

DECLASSIFIED
PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
April 21, 2005

SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON

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January 9, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Nigeria/Biafra

The current Federal military offensive has created a new situation in Nigeria, both with respect to relief and third party mediation.

Current Military Situation

Federal forces have isolated the eastern third of the enclave. Although not decisive, loss of this eastern salient would be a serious blow to Biafra's cause. Other Federal forces have made gains toward the Biafran capital of Owerri and on the key roads toward Uli airfield, terminus of the relief and arms flights. One Biafran division has collapsed; the important fifteenth division astride the eastern approaches to the center of the enclave is under severe pressure.

A recent field survey by Ambassador Ferguson's staff shows a significant decline of discipline and morale within the enclave. Biafran difficulties are compounded by recurrent shortages of ammunition and foreign exchange. Biafra's leadership is alarmed at the present deterioration of its military position. Conversely, morale on the Federal side is high. We have no evidence as yet that the current offensive now under way for over a month has run its course--although in the past Federal forces have never succeeded in achieving a decisive victory.

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Clearly, Biafra's situation is extremely serious and some contingency planning is in order.

Current Relief Problems

Biafra's eastern third is believed to contain some 500,000 people--out of a total of some 3 to 4 million--now isolated from outside food supplies. Some 200,000 refugees have crossed into Federally controlled territory since the start of the offensive.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the Nigerian Red Cross (NRC), it is the only relief agency acceptable to the Federal Government (FMG). We see no possibility that the FMG will change its position adopted last summer when it assigned over-all responsibility for relief matters within the Federally controlled territory to the NRC. Accordingly, our objective is to obtain the FMG's consent to an expanded international effort under NRC auspices.

Meanwhile, the NRC is shifting several relief teams from other areas to care for the new refugees. We are expanding our support to the NRC, both directly and by contributions via the League of International Red Cross Societies (LICROSS). Personnel of the Embassy have been making a survey in the affected areas in order to determine how we can best assist the NRC.

In these efforts, we believe we must proceed with considerable care not to offend or antagonize the FMG, jeopardizing its essential cooperation. We know from past experience that the FMG is extremely sensitive about outside advice--which it considers interference in Nigerian domestic affairs--especially

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from the US. We therefore are trying to enlist the support of the British and of interested international agencies to help open the door to an expanded international effort.

Future Contingencies

If the Federal offensive should continue unchecked, we foresee several contingencies:

-- Further rapid increases in the number of refugees, some under Federal control, some in areas of continued fighting where relief will be extremely difficult;

-- Possibly, interdiction or seizure of Uli airport, resulting in the termination of relief and military supplies to the enclave. (There are other airstrips but these are in the line of the Federal advance or of very limited capability.)

As regards the feeding of refugees, the primary task will be to expand the capabilities of the Nigerian Red Cross (relief teams, supplies, local transport).

Following the loss of Uli, one possibility of providing relief to the enclave would be air drops from Canadian C-130's or the ICRC (US-supplied) C-97's still stationed at Cotonou. Neither the ICRC nor the Canadians would be willing to undertake air drops without FMG consent which would not be forthcoming while the fighting continues. The voluntary agencies now flying relief have indicated that, if Uli were lost, they would probably have to terminate operations. Thus the possibility

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exists that substantial numbers of people might go without outside food supplies for a considerable period.

Meanwhile, we are continuing efforts to increase the capabilities of the voluntary agencies. Through ICRC we are financing a new airlift by the Knights of Malta out of Libreville. As you recall, we are also strengthening the airlift capabilities of JCA by augmenting their fleet of aircraft, including the transfer of two C-97's and financial aid for the purchase or charter of additional large-capacity aircraft.

Diplomatic Initiatives

With a record of consistent support for the Nigerian war effort, the British have more influence in Lagos than ourselves. Furthermore, the British Government feels domestic pressure over Biafra's plight. Ambassador Ferguson and the Director of our Special Nigeria Staff are meeting with UK officials in London this week in order to coordinate UK-US efforts. Ambassador Ferguson will also hold planning discussions with the International Committee of the Red Cross, the League of International Red Cross Societies and the Hague Group composed of donor governments to the Nigerian relief effort. At the same time, the Special Staff Director will continue our dialogue on Nigeria with French officials in Paris.

Prospects for Mediation

We recently approached Sir Arthur Lewis--a distinguished West Indian economist and Director-designate of the Caribbean Development Bank--and

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secured his agreement to undertake a mediating role under appropriate auspices. Highly regarded among Africans he is well known and appears acceptable to both sides. The British agree with us that Sir Arthur is probably the best candidate. They feel strongly, however, that the current military situation makes mediation efforts very unpromising and are opposed to an initiative by Sir Arthur at this time.

We have evidence that the Prime Ministers of Ghana and Sierra Leone are trying to arrange secret talks. Sir Arthur is on close terms with the Ghanaian Prime Minister. We also know that the French are urging Biafrans, through Houphouet-Boigny, to respond affirmatively. We have no indication that the FMG would be willing to talk while its offensive is in progress.

If prospects for mediation should improve we would plan, working through the British and French and avoiding direct responsibility, to encourage discreetly Sir Arthur's initiative.

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Late Developments

According to an agency report, Jacques Foccart (Secretary General for Afro-Malagasy Affairs in the Elysee) has under consideration a plan to assemble secretly a white mercenary force of 300 to 500 men, using Count von Rosen as cover. While the report is unverified at this writing, other intelligence corroborates various elements. For example, we know that a French officer, security adviser to Houphouet-Boigny, and reportedly a participant in these

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deliberations with Foccart, is scheduled to hold talks with Ojukwu at this time. We will give a separate evaluation of this development if borne out by further information.



William P. Rogers

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