so their soldiers will follow their example and respect their judgment, leadership ability, and tactical knowledge.

This behaviour exemplifies idealised influence as it portrays the leader as someone who embodies the values, work ethics and commitment expected from the team. By being at the forefront, the leader sets a standard for dedication, courage and competence, fostering a sense of trust and inspiration among their followers. In the military context, leading from the front is often associated with qualities like bravery, resilience, and a willingness to share the risks and hardships faced by the team. This demonstration of leadership by example contributes to the leader's idealised influence, as their actions become a source of inspiration and motivation for those they lead. Obasanjo illustrates this by his active participation in the war:

After we had moved back behind a collapsed bridge, well behind our troops' defensive line, I became aware of some pain and saw blood gushing out from my thigh. It was then I realized that I too was wounded. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 134)

Leading from the front, as demonstrated by Obasanjo in this situation, involves actively participating in the challenges faced by the troops rather than merely giving orders from a safe distance. By placing himself in harm's way and sharing the physical and emotional experiences of the soldiers, Obasanjo becomes a living example of the dedication and sacrifice he expects from his subordinates. The revelation of his own injury at the war front serves as a powerful symbol of leadership. It communicates to the troops that their leader

is not immune to the risks and hardships they face, fostering a sense of camaraderie, trust and respect. This aligns with idealised influence, where the leader's actions inspire followers to emulate their commitment and fortitude. In addition, Obasanjo's description of being wounded during combat demonstrates his use of language to convey a vivid and impactful experience. The narrative is characterised by a sense of immediacy and urgency. This pragmatic language serves to convey the gravity of the situation and the physical toll of warfare.

Obasanjo also demonstrates idealised influence by actively engaging with the officers and men of the Division within the first month of his arrival. He narrates:

Within the first month of my arrival in Port Harcourt, I had visited all battalions of the Division, met almost all the officers and had experienced first-hand the problems and difficulties of officers and men of the Division. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 112)

By personally visiting all battalions, meeting almost all the officers, and experiencing first-hand the problems and difficulties faced by the members of the Division, Obasanjo is setting a powerful example and establishing a standard for active and involved leadership. By this, he displays a commitment to understanding the realities on the ground, fostering a culture of direct engagement and empathetic leadership within the military unit.

6.2 Inspirational Motivation in *My Command*

In the narrative, Obasanjo's leadership is marked by his capacity to inspire and motivate his followers through a compelling vision of the future. The text suggests that Obasanjo goes beyond merely managing the present; he actively engages in shaping a vision that resonates with the aspirations of the nation. His ability to communicate this vision becomes a driving force behind the inspiration and commitment of his officers.

Obasanjo's communication style, as depicted in the memoir, underscores his inspirational leadership. The narrative highlights instances where he effectively communicates the goals and objectives that he envisions for the command and the war. Obasanjo strategically employs various communication techniques to instil a sense of purpose and determination among the soldiers under his command. For instance, he writes concerning one of his visits to the troops:

In my address to the troops during the visit, I congratulated them on their past performance. In trying to explain the importance of that stage of the war, I gave the analogy of a

long-distance runner. No matter how good the beginning, the end is what matters... I then listed the advantages of winning the war and the disadvantages of losing which touched on their personal security, safety, and lives and those of their relations and loved ones. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 101)

First, Obasanjo's use of congratulatory language to acknowledge the troops' past performance serves to validate their efforts and boost morale. This linguistic strategy fosters a sense of pride and accomplishment among the troops, reinforcing positive behaviour. Recognition is a motivational tool that boosts morale and makes individuals feel valued for their contributions (Govender & Bussin, 2020). This positive reinforcement is a motivational technique that fosters a sense of accomplishment and pride among the soldiers. Secondly, by employing the analogy of a long-distance runner to elucidate the importance of different stages of the war, Obasanjo engages in analogical reasoning. This linguistic device facilitates comprehension by drawing parallels between familiar concepts and the war context, enhancing understanding and retention of key messages. This metaphor of a long-distance runner emphasises the endurance required for success and encourages the troops to persevere despite the challenges they are facing. It creates a vivid image that resonates with the idea that the journey's end is what ultimately matters.

Additionally, Obasanjo appeals to the troops' emotions by listing the advantages of winning the war and the disadvantages of losing, particularly emphasizing personal security, safety, and the lives of their loved ones. This emotive language evokes feelings of concern, fear, and duty, compelling the troops to consider the stakes involved and the gravity of their mission. This approach aims to instil a deep sense of responsibility and commitment to the cause, elevating the troops beyond immediate challenges to focus on the larger goal. Thus, through the enumeration of advantages and disadvantages, Obasanjo engages in persuasive argumentation. By presenting a compelling case for the importance of victory and the consequences of failure, he seeks to motivate the troops and rally their commitment to the cause. In another instance, Obasanjo states:

After giving my operational intentions for the future and enunciating my policies on training, welfare and discipline, I appealed to all officers for co-operation, loyalty and discipline among themselves and in relation to the higher formation. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 99)

In this case, Obasanjo, by giving operational intentions for the future and outlining policies on training, welfare and discipline, sets a vision and direction for the military operations. Firstly, by articulating his operational intentions, Obasanjo provides a roadmap for the future. This clarity in direction helps inspire the military personnel by giving them a sense of purpose and a shared vision to work towards. Knowing the leader's intentions fosters collective understanding and commitment to the mission. Secondly, the enunciation of policies on training, welfare and discipline demonstrates Obasanjo's concern for the well-being and development of the troops. This approach is motivational as it shows a leader who cares about the growth and welfare of the individuals under his command. It communicates a commitment to their success and overall betterment.

The appeal for cooperation, loyalty and discipline among officers further reinforces the inspirational motivation aspect. Obasanjo does not just give orders but appeals to the officers' sense of duty, teamwork and commitment. This appeal encourages a positive and collaborative atmosphere within the military, fostering a sense of unity and shared responsibility. In essence, the memoir illustrates Obasanjo's use of inspirational motivation by providing a clear vision for the future, expressing care for the well-being of the personnel, and appealing to their sense of cooperation, loyalty and discipline. This leadership approach aims to inspire a collective commitment to the mission and instil a shared understanding of the values that will contribute to the command's success.

6.3 Intellectual Stimulation in *My Command*

Intellectual stimulation in military leadership involves fostering an environment that encourages innovative thinking, strategic planning and proactive decision-making. It involves inspiring and challenging the minds of individuals within the command to contribute creatively to problem-solving and planning for the future. This is exemplified by Obasanjo's achievement within the first two months of taking over the leadership of the 3 Marine Commando. He recounts:

Within the first two months of my command of the Division, I had managed to beef up the brigades to reasonable strength while at the same time keeping some two thousand and five hundred men in reserve as reinforcement and replacement for battle casualties. I had also succeeded in stockpiling a reasonable reserve of arms, ammunition and materials,

sufficient for waging up to a forty-eight hour battle by each brigade. (Obasanjo 2015, pp. 130-131)

First, by beefing up the brigades, he demonstrated strategic thinking, ensuring the units were at reasonable strength for potential challenges. This decision not only addressed current needs but also anticipated future requirements. Additionally, the reserve of two thousand five hundred men showcased Obasanjo's foresight, providing a strategic pool for reinforcement and replacement in the face of battle casualties. This approach reflects an intellectual engagement with the unpredictable nature of warfare, emphasizing preparedness and adaptability. Additionally, the stockpiling of arms, ammunition, and materials sufficient for a forty-eight-hour battle by each brigade highlights meticulous planning. This strategic reserve is indicative of Obasanjo's commitment to equipping his forces not just adequately, but in a way that anticipates sustained engagement.

Obasanjo's intellectual stimulation translated into a well-prepared and adaptable military force. By encouraging forward-thinking, strategic planning and resource management, he instilled a culture of preparedness within the Division. This not only enhanced the unit's effectiveness but also contributed to a mindset of continuous improvement crucial in the dynamic and challenging context of military operations. In essence, Obasanjo's approach showcased the vital role of intellectual stimulation in military leadership, ensuring a proactive and resilient force capable of facing evolving challenges.

6.4 Individualised Consideration in *My Command*

In the narrative, Obasanjo's leadership style can be characterized by his commitment to individualised consideration. Individualised consideration refers to how a leader appreciates the individual needs and development of every member of the team (Mir, Khan & Abbas, 2020). As observed by Northouse (2022) and Mhatre and Riggio (2014), a leader who exhibits individualised consideration behaviour provides a supportive climate and listens to the needs of individual members.

On several occasions, Obasanjo demonstrates concern for the individual well-being and opinions of the members of the formation, reflecting a personalised and considerate approach to leadership. For instance, he writes about a conference he held with all commanders, heads of supporting arms and services and the staff officers on the evening of May 20, 1969. He says:

I started the conference by asking for a one-minute silence to be observed in honour of all members of the formation who had died in the war. After paying tribute to all ranks of the division including my predecessor for their wonderful performance in the past, I went on to ask for sincere and honest comments and opinions on the ills of the division, emphasizing that I wanted to know WHAT was wrong and not WHO was wrong. (Obasanjo 2015, p. 98)

In this instance, Obasanjo's request for a one-minute silence to honour fallen members of the formation demonstrates the use of symbolic language to convey respect, remembrance, and solidarity. This gesture serves to emotionally connect with the audience and establish a sombre tone for the conference. Specifically, the emphasis on observing a one-minute silence in honour of those who died in the war and paying tribute to all ranks of the division, including his predecessor, conveys a sense of empathy and acknowledgement of the individual contributions and sacrifices made by each member of the formation. In a war setting, soldiers from different ranks contribute to the overall mission, and recognising their diverse roles fosters a sense of unity. It acknowledges that each member, regardless of rank, plays a vital part in the collective effort. Obasanjo employs inclusive language to recognize and validate the contributions of every member. This linguistic strategy fosters a sense of belonging and unity within the group.

Furthermore, when Obasanjo asks for sincere and honest comments and opinions on the challenges facing the division, he emphasises a desire to understand the concerns and perspectives of the individuals within the command. This approach fosters open communication and trust, allowing soldiers to express their concerns and insights without fear of reprisal. This linguistic approach promotes a constructive discourse centred on identifying and addressing systemic issues rather than scapegoating individuals. Discipline in the military is also closely tied to the principle of individualised consideration. Williamson (2020, p. 1) states that:

Discipline or military discipline as it is often referred to, is defined as the state of order and obedience among personnel in a military organization and is characterised by the Soldiers' prompt and willing responsiveness to orders and understanding of compliance to regulation.

Thus, leaders who understand the importance of discipline tailor their approach to inspire and guide their soldiers effectively, contributing to the overall success of military operations. Obasanjo corroborates this:

Discipline is the fundamental requirement of an Army, both in peace and in war, but more so in war. If discipline breaks down within a formation, that formation also breaks down as a fighting unit. The level of indiscipline in the Division in no small measure accounted for the reverses which the Division suffered and the consequent flagging morale, the combination of which nearly marked the Division permanently as a non-effective fighting force. (Obasanjo 2015, pp. 113-114)

Obasanjo's emphasis on discipline underscores its pivotal role in military effectiveness. He highlights some of the ways he tackled indiscipline among the soldiers including the "high level of looting of attractive and durable items by all ranks for sale outside operational areas or for transportation to their home" (p. 113). Another source of indiscipline within the Division was "the existence of commando girls and the use made of them" (p. 113). Obasanjo explains that the girls were recruited as soldiers, given Army numbers and uniforms, but most of them were more useful for social functions than for Army duties. He was able to tackle this by discharging them from the Army as soldiers and engaged them as civilians (p.119). With this, the girls could be disciplined as civil servants if the need arises. The acknowledgement of indiscipline in the Division highlights individualised consideration and recognises that addressing specific instances of misconduct and morale issues is crucial.

6.5 Conclusion

Olusegun Obasanjo's memoir, *My Command: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970*, is a compelling lens through which the dynamics of power, the harsh realities of war and the essence of effective leadership in the face of formidable challenges can be analysed. It serves as a reminder that history is not just shaped by grand events and political decisions but also by the actions and decisions of individuals who find themselves at the intersection of politics, war and leadership. The memoir captures these complexities, prompting readers to reflect on the complex interplay of human experiences and motivations that have moulded the history of Nigeria. Obasanjo underscores the paramount importance of Nigeria's unity as a *sine qua non* for national stability, progress and resilience. Emphasizing that a divided nation is vulnerable to external and internal threats, Obasanjo

articulates the importance of a united front. He contends that the strength of Nigeria lies in its unity, emphasizing that a cohesive nation can more effectively navigate challenges, harness its diverse strengths and collectively pursue prosperity. In a climate of political and social complexities, Obasanjo's advocacy for unity in the memoir reflects a deep-seated belief that the synergy of a united Nigeria is indispensable for its enduring peace, development and global standing.

The memoir also shows the importance of leadership in every setting, with a focus on the military and leadership in times of crisis. Obasanjo was able to declare that, "Within a space of six months I turned a situation of low morale, desertion and distrust within my division and within the Army into one of high morale, confidence, co-operation and success for my division and for the Army" (p. xix). This illuminates his exceptional ability to navigate challenges, boost morale and foster collaboration. It also emphasises the transformative impact strong leadership can have in mitigating crises and steering an organisation towards success. Essentially, therefore, Olusegun Obasanjo's *My Command* serves as a valuable resource for political education in Nigeria. It offers profound insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the nation's political landscape and history as well as the importance of effective leadership.

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