

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
NO FOREIGN DISSEM

5 August 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Nigeria: The Federal Military Government's War
Aims vis-a-vis the Ibos

I. The Federal Government's War Aims

1. The federal government's immediate war aim is to establish federal control over Biafra. The federal authorities are willing to negotiate an end to the war, but we see no indications that Lagos would be satisfied with anything but a settlement on its own terms, including a renunciation of secession by the Biafrans and the establishment of federal authority--probably in the form of federal occupation forces--over the whole of the former Eastern Region. The federal government almost certainly would not accept General Ojukwu in any leadership position, and many Nigerians might well demand his death or imprisonment. There are no indications that Lagos would consider granting the East-Central State any special status in the federation. There is a remote possibility that the Nigerians would consider adjusting the East-Central State boundaries--possibly even to include a seaport at the expense of the Rivers State.

2. Probably the most important long-range goal of those now in control of the federal military government is that of ensuring that no single tribe ever again dominates politics at the federal level. Since the military coup of July 1966, power has been held by minority tribal elements from the "middlebelt" area--the southern part of the former Northern Region. At the time of the July coup, the middle-belters had the support of the Hausa-Fulanis but this was primarily because the coup was directed against the then Ibo regime. The present aims of the middle-belters and the Hausa-Fulanis coincide, but the minority tribesmen remain determined to prevent domination of the government by the Hausa-Fulanis. In our view, an end to the Ibo problem would almost certainly mark the beginning of serious political differences between the minority tribesmen and the Hausa-Fulanis.

3. The minority tribesmen now in control of the federal government are not bent on genocide against the Ibos, and the top leaders, like General Gowon, will probably take

~~NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
NO FOREIGN DISSEM

great pains to prevent the massacre of Ibos if the federal forces ever do overrun the Biafran enclave. It is almost certain, however, that a federal victory would result in anti-Ibo atrocities by front-line troops. The extent of these would probably depend on the manner in which the federal victory was achieved. The war has already gone on for so long and so much bitterness has built up on both sides, however, that during the first few days after the "liberation" there would probably be a fair amount of retribution particularly against Ibo soldiers and probably also against civilians. After this, Gowon and his senior officers would probably be able to contain the atrocities.

II. Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba Intentions Toward the Ibos

4. There is of course no love lost between the Hausa-Fulanis and the Ibos, and even before the first military coup in January 1966 there was much pent-up anti-Ibo sentiment in the north. Over a million Ibos lived in the former Northern Region, and because of their education and ambition, they held the best jobs. The Hausa-Fulanis regarded the Ibos as pushy, arrogant, treacherous, greedy, and of course pagan. The depth of the anti-Ibo sentiment was demonstrated during the September-October 1966 riots in the Northern Region during which at least 7,000 and possibly twice that many Ibos were killed.

5. These anti-Ibo feelings have probably become more intense since the war, and especially as it has become more and more difficult to explain the federal government's inability to win a military victory. Left to themselves, many, perhaps most, Hausa-Fulanis would probably punish the Ibos severely for the secession, and given the means, many northerners might well undertake a bloodbath of major proportions. Senior Hausa-Fulani officers would probably try to avoid this, however, and Gowon and the army leaders from the minority tribes would probably be able to contain the northern troops who would come into contact with the Ibos in the event of a federal victory. It is probably worthwhile to note that thus far in the war there have been no examples of what would happen if northern troops gained control of areas of heavy Ibo population, because the Ibos have evacuated their towns in the face of advancing federal troops.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
~~NO FOREIGN DISS.~~

6. The Yorubas are also basically anti-Ibo. The Westerners see the Ibos as rivals for the better jobs and as cultural inferiors. Most Yorubas, however, probably feel much closer to the Ibos in education and background than to their northern brothers, and probably quite a few Yorubas sympathize with the Ibo attempt at self-determination. We do not believe the Yorubas would engage in any significant amount of atrocities against the Ibos.

III. The Ibo Elite

7. We do not believe that the military leaders intend to eradicate the Ibo elite, but neither do we believe the Ibos will be permitted to play any meaningful role in the federal government for the foreseeable future. The federal leaders almost certainly would not entrust any responsible federal positions to the Ibos. All the Lagos government has so far promised is that Ibos would control the East-Central State and that Ibos would be represented on the Federal Executive Council. We believe representation in the latter would probably be at best token, and that although Ibo civilians might be permitted to hold positions in the state government, the federal government would probably insist on federal occupation forces in Biafra.

8. It is difficult to see any peaceful resolution of the problem of the Ibo elite if the federal government regains control of Biafra. Federal leaders appear firmly committed to the division of the former Eastern Region into three states--a factor which has won considerable support for Lagos among the Eastern minority tribes. If the Eastern Region is so divided, the Ibo elite would be confined to a very small, essentially rural area. These Ibos would not be accepted with ease in the other two eastern states or the Midwest State, and they would probably be afraid to move to the northern states. The Western and Lagos States already have a relative abundance of trained manpower among the Yorubas. Under the best of circumstances the confinement of the majority of the Ibo elite would provide significant problems for neighboring states, and under the circumstances which would prevail after the war, this situation would probably be a continuing source of serious trouble.

~~NO FOREIGN DISSEM~~
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~