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January 12, 1970

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

The fast-moving Nigerian situation has been receiving our very urgent attention. The following status report is submitted in accordance with the decision reached at the WSAG meeting January 10.

1. MILITARY ASSESSMENT

According to the latest information we have on the developing military situation in Nigeria, the Federal advance continues and an early Biafran capitulation or disintegration is likely. Organized resistance continues and may well continue for some time but the key airfield (Uli) is under aerial attack and is probably not operating. The Biafran capital of Owerri has reportedly been captured, and Ojukwu has left the enclave, perhaps for Abidjan, to try to arrange for an honorable peace. With the military reverses, breakdown of administration and very serious reduction if not elimination of air supply of materiel, it seems only a question of time before the end. Psychologically, Ojukwu's departure could have a very damaging effect on morale. Both the British and the French regard the situation as militarily hopeless for the Biafrans.

2. RESULTANT PROBLEMS

The most immediate result of the Biafran collapse will be a horde of refugees. There will be two aspects to the problem of dealing with them, relief and security.

A. Relief. The breakdown in Biafran administration, and the severe protein shortage which the enclave has

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been suffering means that extraordinary measures may have to be taken for a period of some weeks to prevent mass starvation. The degree to which the civilian population can be reached during this period will depend on the level of armed resistance that still continues and on FMG cooperation. It may be that substantial numbers of these needy might be cut off with no way of reaching them except through the use of an air drop or helicopters.

B. Security. The expressed genocidal fear of the Biafrans may cause large numbers to retreat in terror before advancing Federal troops and hide in the bush, thus making relief operations difficult if not impossible. For its part the Federal Government has enunciated a policy of reconciliation and its performance to date has been reassuring. A code of conduct for the troops has been issued, and an international observer group which was invited into Nigeria in 1968 has found no evidence of atrocities. The Federal Army has been cooperating with the Nigerian Red Cross in feeding refugees displaced by the current offensive. On January 10 Gowon appealed to his troops to follow the "Code of Conduct" and to welcome Ibos attempting to cross Federal lines. He publicly reassured the Ibos that they have nothing to be afraid of in rejoining their brothers in the Federation. Nevertheless the possibility of atrocities by advancing troops cannot be excluded. The international community is very alive to this possibility, as are we.

3. WHAT WE ARE DOING

A. Relief. As signs accumulated several weeks ago that the Federal offensive would likely be successful, we embarked on full-scale contingency planning for the eventuality of a rapid overrun of Biafran territory

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by the FMG forces. We solicited the fullest information from the field on the status of the current relief effort. Ambassador Ferguson, your Nigerian Relief Coordinator, and Mr. Brubeck, Director of our Special Staff for Nigeria, went to London to concert with the British. Mr. Brubeck went on to Paris for discussions with the French and Ambassador Ferguson to Geneva and other points in Europe for planning meetings with those international organizations and governments involved in the international relief effort. At the same time, concerned for the safety of expatriate relief workers within the enclave, we contacted the voluntary agencies as well as our embassies in Lagos and Libreville to ascertain how many Americans might still be inside and to alert the agencies to the developing military situation. As far as we are able to determine, no more than a dozen were inside the enclave and we believe that virtually all of these have been evacuated.

As a result of these planning efforts and consultations we have been able to assure that the Nigerian Red Cross, charged with the responsibility for relief by the FMG, is alert to the problem and is moving energetically, with the full cooperation of the Nigerian Army, to respond to the developing emergency situation. Sufficient supplies are in place, en route, or on order, to meet the anticipated needs of up to two million refugees. Steps have been taken to obtain additional transport to augment the internal distribution capability of relief teams. The NRC is meeting January 12 with the already-established relief coordinating committee in Lagos. This committee includes participating voluntary agencies and governments including the United States. The Nigerian military will also participate. The problems to which attention must continue to be given are those of stockpiling, transport and the availability of needed relief workers. Depending on

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circumstances, the need may develop for an airlift, air drop or internal helicopter transport. Steps are being taken to assure the availability of civilian air transport (e.g. ICRC C-97s). US military C-130s will be considered as a fallback resource (security situation in Nigeria permitting), pending indications of the FMG's reaction to our offer to make them available. We and the British are endeavoring to get advance FMG approval for such emergency measures as well as the use of a designated relief airfield, either Uli or Obilagu.

B. Security. The most immediate need is to secure FMG approval to the expansion of existing observer teams. Following consultations in London and Prime Minister Wilson's conversation with you on January 10, he communicated with Gowon on the importance of expanded observer teams. British High Commissioner Glass in Lagos was instructed to follow up on his initiative and Ambassador Trueheart was instructed to support Glass's efforts. Meanwhile, U Thant has despatched a representative to take up the same question with General Gowon. Assistant Secretary Newsom and British Parliamentary Under Secretary Foley have both discussed the question with U Thant in Yaounde and both will follow up with Gowon in Lagos on Tuesday, January 13.

If the worst happens, and atrocities take place, we, of course, would make representations to Lagos and enlist the help and intervention with the FMG of the ICRC, and, through the Emperor, the OAU. There would also be the possibility of taking the problem to the United Nations Security Council. The more drastic alternative, direct military intervention, would not appear to be in the United States interest. The problem that will most likely face us will not be one

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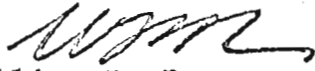
of clear-cut large-scale massacres but isolated atrocities. It will be necessary for us to make a judgment on the appropriate response based on the specific facts at the time. We will endeavor to keep the UK and the UN in the forefront of any international activity on the security problem.

We have prepared messages for you to send to General Gowon, Prime Minister Harold Wilson, the Emperor of Ethiopia and President Houphouet-Boigny, making clear your great interest in the problems of relief and security and expressing your desire to concert our actions with them.

4. CONCLUSION

The problem that faces us with the FMG now is that of persuading it to use the resources the US and other countries can make available without creating the impression we are trying to usurp its own proper role. Our approaches to the FMG must be low-key. The FMG is extremely sensitive to what it considers external meddling, as indicated by General Gowon's statement on January 11 warning foreign governments and organizations not to "meddle in Nigerian affairs."

It is important that we have a clear record demonstrating our support of an expanded relief effort. We think the work of the past weeks in contingency planning and consultations with other governments, and your own actions and statements make this record amply. We are taking the necessary steps to ensure that the international community and the press thoroughly understand our efforts.


William P. Rogers

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