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April 21, 2005

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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

12 August 1969

SUBJECT: SNIE 64.2-69: PROSPECTS FOR AN EMBARGO ON ARMS TO
NIGERIA AND BIAFRA

~~Group 1~~
THE PROBLEM

To assess the possibility of a workable international embargo
on arms to Federal Nigeria and to Biafra. Further, to assess the
effects of such an embargo on the civil war and its ultimate
settlement.

CONCLUSIONS

A. An effective embargo on arms shipments to both parties
in the Nigerian civil war is highly unlikely. The USSR and the UK
would be reluctant even to sign an embargo agreement for fear of
jeopardizing their interests in Federal Nigeria, which is bitterly
opposed to an embargo. France would see an embargo as benefiting

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Biafra, but would not subscribe to an agreement unless the UK and USSR did likewise. Moreover, private and governmental suppliers to both sides would be likely to evade any agreement that might be signed.

B. In the highly unlikely event of an effective embargo, the level of hostilities would soon diminish, but neither party would be any more willing to compromise. Biafra would have achieved a measure of recognition and international intervention, but would remain a tiny enclave dependent on outside aid. The Federal Military Government's effort to force Biafra to renounce its claims would have been thwarted, and the resulting frustrations would probably reduce the authority and effectiveness of the Lagos government.

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DISCUSSION

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The civil war in Nigeria has entered its third year and neither side appears capable of decisive military victory in the foreseeable future. The Nigerian Federal Military Government (FMG) remains determined to bring Biafra back into the fold; Biafra appears equally determined to achieve independence, or at least autonomy. Neither side shows any inclination to compromise and numerous attempts at mediation have failed.

2. Both sides are dependent on imported arms and equipment. The FMG buys 15-20 percent of its military imports from the UK, about 30 percent from the USSR and Eastern Europe, and the rest mainly from assorted private arms dealers. For about the past year, France has directly or indirectly arranged the supply of at least half of Biafra's military imports. Much of the rest comes directly from private arms dealers. Biafran arms purchases are far smaller than the FMG's

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II. PROSPECTS FOR AN EMBARGO AGREEMENT

3. The idea of an arms embargo would be totally repugnant to the Nigerian side. The FMG is hypersensitive to any suggestion that the two sides be treated as equals and has even regarded the discussion of British arms sales in the UK parliament as interference in internal Nigerian affairs. The Federal government would immediately protest the suggestion of an embargo and would probably even threaten to sequester or expropriate the holdings of nations sponsoring the proposal. Popular reactions could include physical violence against resident nationals of sponsoring countries.

4. Biafra, by contrast, would probably welcome moves to bring about an embargo applying to both sides. General Ojukwu, the Biafran leader, has repeatedly appealed to the international community to stop selling arms to Nigeria, hoping to drive a wedge between the FMG and the UK. The Biafran authorities almost certainly reason that, in the unlikely event that an embargo was agreed to, it would be more likely to inhibit the British Government, perhaps even the USSR, than the covert sources -- French or other -- from which Biafra obtains its arms. Biafra would expect such a move to hurt the FMG far more than Biafra by giving the war an

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international status, indirectly supporting Biafra's claim to independence, and making it more difficult for Nigeria to get supplies. Biafrans calculate that the longer they hang on, the greater will be the international recognition of their cause. Moreover, they appear to believe that if they can simply hang on long enough, the FMG's campaign to subdue them will eventually cause so much dissension in Federal Nigeria that it will have to abandon the war. They probably reason that an arms embargo would cause consternation, recriminations, and disunity within the FMG and thus hasten its dissolution.

5. From the onset of the war in the summer of 1967, the UK has freely sold Nigeria small arms and ammunition essential to the conduct of a war of this type. It has, however, been reluctant to supply semi-sophisticated offensive weapons and has refused to sell aircraft. Nevertheless, in private conversations as well as in open Parliamentary debate, HMG has argued that only by continuing to sell arms to the recognized government of a Commonwealth country engaged in repressing an internal rebellion can the UK hope to retain much of its traditional influence in

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Nigeria and to protect its interests there.^{1/} Further, it has argued that only by such a policy could it hope to restrain the Nigerian hawks and eventually steer the FMG toward a negotiated settlement. Recently, less has been heard of these reasons, and the UK has stressed the need to prevent the USSR from becoming the sole or major source of FMG war materiel. As the war has dragged on with no diminution in the suffering and casualties and no end in sight, this policy has come under attack.

6. The UK would probably be glad of an effective international agreement to embargo arms to both sides, but it would have doubts about the prospect of enforcing an embargo and about the willingness of other parties to co-operate. Therefore, it could be expected to be reluctant to undertake the exercise. It would fear that discussion of such an agreement would not be kept private and that its exposure would adversely affect British interests in Nigeria.

7. For the Soviets, Four Power talks on Nigeria would imply recognition of their interests in an area until recently a Western

^{1/} British public and private investments in Nigeria (including Biafra) probably amount to at least \$500 million, a good part of this in oil holdings. Also, at least 20,000 British citizens live or work in Nigeria.

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preserve. Moreover, they might consider it useful -- for example, because of their China problem -- to improve the atmospherics of their relations with the US; in these circumstances, they might be more accommodating on an embargo if they thought the US set great store by this issue. But we think it far more likely that the USSR would refuse to join an international embargo agreement. The USSR would be extremely reluctant to risk such influence in Nigeria as its arms aid has brought, and would be skeptical about the effectiveness of the embargo -- especially as regards arms to Biafra. The Soviets would probably decide to warn the FMG that plans for an international embargo were being discussed. By so doing they would seek to place the onus on the West and gain greater influence in Lagos.

8. Moscow is not completely comfortable in its support of the FMG. Although the Soviet position in Nigeria has improved markedly since the war began, the FMG has kept it from being as favorable as the Soviets had hoped. There have been irritating bilateral problems, many of which have been exacerbated by Nigerian failure to win the war. The Soviets may be wondering how much longer the war will remain an asset for them.

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Nevertheless, the Soviet attitude toward an arms embargo will depend primarily on that of the FMG; and thus chances for Soviet acceptance are slim.

9. Within the past year, France has become the main supporter of Biafra's war effort; in particular, at least half of Biafra's arms are acquired with the help of France, although nearly all come through intermediaries. De Gaulle and his successors, without extending formal diplomatic recognition to Biafra, have publicly expressed French support of Biafra's right to self-determination. This policy appears to stem from a mixture of motives, including sympathy for the Biafrans, anti-Anglo-Saxon sentiments, and concern about the potential role of a strong and united Nigeria in West Africa in relation to France's former colonies in the area, particularly the Ivory Coast. The fact that a state-owned French oil company has prospecting and mining leases in promising areas in Biafra probably bolsters the French position but is by no means a decisive factor. In any event, de Gaulle's policy has kept Biafra afloat and incurred remarkably little African disapproval. The new French Government has shown no signs of changing it.

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10. French reaction to any proposal for an international embargo would probably include a reminder that France has officially embargoed arms to both sides and a reiteration of previous denials that it is supplying either side. At present, France opposes Four Power talks on the problem because it thinks the other three are too anti-Biafran. In general, however, France would probably be willing to participate eventually in such talks because of its desire to advance its Great Power claims, and particularly if it thought talks would in some fashion aid the Biafran cause. France would probably view the declaration of an international embargo as a step in this direction. Whether or not France would then agree to reduce or end its assistance would probably depend first on how much the FMG's supplies were actually reduced and secondly on how the struggle was going.

11. Arms also are supplied by or come from many other countries. Some governments which supply arms or permit shipments are motivated by political sympathies, others by profit. Not all could be persuaded to go along with an embargo, and some would continue to permit commercial arms dealers to operate.

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III. PROSPECTS FOR ENFORCING AN EMBARGO

12. Even if the UK, the USSR, France, and other European countries were to agree to an international embargo, a complete cessation of arms shipments to both sides is inconceivable. Both the FMG and Biafra already get up to half their military supplies through the black and grey arms markets, largely in Europe. Both have had two years in which to establish the necessary contacts and channels. A number of the smaller European countries -- including the Netherlands, Belgium, and Sweden -- declared an embargo on arms shipments to either side months ago, yet arms continue to funnel through them. Some countries -- such as Gabon, Portugal, and the Ivory Coast -- might refuse to join in the embargo, but even if they did, they might choose not to enforce it and might allow transit rights to Biafra. Nigeria, possessing open airfields and ports, could admit whatever ships or aircraft it chose. Thus enterprising dealers could put arms into both sides through transshipments. Even if all countries which declared an official embargo made strong efforts to enforce it, legal technicalities, false invoicing, and other dodges would be open to enterprising dealers.

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13. It is also likely that some countries agreeing to an embargo would give it only lip service. The USSR could easily channel arms through Algeria, Sudan, or the UAR -- all declared supporters of the FMG -- in an effort to retain its favorable image with the FMG. For similar reasons, and to protect British citizens and British investments in Nigeria, the UK could end government-to-government transactions but allow less visible arrangements to continue. France could easily continue to support Biafra, providing money and letting the Biafrans make their own arrangements.

IV. IMPACT OF A FULLY ENFORCED EMBARGO

14. In the highly unlikely event of an effective embargo, the level of military activity would soon diminish. Because of smaller stockpiles, Biafra would almost certainly be the first to run out of ammunition. But the Biafran guerrilla forces have had some practice in capturing supplies, rifles, and ammunition from their enemies and would certainly intensify their efforts. Although both parties tend to use up ammunition nearly as fast as it is delivered to the front, Biafra has had far more experience in conserving or rationing supplies. Moreover, the Biafran Army is slightly better organized and disciplined and might take

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more readily to guerrilla warfare. Although the Federal stocks are almost certainly larger, FMG commanders have been more dependent upon armored cars and artillery to support their operations and thus would presumably suffer relatively more if they were denied such materiel. Nevertheless, Federal forces would probably be able to make further advances along the main roads. But military activity would soon bog down and the FMG could almost certainly not achieve a decisive victory.

15. While an embargo would be likely to reduce the level of military activity, it would neither change the goals nor reduce the hostility between the warring parties. Biafra would have achieved two of its major objectives -- a form of international intervention in the war and a measure of recognition as an equal party in the dispute. It would be left with at least some territory under its control, though it would be a tiny enclave dependent on outside aid. But the FMG's effort to force Biafra to renounce its claims would have been thwarted. The resulting frustration would probably reduce the authority and effectiveness of the Federal government.