

April 21, 2005

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STATES OF A

POL 27-9 BIAFRA-NIGERIA

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ACTION AF 16

INFO EUR 15, IO 13, SSO 00, NSCE 00, USIE 00, CCO 00, CIAE 00, DODE 00,
GPM 04, H 02, INR 07, LI 03, NSAE 00, NSC 10, P 04, RSC 01, SP 02, SS 20,
USIA 12, SA 01, SAH 02, SR 01, ORM 03, SCS 04, SCA 01, E 15, DOT 12,
ACDA 16, RSR 01, AID 28, MC 01, /194 W

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O P 141530Z JAN 69 ZFF-4

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4424

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION USUN

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SUBJ: MEETING WITH GENERAL GOWON

REF: STATE 5133

1. GOWON WITH EUUEYITCHIE AND EXTAFF ENAHORO RECEIVED ME THIS MORNING FOR DELIVERY REPLY TO EXTAFF DEC 30 NOTE. REPLY OMITTED LAST THREE SENTENCES PARAGRAPH 1C REFTEL AS AUTHORIZED STATE 5241 (NOTAL).

2. I ORALLY SUMMARIZED REPLY AND HANDED NOTE TO ENAHORO. I NEXT MADE POINTS CONTAINED IN PARAGRAPHS 3 TO 5 REFTEL.

3. I THEN REFERRED TO PASSAGE IN EXTAFF NOTE CONCERNING SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES THAT WOULD RESULT IF C-97G AIRCRAFT ENCOUNTERED NIGERIAN AIR FORCE ACTION. I SAID I HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO SAY THAT NFG FULLY SHARED FMG VIEW THAT NAF ATTACK ON C-97G OR ANY RELIEF AIRCRAFT WOULD HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES NOT ONLY FOR US-NIGERIAN RELATIONS BUT FOR FMG POSITION IN WORLD. I STATED THAT IN VIEW FMG CONDUCT OF WAR THUS FAR AND GOWON'S PREVIOUS STATEMENTS TO ME, USG

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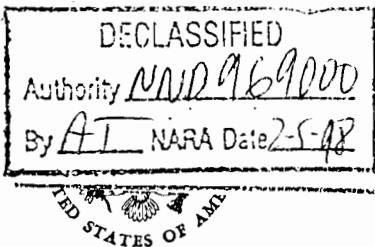
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WAS CONFIDENT FMG WOULD USE ITS BEST EFFORTS TO PREVENT SUCH ATTACKS.

4. GOWON'S IMMEDIATE RESPONSE WAS THAT FMG WOULD DO ITS BEST NOT TO HARM RELIEF AIRCRAFT BUT HE THEN LAUNCHED INTO INCREASINGLY IMPASSIONED DENUNCIATION OF RELIEF AGENCIES. HE RECITED FAMILIAR CHARGES OF BIAS, CONTEMPT FOR FMG, IMPROPER ACTIVITIES, ETC. WITH EMPHASIS ON CHURCH GROUPS ALTHOUGH ICRC DID NOT ESCAPE CONDEMNATION. AFTER WE DISCUSSED OTHER MATTERS AND HE CALMED DOWN, I REVERTED TO SUBJECT AND POINTED OUT THAT WARNING AGAINST NIGHT FLIGHTS BY MINISTRY DEFENSE SPOKESMAN SEVERAL MONTHS AGO NO LONGER CREDIBLE AND THAT IF FMG DECIDED IN FUTURE THAT IT MUST ATTEMPT DISRUPT NIGHT FLIGHTS TO PREVENT ARMS DELIVERY, FMG MUST FIRST ISSUE NEW WARNING TO RELIEF AGENCIES. GOWON GAVE ME CLOSE AND THOUGHTFUL ATTENTION WHICH I HAVE FOUND FROM PAST EXPERIENCE INDICATES THAT HE WAS IMPRESSED. ALTHOUGH HE AVOIDED COMMITMENT, HE ADMITTED THAT RELIEF AGENCIES SEEMED ENTITLED TO NEW WARNING BEFORE NAF ACTION. I BELIEVE WE CAN EXPECT NEW WARNING TO RELIEF AGENCIES IF FMG DECIDES TO INTERCEPT FLIGHTS BUT NOT IN IMMEDIATE FUTURE AS NAF DOES NOT NOW HAVE NIGHT INTERCEPTION CAPABILITY.

5. GOWON HIMSELF RAISED EG BAN IN ICRC FLIGHTS UNFORTUNATELY IN CONTEXT OF BBC REPORT THAT ICRC GENEVA HAD ANNOUNCED IF FLIGHTS STOPPED FROM EG IT WOULD HAVE TO CEASE OPERATIONS IN FEDERAL TERRITORY. GOWON DESCRIBED THIS AS THREAT AND SAID IF RELIEF AGENCIES WANTED TO PULL OUT FMG AND NIGERIAN RED CROSS WOULD HAVE TO COPE AS BEST THEY COULD WITH RELIEF PROBLEM.

6. THIS WAS NOT MOST AUSPICIOUS BACKGROUND FOR URGING FMG TO BE HELPFUL IN EG SITUATION BUT I TRIED. MY PRINCIPAL ARGUMENTS WERE THAT WHATEVER FACTS AND MERITS FMG WOULD BE BLAMED FOR GEG ACTION AND THAT IT WAS IN FMG OWN INTEREST TO KEEP ICRC IN RELIEF TERRITORY. RE FIRST ARGUMENT GOWON AND OTHERS INSISTED FMG HAD BROUGHT A LOT OF PRESSURE ON GEG BUT DID NOT REFUTE MY COMMENT THAT NIGERIAN CHIEF OF STAFF BASSEY MAY HAVE PRESSED GEG ON HIS OWN. I REITERATED THAT WHETHER EVER FACTS, GIVEN PREVAILING CLIMATE OPINION IN NIGERIA AND IN MUCH OF EUROPE, FMG WOULD BE BLAMED FOR END ICRC AIRLIFT. EVEN IF GOWON'S ARGUMENT WAS WRONG AND UNFAIR, IT WAS FACT OF LIFE WHICH FMG AND OTHER GOVERNMENTS HAD TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.

7. RE SECOND ARGUMENT, GOWON GRUDGINGLY AGREED THAT FMG WOULD PREFER TO HAVE ICRC REMAIN IN RELIEF PICTURE RATHER THAN HAVE RELIEF OPERATIONS INTO REBEL TERRITORY WHOLLY IN HANDS CHURCH GROUPS. HE

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SAID, HOWEVER, ICRC DID NOT HAVE TO CEASE RELIEF OPERATIONS INTO REBEL TERRITORY BECAUSE OF GEG ACTION; IT COULD TAKE UP LONG STANDING FMG OFFER TO BASE OPERATION IN LAGOS. I RESPONDED I DID NOT THINK THIS PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE. LAGOS PORT WAS ALREADY JAMMED AND MANY SHIPS WERE AWAITING PIER SPACE. THERE WAS REAL QUESTION WHETHER IKEJA AIRPORT COULD HANDLE INCREASED TRAFFIC, TO SAY NOTHING OF STORAGE PROBLEMS, RESULTING FROM RELIEF AIRLIFT. GOWON WAS SHAKEN BY THESE COMMENTS BUT SAID HE THOUGHT LAGOS COULD COPE. IN ANY CASE, ICRC SHOULD AT LEAST BE WILLING TO TRY LAGOS AS BASE OF OPERATIONS. FMG WOULD DO ALL IT COULD TO FACILITATE BUT IF DESPITE THIS LAGOS COULD NOT COPE, FMG WOULD BE WILLING CONSIDER OTHER ALTERNATIVES. I RESPONDED THAT IF FMG THIS FLEXIBLE, IT SHOULD PROMPTLY ISSUE PUBLIC STATEMENT EXPLAINING ITS POSITION. GOWON WAS OF COURSE SPEAKING IN TERMS OF DAYLIGHT NOT NIGHT FLIGHTS. UNFORTUNATELY, I DOUBT THAT FMG WILL INTERCEDE WITH GEG. GOWON AND OTHERS SEEMED TAKEN WITH IDEA OF PUBLIC STATEMENT BUT IT WILL BE DEPARTURE FROM PAST PRACTICE IF THEY FOLLOW THROUGH.

8. ENAHORO INTRODUCED SUBJECT OF EMPEROR'S RECENT PROPOSAL ON LAND CORRIDORS AND RESTATED FMG POSITION. I COMMENTED THAT HE HAD MENTIONED TO DCM THAT OBILAGO AIRSTRIP INVOLVED AND INQUIRED WHETHER I WAS NOT CORRECT IN RECALLING THAT FMG HAD EARLIER SAID THAT OBILAGO MIGHT BE USED TO RECEIVE RELIEF FLIGHTS CARRYING SUPPLIES FOR REBEL TERRITORY. GOWON SAID THIS WAS CORRECT BUT THAT MILITARY SITUATION NOW PRECLUDED SUCH USE. FROM LATER COMMENT, I GATHER HE HAD IN MIND EMPEROR'S REQUIREMENT OF FIVE MILE NEUTRAL ZONE AROUND AIRSTRIP AND ROAD TO BE USED TO TRUCK SUPPLIES TO REBELS.

9. I ALSO URGED THAT FMG SHOULD SHOW SOME INITIATIVE ON LAND CORRIDOR. I SUGGESTED THAT FMG MILITARY SHOULD EXAMINE SITUATION ON WAR FORNTS TO DETERMINE WHETHER THERE WAS AREA OF RELATIVE QUIET WHERE LAND CORRIDOR COULD BE LOCATED. THIS IDEA TOO SEEMED TO IMPRESS GOWON.

10. I TOOK OCCASION TO SHOW GOWON AND OTHERS LEAFLET ANNOUNCING DEMONSTRATION AGAINST EMBASSY BEING ORGANIZED BY COMMUNIST - CH

FOR JANUARY 18. I SAID I WAS CONVINCED THAT ORGANIZERS WOULD NOT BE SATISFIED WITH PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATION BUT WOULD MAKE EFFORT TO DAMAGE EMBASSY, AND EMPHASIZED THIS WOULD HAVE UNFORTUNATE REPERCUSSIONS IN US AND NIGERIA. I URGED EFFECTIVE POLICE MEASURES TO THWART DEMONSTRATORS. GOWON ASSURED ME LAGOS POLICE WOULD PERMIT

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NO VIOLENCE. ENAHORO SUBSEQUENTLY TELEPHONED TO TELL ME THAT POLICE HAD ALREADY INFORMED ORGANIZERS THAT DEMONSTRATION COULD NOT BE HELD.

11. STATE 5846 ARRIVED WHILE I WAS WITH GOWON. WHEN ENAHORO TELEPHONED ME, I ASKED WHETHER IYALLA HAD REPORTED ON SECRETARY'S NOTE TO ARIKPO. ENAHORO SAID NO SO EMBASSY SENT HIM TEXT.

12. GOWON WAS REASSURED BY ASSURANCES OF NO CHANGE IN USG POLICY. HE COMMENTED THAT AT GOVERNMENT LEVEL WE COULD REACH UNDERSTANDING OF EACH OTHER'S ACTIONS, BUT NIGERIAN PEOPLE SAW SUCH USG ACTIONS AS SUPPLY AIRCRAFT TO RELIEF AGENCIES FOR AIRLIFT TO REBEL TERRITORY AS SUPPORT OF REBELS. GP-3 MATHEWS

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