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PA/HO Department of State
E.O. 12958, as amended
April 21, 2005

THE WHITE HOUSE

~~SECRET~~ ~~ALL~~ ~~US~~ ONLY

WASHINGTON

Friday - October 24, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY KISSINGER

ACTION

FROM: Roger Morris

←

SUBJECT: Nigeria/Biafra Peace Initiative

As I reported to you last week, Elliot Richardson is moving ahead on the relief initiative (as instructed by the President) to try to break the impasse on daylight flights. On October 19 we gave our "understanding" to the Biafrans as to the inviolability of the airlift. Their answer is due tomorrow. I am satisfied that State has pursued this much of the President's instructions with precision and vigor.

I am still very concerned, however, about the low-key way they are going about a six-week-old Presidential instruction to mount a serious peace probe. Richardson seems to have the message from you. He has decided to deal with the delicate problem of bringing around the Secretary by having Newsom send a memo to Sec. Rogers which Richardson will endorse on its way in.

Yet it has taken two weeks just to get a draft of that memo (bootleg copy at Tab A). Not only does it contain AF's usual distortions of fact, but also -- in making a watered-down probe subject to prior Federal acceptance -- it directly contravenes the President's instructions to pursue an even-handed and vigorous initiative.

It may be, of course, that Richardson will correct these major flaws as the memo comes through him. But if he doesn't, we face exactly the same situation Sec. Rogers brought to San Clemente on the Nigerian problem. That is, State "is agreeing" to launch an initiative as the President desires, but in a manner and toward a goal directly opposite to the President's intentions.

Having all too recently encountered Richardson's wrath, I have every desire to give him the benefit of the doubt in this issue. And in keeping with your instructions to us to be tactful in such matters, I have not given him the specific Terms of Reference which you signed on this matter on October 2.

I would like your authorization, though, to have a quiet session with Richardson to: (a) bring him in on the Norman Cousins initiative and our follow-up, and (b) suggest the importance (both for success

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and consistency with the President's wishes) of an even-handed and flexible probe. I would still not hand him the Terms of Reference, but rather use them as "talking points" to illustrate what I understand from you to be the President's preferred approach. All, to be sure, with tact. As a refresher, the Cousins are at Tab B.

documents

This action takes on greater urgency, of course, with each day of mounting starvation (and thus greater rigidity of position) in Biafra. (I am sending you separately a complete up-dating on Biafra for the President, including an analysis of major problems we face over the next two-three months.)

Recommendation :

That you authorize me to see Elliot Richardson to discuss past actions (Norman Cousins) and terms of a future US peace initiative.

Approve

HK OCT 28 1969

Disapprove

See me

_____.

Attachment

Tab A - Advance copy of State draft memo from David Newsom to Sec. Rogers.

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tab a
TAG A

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ASSISTANT SECRETARY

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TO: The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S
The Under Secretary

FROM: AF - David D. Newsom

SUBJECT: Nigeria--Recommendations of African Interdepartmental Group--INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

Following your decision that we should undertake exploratory soundings on the Nigerian problem before considering further steps, Mr. Brubeck has now completed four weeks of talks in Europe and Africa. His findings, together with other current evidence, were reviewed on October 10 by the African Interdepartmental Group. Its conclusions and recommendations are summarized below.

Relief

We are engaged in a follow-up of your statement of September 9 in a last effort to impel Biafran acceptance of ICRC daylight relief flights. All evidence suggests that the Biafrans remain determined to prevent these flights, using the need for third-party guarantees as their ostensible reason. The only chance we see of persuading them to agree is to make the political cost of refusal too high. They are under considerable external pressure to accept and, in the hope it may be decisive, Ambassador Ferguson is making one final USG effort in support of current ICRC negotiations with the Biafrans. Ferguson has approached the Biafrans with the offer of a Presidential statement that the USG "understands and accepts" the Nigerian undertaking not to violate the agreement for military advantage. This is as far as we can go to meet the Biafran demand for third-party guarantees (their other demands are probably negotiable). Ferguson has asked for a "yes or no" response, warning that if the Biafrans reject what we consider a reasonable agreement, the USG would feel free to make public its view on the merits of the Biafran position. We are advising the Nigerians, ICRC, the French and the British of this initiative, and have requested the support of Ivory Coast President Houphouet-Boigny (as the closest supporter of the Biafrans). We are now awaiting the Biafran response.

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Political1. Assessment of Situation

The situation remains essentially as summarized in your memorandum of October 6 to the President. Barring a negotiated settlement, the war could drag on indefinitely, certainly for the next six months. Neither side seems under sufficient pressure to make the concessions necessary for compromise. Gowon insists on acceptance of "one Nigeria" and the beginning of "serious" negotiations before a ceasefire. Ojukwu insists on unconditional negotiations accompanied by a ceasefire. African efforts have generally concentrated on an all-or-nothing negotiation of the basic issues at the summit. These efforts seem to us as well as other observers to have suffered from inept preparation and handling. The latest such effort at mediation, by OAU Secretary General Telli with the Emperor's sponsorship, has foundered. Our information suggests Telli was presenting different terms for negotiation to the two sides.

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both.*

At the same time, there are some possibly encouraging new elements in the situation.

(a) Both Gowon and Ojukwu have indicated their readiness for confidential, lower-level exploratory talks, but there has been no systematic effort to exploit this avenue as a way around the present impasse. Yet the occasional, limited contacts that we know of, as well as Ambassador Ferguson's Cross River talks and the sporadic, often conflicting exchanges taking place now through various African third and even fourth parties make us think that exploratory talks are possible.

(b) Among the Africans the flurry of recent negotiating initiatives, though ill-prepared and often at cross-purposes, shows a mounting concern to end the war. Even the committed supporters of the two sides are urging the need for compromise and the need for outside support for African mediation.

(c) Although their "asking prices" are irreconcilable, both sides have enough problems and could be brought under enough pressure to justify a try at a skillful exploratory mediation. While it is not our place to speculate on the terms of settlement, we believe a basis for exploratory discussions exists.

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2. Outside Involvement

We continue to feel that a direct US mediating role is unwise and that we should confine ourselves to private, diplomatic support for African mediation efforts. We recognize, however, that as the war drags on and public US humanitarian concern persists, our deep commitment to a relief effort carries its own dangers of deeper involuntary political involvement.

Several governments have raised with us the question of a US role in the current impasse. The role envisaged has been primarily an approach to one or the other of the Europeans involved. The Nigerian Foreign Minister has urged us to speak to the French. Houphouet and Nyerere have urged us to speak to the British. This kind of a US role, which might lead to our stimulation and support of non-American mediation would mean greater involvement. The question is whether the situation has now altered sufficiently and the prospects for progress increased to the point where a behind-the-scenes effort at the request of and in support of the Africans would be feasible and would have a chance of effective results. We now feel on the basis of our recent discussions with other countries that circumstances have changed and that we can and should now undertake this type of effort. Since the only real solution to the relief problem is peace, such a role might carry less risk than our present, in effect open-ended commitment to relief.

Among the non-involved Europeans (Scandinavians, Dutch, Germans, Italians) the situation is much like ours. Their domestic political pressures are contained by their commitment to humanitarian relief. At the same time, they are remarkably alike in realistically assessing the need for a compromise. If some promising mediation were in prospect, they would probably join with the US and others in lending what diplomatic influence they have (though none wants to get out in front).

The key Europeans directly involved, the British and French, are uneasy, probably looking for some avenue to compromise, but have real interests and commitments to the two sides. Their cooperation will depend on finding an approach that they can honorably and gracefully support. They are beginning to realize the need to come to some mutual understanding to end the war. Pompidou told Ambassador Soames recently that the French would be willing to pressure Ujukwu for a settlement if the British would do so with the FMG. While the Soviets are also involved, they are unlikely to cooperate and we of course would not count on their help.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

We conclude that:

(a) The present international climate for negotiated settlement is probably as favorable as can be hoped for in the foreseeable future. Given the alternative (protracted war perpetuating the relief problem with its attendant political dangers) an effort to exploit the present climate for negotiations is worthwhile.

(b) What is needed, and has so far been lacking, is a systematic and coordinated effort under African auspices with widest African and outside support. It should begin with what is possible--a lower-level, confidential, exploratory mediation sponsored by key Africans on both sides (especially the Emperor and Houphouet); should be conducted by a skilled and discreet African mediator; should have the diplomatic support of the non-involved outsiders (US and European); and would require some prior understanding between the British and French as the basis for their support. It should begin with a carefully prepared agenda starting with modest, exploratory questions and avoiding the basic issues, should aim initially only at getting a dialogue going.

We have considered carefully how the US might help in promoting such an enterprise, while avoiding a direct role and direct responsibility. Balancing our view that this is not primarily a US concern against the possibly useful role the US can play, we have concluded that, at least, some further exploration along these lines is warranted.

The following recommendations are admittedly limited and may not produce results; but we believe they provide the most useful contribution the US can make without risk of over-involvement:

1. That we continue the pattern of intensive consultation with interested European and African governments begun with Brubeck's trip. We should express a willingness to work closely with them in support of a promising African mediation effort, and seek to develop further a basis of mutual trust and understanding, and a potential consensus for concerted diplomatic support of such a mediation.

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2. That we explore with governments more directly involved (particularly France, Britain, Ivory Coast and Ethiopia) the prospects for a low-key pre-negotiation negotiation; who might be an effective mediator; African sponsorship and scenario for such a mediation; and how far outside governments (particularly the French and British, but with the cooperation of ourselves and other Europeans) might lend diplomatic support to the mediator's efforts.

3. If a suitable mediator could be agreed upon, under the auspices of some key African governments, we and other outside governments should be prepared, privately and confidentially, to consult with him and support his efforts with the two sides. The US would not assume the mediator's role, would act only in consultation with other outside governments, but would be prepared to take an active part, with these governments, in the effort to develop and support a negotiating initiative.

4. That before beginning this further round of explorations, we explain our views and role to the Nigerian Government, and proceed only to the extent that they understand our limited, indirect participation and regard it as helpful.

Fed. veto

AF/SN:WHBrubeck:gw
October 22, 1969

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