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

Roger Harris
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

~~SECRET SENSITIVE~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry Kissinger *HK*

SUBJECT: US AID Projects Bearing on the Nigerian-Biafran War

INFORMATION

December 10, 1969

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Roger - crank up another review after time.

DEC 10 1969

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The following is for your background on this morning's story by Evans and Novak that AID is building a road which is of potential military value to the Federal Forces surrounding Biafra. (A copy of the Evans-Novak piece is at Tab A). My staff learned of this project only recently, and is in the process of a thorough investigation -- including not only the specifics of the AID projects but also a detailed estimate from the intelligence community on the present or potential relevance of the projects to the Federal war effort.

The road in question is one of several projects financed in FY 1969 by \$3 million Supporting Assistance, which AID presents as short-term rehabilitation aid to Federal Nigeria. In principle, this program is consistent with our overall relief policy to get food and medicine to the needy on both sides. In addition to the Biafran aid, our relief has helped feed almost one million behind Federal lines.

The main projects and their political-military implications are:

The Calabar Road (to which Evans-Novak refer)

A map showing the road and its relationship to the main sectors of Federal military activity is at Tab B. This project dates back to 1963. Its economic rationale (sensible enough) is to offer an additional trading route for products from Northern Nigeria going out through the port of Calabar. Work was suspended when the war began in 1966. Construction was resumed last year under the rationale that this would make possible a wider distribution of relief northward from the port.

Our initial estimate is that the road is not of military value to the Federals --

HK - I think we need another review of our policy here - we are satisfying no one - & accomplishing nothing

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- This eastern front of Biafra is extremely inactive. Our intelligence finds not much more than a battalion on the Federal side, and probably even less on the Biafran side. And since neither army has decent engineering, the Cross River dividing ~~them~~ is a formidable natural barrier.
- The port of Calabar simply lacks the capacity for any sizeable supply operation for the Federal Army.
- The northern leg of the road is still unpaved, which would make it soon impassable if it were used by more than an occasional truck or jeep.
- The Federals have trouble enough maintaining their shorter lines of supply in the North and South, let alone trying to use this more extended route along the East, even if the road were passable.

There remains, however, the very real problem that 40 some Americans on the construction crew are now working in places five or six miles from the Biafran lines. The Biafrans undoubtedly understand that the road is of dubious military value. But its political-propaganda significance may well tempt them to a raid. This could mean American casualties or hostages.

Thus, although AID is justifying the road for relief purposes, a large segment of it is simply not useable for any supply operation, relief or military. My view is that we should think seriously about suspending the American construction effort simply on the grounds of potential danger to our citizens in a war zone.

Supply of Heavy Trucks and Road-Grading Equipment

These too are ostensibly to facilitate relief on the Federal side. There is no hard evidence that they are used otherwise. But once we turn such equipment over to the Nigerians, we have no real control over possible exploitation for military purposes. Road graders in particular could be useful to Federal forces trying to advance along the hotly-contested southern front, where the main Biafran tactic of defense is to disrupt the well-developed road system to stop Federal armored cars.

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In sum, the Calabar Road poses some danger to the American contractors, and US-supplied equipment is in the grey area between legitimate relief and de facto logistical support for the Federals. These programs should be reassessed to bring them wholly into line with your policy of neutrality in this war.

I am reviewing this matter further with State and AID -- and will have a recommendation to you in the next few days.

Attachments

Tab A - Evans-Novak piece.

Tab B - Map.