

NKJ.001.096.002/3

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*Cypt # 7 sent to
Hamilton*

APPROVED FOR RELEASE
DATE: APR 2001



BOARD OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

The Outlook for Nigeria

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26 January 1968
No. 2-68

~~S E C R E T~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 January 1968

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 2-68

SUBJECT: The Outlook for Nigeria*

We believe that, no matter what the military outcome, the protracted civil war and the political upheavals which preceded it have already considerably damaged Nigeria's postwar prospects for national development. It is difficult to see how a bitterly resentful and widely hated Ibo people could be reabsorbed into Nigeria's polity and society. Traditional tribal animosities and political enmities among non-Ibos are likely to worsen. Moreover, we see no national leadership in sight, military or civilian, which would be capable of assuaging intergroup antagonisms and gaining the broad popular backing needed to carry out the complicated tasks of political, economic, and social reconstruction. Hence, we estimate that political instability will plague Nigeria for some considerable time to come, and that tribal and regional strife will seriously threaten the country's unity.

Soviet influence in Nigeria, sparked by Moscow's willingness to provide military equipment to the Federal forces, has increased and is likely to persist after the war. The US and the UK have suffered a diminution of influence, in part because the Federal government has resented their declared noninvolvement in the civil war. After the war, Nigeria is likely to follow a more nonaligned and less pro-Western foreign policy than in the past, and the competition for influence among foreign countries will probably add one more disruptive factor to the Nigerian scene.

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* This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence and the Office of Economic Research in the Directorate of Intelligence and with the Clandestine Services.

~~S E C R E T~~

GROUP 1
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I. ORIGINS OF THE WAR

1. Nigeria's prolonged civil strife is rooted in the fact that increased contact among its diverse tribal and regional groups intensified rather than diminished mutual antagonisms. By the time of independence (1960), the generally better-educated Ibos from Eastern Nigeria already dominated commerce and the public services in much of the country. They displayed condescending attitudes toward the more tradition-bound Hausa-Fulani of the North and the more relaxed Yorubas of Western Nigeria. Most non-Ibos in turn developed considerable antipathy toward the pushy, clannish Easterners, ranging from Yoruba resentment of the Ibo superiority complex to the Hausa view of Ibos as "slave material."

2. Nigeria's founding fathers, both British and African, foreseeing some of the obstacles to national unity, fashioned a federation in which each of the three major tribal groups could dominate a region which embraced its own homeland as well as those of lesser tribes. The major weakness in the arrangement, however, was that, by weight of numbers alone, the Northerners were virtually assured of a permanent majority in the national parliament. As the scope and importance of the central government

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increased, its domination by the conservative Moslem North became intolerable to the more modernized Southerners. After efforts to loosen the Northern grip by constitutional means failed, Ibo army officers in early 1966 snuffed out the parliamentary system by assassinating key Hausa-Fulani leaders, which led to the establishment of a military regime, the Federal Military Government (FMG). A second military coup, this one by Northern officers against the Ibo head of the FMG, and a series of bloody massacres of Ibos and other Easterners living in the North set the stage for the secession last May of the Eastern Region as the "Republic of Biafra," and for the subsequent civil war.

II. THE VIEW FROM BIAFRA

3. The massacres and the lack of remorse displayed by the Northerners convinced the Ibos that they could not live in any Nigerian state dominated by Northerners. The more recent slaughter of civilians by Federal troops advancing through Ibo settlements in the Mid-West and the East and the bellicose statements of some Federal commanders give new substance to Ibo fears. Most Ibos now believe that the invading Federal forces are intent upon exterminating them or reducing them to permanent subjugation.

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4. Under these circumstances, the Ibo war effort is sustained by the seeming lack of any alternative to continued resistance. The battle performance of Biafran troops, though hardly brilliant, has been adequate to keep the numerically superior and better equipped Federal forces from penetrating deeply into the Ibo homeland. Colonel Ojukwu, Biafran Chief of State, appears to enjoy the support of the overwhelming majority of Ibos and his government is accepted, or at least not openly opposed, by the minority tribes under Biafran rule. A Federal blockade and seizure of key Biafran coastal towns has brought Eastern exports of petroleum and of palm oil, the traditional crop, to a halt and largely cut off Biafra from the outside world. But there is as yet no indication that the resultant economic pressures will soon force Ojukwu to sue for peace. Though nutritional standards have declined, local production assures an adequate supply of foodstuffs. Also a meager supply of arms and other goods procured from a variety of private sources in Europe is flown in by night via the Portuguese island of São Tome.

III. THE VIEW FROM LAGOS

5. Meanwhile in Lagos, rising pressures against the government of General Gowon call into question the ability of the FMG

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to sustain its war effort. Gowon has gained some stature merely by surviving in office for a year and a half and by projecting a much-needed image of dignity and honesty. But he has not won the support of all military commanders, the more headstrong of whom pay scant attention to orders from Lagos. Though well regarded by his fellow minority tribesmen of Northern Nigeria, who make up the bulk of the army's rank and file, Gowon has done little to attract popular support from Nigerians generally. So far as we can determine, his government is neither effective nor popular. His cabinet, the Federal Executive Council, is an assemblage of opportunistic politicians, distinguished mainly for their opposition to the former parliamentary regime. It serves as a bridge of sorts between the military chiefs and the civil service, but its members appear more interested in maneuvering for political dominance in postwar Nigeria than in coping with current problems.

6. Gowon is being pressed to speed the termination of the war. Federal military commanders, dissatisfied with the slow pace of battle, are urging a bolder approach with less regard for the possibilities of a negotiated peace, and with less attention to the prevention of atrocities against Ibo civilians. The chiefs

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of the minority tribes of the North are calling for an early end to the war, whether by victory or negotiation, alleging that they are suffering by the absence of the men who have been recruited into the army from their areas.

7. Furthermore, Nigeria's economy is beginning to show the strains caused by the dislocations of the war. For one thing, the cost of arms purchases abroad has contributed to a sharp drop in foreign exchange holdings and a decline in nonmilitary imports. Governmental revenues have fallen off since the virtual cessation of petroleum production last summer, and the costs of supporting a much larger army are straining the budget. The situation is by no means desperate, but the costs are beginning to pinch and the discomfort index will rise as the war continues.

8. Of no less importance to Gowon and a prime consideration in assessing the FMG's ability to achieve a military victory is the rumbling of rising tribal and political discord in a number of different areas. The tensions among the Yorubas and between the Yorubas and the government are particularly ominous. Old political feuds and traditional clan rivalries are reviving, together with a growing mutual distrust between Yoruba civilian politicians generally and FMG military leaders. In addition, local

feuds are developing among Northern tribes, e.g., between Tivs and Hausas, and in the multitribal Mid-West.

9. Gowon hopes to assuage some of the restive tribal groups, particularly the minorities in the North, by inaugurating a new internal arrangement of twelve subordinate states with a strong central government in place of the four formerly semi-autonomous regions. He has proclaimed 31 March as statehood day. In our view, all indications are that the new arrangement, if carried out as scheduled, would exacerbate rather than relieve tribal tensions. Some new states will contain antagonistic tribes or clans which already are bickering over the location of state capitals, control of patronage, and the division of regional assets. Moreover, nearly all Northern states will face a shortage of qualified local talent to staff ministries and commissions. Indeed, there are not even enough Northern civil servants to man the present single regional government, let alone six new states. Hence, many of the new states will either have to rely on educated Yorubas or expatriates in considerable numbers or face a breakdown in local government. But resident Yorubas in widely scattered Northern cities are increasingly resented by the local populace as were the Ibos in the past. Some Yorubas have already left the North for the safety of their homeland.

10. Finally, such key matters as the formula for allocation of federal revenues to the states and the degree of subordination of the states to the FMG are still undecided. The state leaders anticipate a much greater degree of autonomy than Gowon apparently has in mind. Indeed, some look forward to 31 March as a kind of independence day. At the least, the establishment of the state system is likely to encourage existing centrifugal tendencies.

IV. POSTWAR PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

11. We cannot at this stage predict with any confidence either the duration or the likely outcome of the war. We do not rule out the prospect of a victory by Biafra; i.e., the making good of its claim to independence. If the Biafrans succeed in driving the Federal forces out of Eastern Nigeria, or if the Federal forces withdraw from the struggle because of a crisis within the FMG, Biafra would probably gain diplomatic recognition from European states which have shown sympathy for their cause, i.e., Portugal and France, and probably from some African states as well. Its economic prospects would be fair to good, once its petroleum production resumed. Bolstered by the successful struggle for independence, it could probably maintain a higher level of political stability than normally prevails in West Africa.

12. A Biafran victory would almost certainly worsen the prospects for the rest of Nigeria. Much would depend on the circumstances of ending the war, the state of mind of Nigerian military commanders, and the degree of discord among the tribal components of the army and of the country. At the least there would be considerable confusion, a venting of tensions among tribes and factions, and some violence, which could lead to tribal warfare, secessions, or a general break up into smaller component states.

13. On the other hand, a Federal military victory would not ensure a stable, unified Nigeria. Rather, it too would be likely to trigger a release of pent up antagonisms among non-Ibos. The FMG, lacking any firm institutional framework or national consensus, would have to rely mainly on the army and police to make its writ effective. The capabilities of the police are limited, and their numbers too few for maintaining order over large areas. As for the army, Gowon himself regards it as a national liability in terms of maintaining order and security. The troops have been hastily mobilized and are largely untrained and undisciplined. Its few competent officers would be too thinly spread to act effectively and in concert. Yet Gowon apparently does not plan to draw heavily upon civilian political leadership to assist in administering a postwar Nigeria. And, if he follows his intention

of discarding some of the important civilians now in the FMG, he would probably speed the emergence of new civil strife.

14. There would also be a problem of demobilizing or re-assigning much of the 60,000-man Federal army. Many of the new recruits who came from the ranks of the unemployed or from menial positions have high expectations of mustering out benefits, which may not be fulfilled because of financial stringencies. The return to civilian life of large numbers of disgruntled veterans, in the unsettled conditions likely to prevail after the war, could lead to a resurgence of the traditional practice of employment of bands of armed thugs by local political bosses, or simply to more disorder.

15. In addition to the task of preserving some sort of unity and order in non-Biafran Nigeria, the FMG would face the formidable problem of dealing with the defeated Ibos. It is difficult to see how a bitterly resentful and widely hated Ibo people could be reabsorbed into Nigerian polity and society. If the Federal army is assigned the task of pacifying Iboland, there would almost certainly be continued violence, if not massacres, which could lead to a resurgence of Ibo resistance.

16. Some of these horrors might be avoided if an effective political leader or group, civilian or military, were to appear

on the scene and win broad popular support. But we see no promising person or organization on the horizon. The net effect of two years of coups, assassinations, massacres, and civil war has been to obliterate the institutions and relationships of the old federal system, and to deplete the ranks of capable military officers and political leaders. Hence, we doubt that the fragile political and administrative apparatus and mediocre leaders of the FMG will be capable of dealing effectively with the complicated tasks of political, social, and economic reconstruction. In sum, we believe, whatever the outcome of the war, that political instability will plague Nigeria for some considerable time to come and that tribal and regional strife will seriously threaten the country's unity.

V. NIGERIA'S FOREIGN RELATIONS

17. During the course of the war a considerable shift has occurred in Nigeria's relations with foreign powers. The most conspicuous development is the rise of Soviet influence in Lagos, largely sparked by Moscow's provision of military aircraft and other arms to the FMG at a stage in the war when no other great power was willing to do so. The USSR has furnished over US \$5 million of military equipment and several score of technicians. In

addition, it has renewed earlier offers of economic aid, particularly for the rebuilding of roads and bridges after the war. In the wake of Soviet involvement, the East European Communist countries and the UAR have also contributed to the FMG's war effort.

18. The Soviets are moving quickly to exploit along customary lines the advantages offered by their new acceptance in Lagos: they are planning to add some 24 additional personnel to their mission; they are breathing some life into hitherto dormant Soviet-Nigerian friendship societies and forming new ones; they are also lavishing attention on leftist trade unions, courting journalists and broadcasters, and disseminating Soviet propaganda including anti-US material. This ostentatious display has convinced a good many Nigerians, including members of the educated elite, that the Soviets are helping their efforts to preserve Nigerian unity. Barring a major blunder, the USSR can expect to develop its influence further at very little cost or risk, at least so long as the war lasts and probably for some time thereafter.

19. Recent Soviet successes in building influence stand out the more starkly, in that prewar Nigeria had been virtually a Western preserve. The US since 1962 has extended over US \$200 million in aid. But most Nigerians, again including the educated

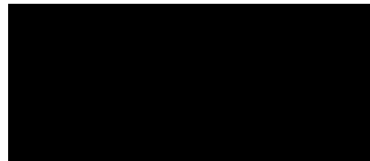
elite, resent the US policy of noninvolvement in the civil war, believing that our refusal to ship arms to the FMG either is based on a pro-Biafran bias or reflects a lack of interest in preserving a unified Nigeria. The UK also lost considerable influence early in the war by taking a stand similar to that of the US. Subsequent arms sales to the FMG have only partially restored Lagos' confidence in UK intentions.

20. The US will continue to maintain some influence in postwar Nigeria, if only because most Nigerians are aware of the past willingness of the US to provide large amounts of economic and other aid. The FMG is not without qualms about rising Soviet influence and probably hopes that the US will furnish considerable aid for reconstruction and for subsequent economic development. Nonetheless, the postwar outlook is for a Nigerian foreign policy more nonaligned and less pro-Western than in the past. There will probably be considerable competition for influence between the USSR and the Western powers, and this in itself is likely to inject a further element of disharmony in Nigerian internal affairs.

21. Should Biafra make good its claim to independence, it would probably maintain friendly relations with France and Portugal, the sources of sympathy and clandestine support during the war.

Anti-British feeling, now at a high pitch, would certainly persist for some time, and would make it difficult for Shell-BP and other UK commercial interests to reestablish relations. A postwar Biafra would soon look to Washington for a considerable amount of aid and support, and its relations with the US would largely be determined by the response.

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