

GEHEIM

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"If peace is rejected by our enemy, then I will fight him with the best I have, I will harass him and make his life unbearable for as long as there is breath within me. To the last man, to the last inch, I will fight him until he leaves my people alone."

General Ojukwu, 1 May 1969

Biafra Two Years After Secession

In nearly 23 months of civil war, Biafra—originally coterminous with Nigeria's former Eastern Region—has been reduced in size to less than one-fifth the territory Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu led into secession on 30 May 1967. The inland enclave now controlled by the Biafrans includes only two towns of any size and would not be viable as an independent entity. Nevertheless, the will to resist is as strong as it ever was among the five to seven million predominantly Ibo tribesmen now in Biafra. Despite the loss of Umuahia, the secessionists' provisional administrative center, government administration continues from dispersed locations, arms and other supplies flow in via the hazardous airborne lifeline, and a highly motivated Ibo tribe is finding new and ingenious ways to manufacture war materials and improvise substitutes for imports. Organized resistance by the Biafran Army will almost certainly continue as long as the means are available. Even if the secessionists are defeated in the conventional war, the Ibos will probably continue the struggle in some form of guerrilla warfare.

BIAFRA TODAY

Biafra has managed to maintain relatively intact most of its governmental machinery. From central government ministries down to local authorities, day-to-day business goes on, with even the judicial system still functioning. Biafra's parliament, the Consultative Assembly and House of Chiefs, whose membership is predominantly Ibo, but which does include some minority tribesmen,

meets fairly regularly to approve major policy decisions made by General Ojukwu, the head of state, and commander in chief of the armed forces.

Ojukwu controls all aspects of government and the military, and evidently enjoys the overwhelming support of the Biafrans. It is not known where Ojukwu established his headquarters when

he evacuated the former secessionist administrative center of Umuahia last month, but he is believed to be operating from the vicinity of Orlu, where many of the government offices and foreign relief headquarters have been relocated. Considerable disruption occurred when Umuahia was evacuated, and the Biafrans have apparently now decentralized their civilian administration to avoid another disruption if they lose Orlu. The Biafran Army has decentralized its supply system, possibly in preparation for an eventual guerrilla war.

Ojukwu's style of governing is highly personal, but he does rely on advice from a number of close associates and is sensitive to the counsel of various elements of Ibo society. Chief among his advisers is Home Affairs Commissioner Christopher Mojekwu, who was instrumental in gaining Portuguese and French assistance and who is probably the leading exponent of continuing the war no matter what the cost. Others who have been influential in gaining foreign support for Biafra's cause are Francis Ibiam, the former governor of Eastern Nigeria, Kenneth Dike, former vice chancellor of the University of Ibadan, and Michael Okpara, former Eastern Region premier. Other advisers normally work through the Executive Council, a body of 20-25 men which reportedly meets weekly with Ojukwu. The two top military leaders are Generals Alex Madiobo, an Ibo, and Phillip Effiong, a minority tribesman. Ojukwu himself plays the key role in directing military strategy and tactics, however, and has even assumed direct command of field troops in critical situations.

Although Biafra's survival thus far owes much to Ojukwu's leadership, there is no reason to believe that the Ibos' fight for independence would collapse if Ojukwu were no longer on the scene. The traditional leaders of the Ibo tribe have consistently backed the independence pol-

icy, and although individual Ibos have chosen to give up the fight, the tribe as a whole, and probably most minority tribesmen in Biafran-held territory, remain committed to the struggle for a separate existence. This commitment results in large measure from a genuine fear on the part of the Biafrans that the "northern hordes" are bent on exterminating them.

Biafra's active foreign policy has been one of the key factors in the prolongation of the civil war. Ibo diplomats, who had formed the core of the Nigerian Foreign Ministry, used their established contacts to good advantage in getting foreign support. These Biafrans were instrumental in gaining recognition from Tanzania, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Zambia, and recently Haiti, as well as in turning French sympathies for Biafra into positive moral, financial, and military support.

The Biafrans' technical ingenuity has also made a considerable contribution to the war effort. Soon after secession, Ojukwu established the Science Group, staffed with Western-trained Ibo scientists and technicians. This group kept the Port Harcourt oil refinery operating after all foreign technicians had left, manufactured homemade armored cars using sheet metal, built crude rockets tipped with grenades to fire at federal planes, and constructed antipersonnel and anti-vehicle mines. After the loss of the Port Harcourt refinery, the Biafrans constructed backyard refineries that continue to provide diesel fuel, kerosene, and even low octane gasoline.

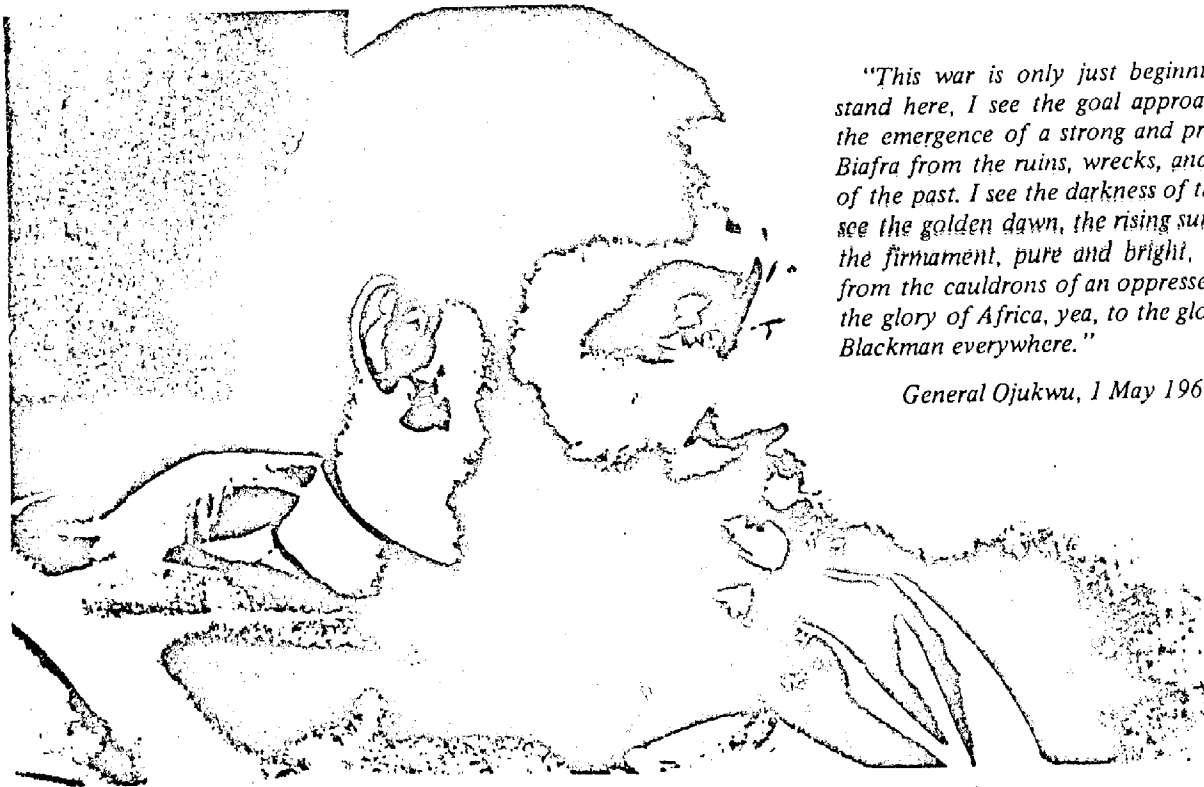
Biafra's internal economy continues to function, although mainly at a subsistence level. A few substitute industries have been developed to replace imports. Relief organizations operating in Biafra have spent considerable amounts of foreign exchange on local food and services, and the Biafrans have been able to use at least some of this to purchase munitions.

THE WAR

Biafra's ability to hold off further federal advances into the densely populated Ibo heartland would seem to depend primarily on how well the supply of arms to the secessionists can be continued. Throughout the war the secessionists have captured considerable amounts of arms from the Nigerians, but it was a marked increase in arms supplies from abroad last September—as a result of the French decision to provide military assistance—that enabled the Biafrans to halt a federal drive which at that time seemed certain to end in military victory in a matter of weeks. Beginning in September a stalemate prevailed in the war until April, when a drive by the federal 1st Division along an unexpected route forced the secessionists to evacuate Umuahia. Shortly thereafter the Biafrans recaptured the important road

junction town of Owerri on the southern front. The 1st Division has become bogged down in Umuahia, however, and the Biafrans, although still on the offensive in the south, do not appear capable of any significant gains in the immediate future.

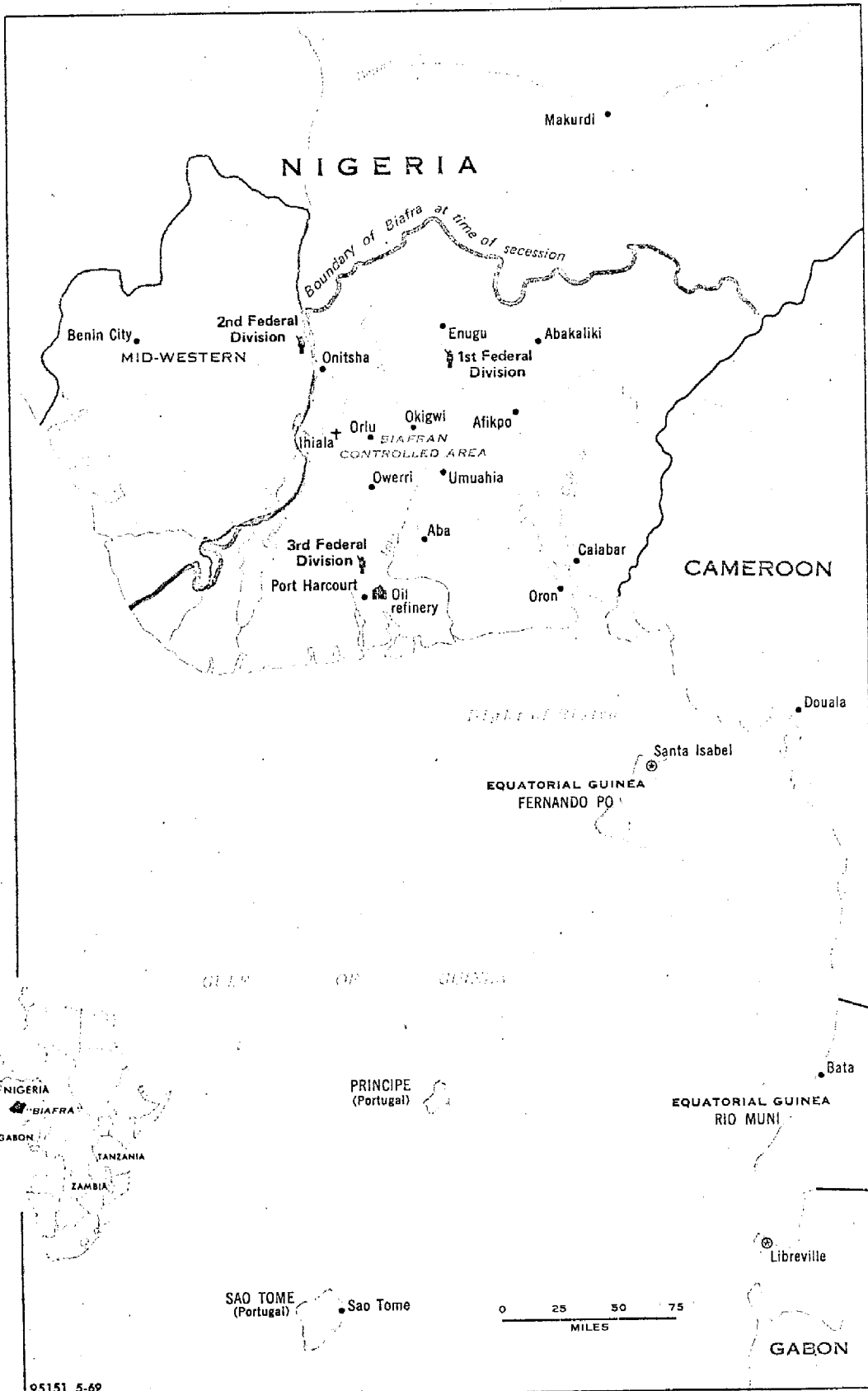
The Biafrans have had some success recently in operations across the Niger River in the Midwest State in an area in which small units have operated almost continuously since late 1967. Although these latest incursions have so far been mainly harassing actions, they have kept the federal 2nd Division off balance. Ojukwu's general war strategy continues to be simply to hold out against the federal forces in the hope that the Lagos regime will fall apart as a result of local tensions.



"This war is only just beginning. As I stand here, I see the goal approach. I see the emergence of a strong and prosperous Biafra from the ruins, wrecks, and carnage of the past. I see the darkness of the past. I see the golden dawn, the rising sun rending the firmament, pure and bright, emerging from the cauldrons of an oppressed past to the glory of Africa, yea, to the glory of the Blackman everywhere."

General Ojukwu, 1 May 1969, Owerri

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Ojukwu maintains that he favors a negotiated settlement of the war, but has so far refused to agree in advance that such a settlement be worked out within the context of a united Nigeria. This is a precondition on which the federal government insists. Biafran and Nigerian delegates were present in Monrovia last month when the Organization of African Unity Committee on Nigeria made another in a series of mediatory efforts, but the conference broke down when the Biafrans would not negotiate on the basis of "one Nigeria." Ojukwu has thus far insisted that a cease-fire or truce precede negotiations, or at least that one or the other be the first item on the agenda. Lagos maintains it will agree to a cease-fire only if Biafra renounces secession. Even if serious negotiations do eventually materialize, major, perhaps insurmountable, problems will arise over basic substantive issues, such as the question of who will be responsible for the security of the Ibos. Lagos will almost certainly demand that federal troops be stationed in Biafra, and Ojukwu has consistently rejected this. Indeed, the question of who would be responsible for the security of the Ibos was probably the single most important reason the Biafrans seceded in the first place.

THE ARMS AIRLIFT

Although the arms airlift has operated virtually without interruption since September, it continues to be dependent on a number of factors, any one of which could quickly change and disrupt the whole supply operation. Federal ground forces are only some 15 miles from Ihiala airstrip. At one point last fall they advanced to within artillery range before they were driven back. The airstrips are very vulnerable to air attack. Ihiala is defended by two Bofors guns which have apparently struck terror into the hearts of the Egyptian and Nigerian pilots of the federal air force. The airlift is carried out for the most part on overworked, rickety aircraft, and the seces-

sionists are often hard pressed to come up with the money to pay the crews.

An equally serious threat to a continued flow of arms to Biafra at the current rate lies in the uncertainty of French support following De Gaulle's resignation. Ivory Coast's Houphouet-Boigny appears deeply committed to Biafra and willing to spare no effort to ensure that arms are available. If French support is lost, however, there would be a significant reduction in the arms airlift, a development which might lead to an early end to the conventional war. Aid has continued, and may even have been increased, under the interim French Government. No final policy decision toward Biafra will be made until after the French presidential election is decided.

THE RELIEF PROBLEM

A food shortage persists in Biafra where some two to three million people have been displaced by the civil war, including approximately 500,000 who fled Umuahia in April. Malnutrition remains a serious problem, but the general food situation, which was probably at its worst last October, has improved recently, and widespread death by starvation no longer appears an immediate danger. The improvement is mainly due to the efforts of the International Red Cross and a number of religious relief organizations, which are presently feeding an estimated 1.5 million Biafrans; these agencies are currently flying in relief supplies from Dahomey, the Portuguese island of Sao Tome, and Equatorial Guinea. In addition, the Biafrans themselves have made a major effort to increase food production, and a large harvest is expected to begin in early June.

Biafran relief remains a political issue, with both sides in the civil war showing little inclination to compromise important military and political considerations in the interest of the refugees. The Biafrans have always recognized the

propaganda value of the refugee situation, and they probably will continue to reject any arrangements, such as a land relief corridor, that could be used by Nigeria for military advantage. The secessionists are also opposed to any relief measures in which Nigeria would participate. Federal leaders have become more aware of the propaganda value of appearing willing to aid Biafran refugees, but Lagos remains basically suspicious of all foreign relief agencies and probably prefers that no relief at all go to the secessionists. At any rate, it now appears that the Biafrans will be able to hold the refugee problem within manageable proportions in the foreseeable future, provided foreign relief continues somewhere near its present scale.

OUTLOOK

Biafra's only chance to establish its sovereign existence would seem to lie in an eventual victory by default as a result of the disintegration of the federal regime. Assuming federal forces maintain their cohesion, the secessionists are unlikely to regain much more of the former Eastern Region; nor do they appear to have the weapons to retake Port Harcourt. On the other hand, a federal military victory is not within sight either. Neither side

in the civil war appears inclined to alter its basic position on a negotiated settlement; Lagos insists that Biafra renounce secession, and Biafra is unwilling to do so. Ojukwu is convinced that the Lagos regime will fall apart from internal pressures if only he can hold out long enough. He probably is right, although he may have to hold out much longer than he thinks. To prevent significant federal advances, Biafra will almost certainly have to continue to receive arms close to the present rate, a factor over which Ojukwu has very little control.

If the Biafran arms supply were drastically reduced, either by the withdrawal of French support or by interdiction of the secessionist airstrips, it seems likely that federal forces would win the conventional war within months. There would then follow a long, drawn-out resistance, including some type of guerrilla warfare supported by the overwhelming majority of the Ibos. If the arms supply continues at its present level, the prospect over the next several months is for the conventional war to drag on inconclusively, with federal forces chipping slowly away at what remains of Biafra but unable to deliver the coup de grace.

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