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

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: April 21, 1969

SUBJECT: Biafrans Seek US Support

PARTICIPANTS: Dr. Pius Okigbo, Biafran Representative
Dr. Eni Njoku, Biafran Representative
Dr. Nwonye Otue, Biafran Representative

Claus W. Ruser, U
Roy M. Melbourne, Country Director, AF/W
George B. Sherry, AF/W
Roger Morris, NSC Staff

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During a four hour dinner conversation, the three Biafran representatives put forward the Biafran case and sought US official support for Biafra. Dr. Kenneth Dike was also to be present, but another engagement intervened.

Taking turns, all three Biafran representatives defended Biafra's claim to sovereignty. They cited the 1966 massacres in the North and rejection of Ibos by the Nigerian Federation which then refused to allow them to go in peace. Claiming that no military solution is possible, and that, indeed, the military situation is "irrelevant", they insisted that the Biafrans would never give in.

Njoku made the point that as Nigerian citizens able to travel and settle outside of Iboland by right, Ibos would continue to be subject to hostility and eventual massacre, which would not be the case if they had the protection of a foreign nationality, namely Biafran. The three stated categorically that the Ibo people do not wish to repeat their recent experience in the Federation and, in any event, the Nigerian Federation could not endure the tribal rivalry which will inevitably destroy it. They dismissed Gowon as one whose assurances of safety to the Ibos could not be believed. They said that basically the question to be resolved is Ibo security.

Getting down to their principle reason for being here, they stated it as their assumption that the US cannot stand by doing nothing while blood continues to be uselessly shed in the Nigerian conflict. They

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proposed, therefore, that the US assert its moral authority by unilaterally calling for an arms embargo and cease fire to be followed by suitable steps to see to it that arms suppliers to both sides agree to suspend deliveries.

The present US policy of political non-intervention, while humanitarian assistance to the civilian victims of the war continues was reiterated. It was made very clear to the Biafrans that the US Government is determined to avoid direct involvement in what it regards as an internal and African matter.

The visitors all professed to understand that the consequences of the Vietnam war and developments at home have not disposed the American people or Government to new foreign ventures. They insisted, however, that a call for an arms embargo would not constitute political intervention, even though it was pointed out to them that such action could have a baneful affect on our relations with Nigeria and Britain. They were unconvinced that we might have no influence on Soviet or French policy and, little more on the British at this juncture.

At no point in the discussion did the Biafrans concede that the Eastern minorities problem is meaningful. They felt that the non-Ibos in the former Eastern Region would support Biafra if a plebiscite were held, but that even if this were not the case, a Biafra consisting solely of the Ibo heartland would be viable. This area would include Port Harcourt and the bulk of the oil lands, which Lagos includes in the new Rivers State.

Njoku, as a trained botanist, was asked about Biafran food prospects. He said the rains had started earlier this year and this meant that the carbohydrate shortage would be well on the way to resolution as the new crop would be available by June 1. The maize at that time would be followed by yams. Meanwhile the protein shortage was being handled by the food on the relief flights. He thought the intensified campaign to grow more would permit Biafra to meet the problem in the future. The Biafrans were reluctant to discuss relief and the food problem except in the context of urging those seeking to help to devote their energy to ending what they considered the basic cause, the fighting.

It was very clear throughout the evening's animated but friendly discussion that the Biafran spokesmen remain convinced of the validity of their position. Further, they stated that they wanted to make every effort to convince the US of the wisdom of seeking an early cease fire, arms embargo, and an end to the war. This clearly implied Biafran independence.

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