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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

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February 15, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

FROM: Richard T. Kennedy *RTK*

SUBJECT: Visit to Nigeria

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I visited Nigeria from January 26 to February 5, 1970, together with Mr. Claus Ruser and Mr. William Mithoefer of the Department of State. From January 26 to February 1, we remained in Lagos interviewing personnel at the Embassy, USAID, and non-U.S. organizations. Discussions were held with Ambassador Trueheart, USAID Director Adler, Ambassador Labouisse (UNICEF), and British High Commissioner Sir Leslie Glass, among others. From February 1 to February 5 we toured the southern area of the former Biafran enclave, meeting with Colonel Obasanjo (the General Officer commanding Nigeria's Third Marine Commando Division) and relief personnel operating throughout the area.

We also visited hospitals, relief feeding stations and distribution points, off-loading and warehouse facilities in Port Harcourt and Red Cross Operating Centers. During the period we visited nine villages in the interior assisting Dr. George Lythcott, a U.S. physician, who was participating in a medical-nutritional survey under the sponsorship of the Nigerian Ministry of Health and the Nigerian Red Cross.

The Situation

There is widespread malnutrition in the area of the former Biafran enclave. The situation differs markedly, however, from village to village. The Owerri-Orlu area, which was the last to fall to the Nigerian forces, evidenced the greatest need both as to numbers and severity. It was clear that extraordinary efforts would be required quickly if the already bad situation in this area were not to deteriorate further.

The flow of refugees, though continuing, seemed to be tapering off. Those who had recently left refugee camps in federally-held areas where they had been receiving regular feeding through the ICRC were in noticeably better condition than those who had been longer away from the refugee camps.

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The medical-nutritional survey covering some 50 villages and about 4,000 randomly selected individuals is nearing completion. Dr. Lythcott will return this week with preliminary data on its findings.

The security situation is markedly improved. Policy have taken on the major role in law enforcement, traffic control, etc. The troops for the most part are in cantonment areas. Scattered incidents still occur but a major effort has been made by Nigerian military authorities to control troops in the area and to prevent such incidents or undisciplined behaviour. Fear of the federal forces, which characterized the early days following the collapse, is diminishing. Ibo personnel, formerly employed in hospitals and clinics, are beginning to return to work -- the numbers are small thus far but all evidence indicates they will increase rapidly in the coming weeks.

Continued presence of large numbers of troops in the area will pose growing problems. Troops are occupying schools and other facilities for lack of other suitable billeting in most areas. This impedes return to normalcy and complicates the relief feeding problem. If the schools could be opened soon, much feeding could be accomplished through them with greater ease and effectiveness than is now possible. The troops have little to do and efforts to keep them busy will pose growing burdens on commanders. Moreover, they are consuming some local food which otherwise would be available for the population in need. The Nigerian military is aware of the problem but is not yet sure how to deal with it -- where the troops should be stationed and how soon demobilization can begin are questions to which answers have not yet been developed.

The FMG will not permit the use of the airfields within the former Biafran enclave for relief purposes. However, illogical in terms of the capability which these fields afford to meet urgent relief needs, the FMG at the highest levels consider these fields to be symbols of Biafran resistance and will not employ them. There was growing evidence that the airfields would be rendered unusable by the federal forces.

Problems of Relief

The immediate problems in the relief effort are distribution, organization, and momentum. There is clearly enough imported food in the area or on the way to meet the estimated needs. It is equally clear, however, that there is insufficient transport either to move the required quantities to main distribution points or to effect the distribution to remote areas where a large portion of those in need are located.

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Local transport for hire will not be adequate to pick up the slack. A major effort is needed to put into use promptly the large number of vehicles being delivered by foreign donors. Delays in moving these vehicles to the relief area are seriously impeding relief efforts.

Main roads are in reasonably good condition and capable of handling the relief traffic for the present. Continued hard use will result in deterioration, however, given the lack of maintenance over the past year or two. This deterioration is likely to become a significant impediment to relief efforts with the onset of the rainy season in late spring this year unless maintenance efforts are significantly increased now. The many damaged bridges, which have been temporarily improved, need attention now if they are to continue serviceable under the growing traffic load.

There is some local food available but not in sufficient quantity to have a real impact in the next few months. The Red Cross is attempting to increase its purchase of food elsewhere in Nigeria but quantities available have been short of expectations. The slack will have to be made up by imported food. Some attention is being given to the need for a large scale planting program before the rainy season begins. Substantial imports of seed will be needed soon, however, if this program is to be effective.

The organization of the relief effort was all but chaotic. Expatriate personnel (in particular U.S. physicians from the NCDC Atlanta) with relief teams are making a monumental effort, but their efforts alone will be insufficient if the organizational arrangements are not improved quickly. Some steps are being taken to improve the coordination among the various relief agencies and the Nigerian Red Cross, but there is a crying need for a real organizational overhaul at every level from Lagos to the field teams. A complicating factor, which will grow in significance, is the relationship between the Nigerian Red Cross, the National Rehabilitation Commission and the rehabilitation commissions of the several states in eastern Nigeria. The State Rehab commissions are evidencing a growing tendency to assert their prerogatives but lack the organization, personnel, or the motivation of the Red Cross. Their bureaucratic concerns may impede rather than enhance the relief effort in the coming weeks.

There is evidence that the momentum of the relief effort is picking up after a very slow start in the early days after the collapse. The objective must be to sustain and increase this momentum. The aforementioned growing influence of the states, however, may work against

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this effort. The feeding targets established by the Nigerian Red Cross and the Ministry of Economic Development are substantially below the estimated needs projected by the Western report. The higher estimates are now accepted as the basis for planning by Embassy Lagos and efforts are being made to gain acceptance of them by the Nigerian authorities.

If the targets are to be increased the impetus must come from Nigerian sources. The nutritional survey now in process will help to confirm real extent of the need and establish realistic feeding targets. Hopefully, the Ministry of Health and Red Cross will urge an increase in the feeding targets based on the findings of the survey. For the present, however, maximum effort must be devoted to increasing the amount of food being delivered to distribution points to meet at least the minimum targets already set.

Planning

We could see no evidence of meaningful, detailed contingency planning. There is no doubt that the collapse came sooner than any, including the Nigerians, expected. Neither the Nigerians nor we were fully prepared for it. The Western report of nutritional needs which had been completed in November under U/CF auspices had not been brought to the attention of Federal Nigerian authorities in a meaningful way until mid January. Our Embassy had been given a summary of its conclusions but the significance of the conclusions for the post-hostilities period was not grasped. Many of the questions now arising had not been thought through in advance and answers to questions which seem obvious were not available ahead of time -- e.g. port and airfield capacities, licensing requirements, fuel storage availability, road and bridge condition, means for transshipment of supplies and equipment from Lagos to the East. All of these questions could have and should have been foreseen, but were not. The staffing and organization of our AID mission were inadequate to the magnitude of the task. The need for personnel actually stationed in and functioning in the east at major operations centers such as Port Harcourt and Enugu had been recognized. But only after several weeks are personnel actually being assigned there in numbers needed for effective operation.

The Embassy/USAID Approach

The attitude of the Embassy seemed to be somewhat "business as usual." The Embassy's principal concern centers on relations with

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the Nigerian Government. These relations must be improved if an effective relief effort is to be mounted. But if fear that our relations might be disturbed is the overriding concern, the tendency will be to do nothing to press for improved relief efforts. It is important that the relief issue not be made a political issue. It is equally important that the credit for improved relief go to the Nigerians -- our own profile in these respects should be as low as possible. There is a middle ground, however, in which the Embassy, using technical channels and discreet contacts, can bring the facts before the Nigerians meaningfully without involving political pressures.

Organizationally, the Ambassador was the focal point in the Embassy for relief matters. No one below the Ambassador himself was charged in the Embassy with the overall coordination of the effort. USAID Director Adler was the principal operator and carried the bulk of the load himself. His resources were thin. (On our arrival he expressed the view that his personnel resources were adequate for the task. Within a few days, however, he had developed a comprehensive list of additional operating personnel needed and was working on a complete reorganization to enhance the capability on the relief side.)

As noted, political pressures and public relations announcements of our role in relief are most likely to be counterproductive. In this we agree with the Embassy views. Given the basic inclination of the Embassy to avoid any step which might cause difficulties in our relations, however, it will be essential for some time that the Embassy be impressed with the urgent need to improve the relief effort. Otherwise any report of improving conditions will be seen by the Embassy as justification for relaxation of its own efforts.

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