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By 57/RSW Date 7/6/98

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

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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President  
from -

FOL 27-9 Biafra - Nigeria

REPRODUCED AT THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES

~~SECRET EYES ONLY~~

January 14, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR UNDER SECRETARY RICHARDSON

FROM: Roger Morris *RM*  
SUBJECT: Next Steps in Nigerian Relief *D*

Following up Henry Kissinger's telephone conversation with you last night, the following suggests steps we might take to deal with the problems facing us in Nigeria.

Our Immediate Dilemma

Gowon is taking his own time about relief while public reports (rightly or wrongly) trumpet massive needs. The Federal position springs in part from extreme national pride tinged with xenophobia, in part from their chronic insensitivity to domestic pressures experienced by their western patrons, and in part from honest ignorance of the problem.

Obviously we have to observe their pride and sensitivity. But is is equally clear that neither we nor they should tolerate (a) under-estimation of the domestic pressures here or (b) their ignorance of the need. There are two salient facts from our experience: (1) we have an ample record on which to judge Nigerian efficiency from the last 2-1/2 years of war; (2) we already have a good idea of the food needs in Biafra on the basis of the Western Report done only last November. The implications of the report are very serious. (see Tab A)

*2* We cannot afford the luxury, therefore, of confidence. If large numbers of people starve -- or, more likely, if there are "reports" of mass starvation which we could neither confirm nor deny conclusively -- we will dissipate most of the public credit we have built up. One can foresee a sequence in which our present posture, designed to preserve our standing with the Federals, leads instead to a rupture. Given the choice between making his own moral position clear as against observing Federal sensitivities, the President will be hard-pressed not to make a statement which will poison the well in Lagos.

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We need to strike a balance between (a) playing for time with the Federals and (b) containing the pressures here which could force our hand before Gowon is persuaded. This means:

- low-key, but sustained evidence of our seriousness in Lagos;
- actions cleared with the Federals, but which are highly visible gestures that something is moving after all our claims of urgency and readiness over the past few days.

#### What Can We Do?

Henry thinks the following steps have merit, and asks that I outline them for your consideration:

1. Dave Newsom should give the Western Report to Federal relief officials at once, taking along Dr. Conrad (one of the experts familiar with the Report) to comment on its relevance to the present crisis.

- This approach would be a natural follow-up to the Newsom conversation with Gowon. We offered to furnish Ferguson's information, and we would be consonant with Gowon's claim that the Federals were conducting an urgent assessment of the situation.

- Newsom should remain in Lagos, however, to emphasize the importance we attach to prompt, initial reply from the Federals on (a) their reaction to the Western Report and (b) results of their study of the relief requirements. This would also give him an opportunity to have more conversations with Federal relief officials, relief workers returning from the scene, and perhaps even to get out to the East if Federal attitudes on a visit change (as they certainly could) over the next few days.

- We would be striking the pose that Newsom, a senior official required in Washington, is staying in Lagos nonetheless because of the urgency of the need outlined in the Western Report and the US expectation that the Federals, true to their word, will

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respond if the need is documented. Obviously the Feds will still conduct their own survey and stall for time, but Newsom's presence is the kind of low-key pressure we should maintain. If Dave flies out tomorrow, we will have let the Federals off the hook on the basis of Gowon's proud put-off.

-- Newsom should not, however, associate himself with the Hunt Mission to Lagos. As Joe Palmer used to warn, the Federals recoil most rapidly when they think others are ganging up on them. And we already have incurred some of that reaction as a result of the President's telephone conversations with Wilson. We should begin to play down the British-US concert.

-- Newsom should also remain in Lagos for direct talks with,  
(a) the UN's General Kahn to follow up the observer issue and  
(b) UNICEF's Labouisse, for reasons outlined below.

2. Dr. Conrad, joined by Gene Dewey and George Thomas from Ferguson's staff -- (and also preferably by Drs. Western and Foege) -- should proceed quietly to Port Harcourt as part of the normal AID pattern of staffing. They should continue as far as they can get into area of need. This would be an unpublicized mission, but it would establish a record (as does the Newsom presence) that we are on top of the situation when we know, from the earlier Western Report, that the need is likely to be very great.

3. Immediate and visible airlift: We should forget the C-130s out of deference to Gowon's objection to military aircraft, but we should move immediately to charter large transports to do the following:

-- Coordinate with UNICEF to finance and transport to Cotonou 48 trucks now ready to move from Detroit. (UNICEF is ready to go on this if we provide the funds. The trucks could be driven into Nigeria from Dahomey, and UNICEF thinks they can clear the coast with the Feds. We would want to check that of course.

-- Charter and transport for UNICEF 18 helicopters (3-1/2 tons) to be crewed by civilians chartered by UNICEF. Again, UNICEF is ready to move on this with charter crews if they have assurance of financial support from us.

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-- Support UNICEF as they think necessary in their approach to the Federals. UNICEF says there is a precedent for both the trucks and the helicopters, and they think they could get Federal acquiescence for landing at Port Harcourt, Calabar, Enugu and Benin City if they go to Gowon with a definite package support by the US.

-- This UNICEF package would probably run roughly \$4 million.

-- We could also fly the prepackaged hospitals to Cotonou. And even have C-130s ferrying food to bring the ICRC stocks up to capacity at Cotonou. (It takes 3-6 weeks to get present pipeline food on the scene.)

4. Either through UNICEF or LICROSS, offer the Nigerian Red Cross \$2 million for local purchase of foodstuffs for the first 30 days of occupation. Like the provision of transport, this accords with Gowon's own assessment that food is available locally. We should test the Nigerian approach and give them every opportunity to see if local purchases will meet the need.

5. Simultaneously, we should order advance production of 20,000 tons of high protein and relief food per month to keep up the pipeline against the possible and probably likely prospect that (a) the 13,000 ton stockpile in the area will be depleted faster than we expect if there is effective relief, (b) the 11,000 tons outside the area cannot be transported into the enclave as rapidly as we expect, (c) that Nigerian locally-purchased food will run dry in 30 days or sooner. (It is ominous -- and symptomatic, I think -- that the Nigerian Red Cross plans to use Aba as a main distribution point, when there are only 2300 tons of stockpiles at Port Harcourt and this supply port is separated from Aba (as we know from military intelligence) by a badly damaged road and perhaps the yet unbridged Imo River. Similarly, Calabar has low foodstocks and no major access to the enclave, which was our argument, after all, in rebuttal of charges on the Calabar-Ikom road being built by AID.)

6. Move two C-97s in Tel Aviv to Cotonou for International Red Cross use and release all available C-97s in this country to the ICRD. Also we should urge the transfer of JCA aircraft to the Red Cross.

7. We should charter LSMs and offer them to the Nigerians with charter crews under Nigerian command.



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8. We should offer lighterage vessels on charter to the Nigerians to avoid further obstacles (in Port Harcourt and Calabar) which are a great potential bottleneck once the effort gets into gear. In this regard, we should urge JCA to turn over to us, for transmission to the FMG, the five lighterage vessels it has at Sao Tome.

9. We should offer to Nigerian Red Cross or the Nigerian military light aircraft and small passenger helicopters which could be flown, if necessary, by chartered civilians. Here it may well be advisable at this early stage to make known our readiness to reopen our relationship with the Federal military in the wake of the war. Our Defense people in Lagos should be instructed to make every effort to get into the war zone to make their own reports on the issue of excesses as well as relief.

10. Call Clyde Ferguson home immediately, as the only high-level official with direct experience inside Biafra. (He should report to the President as a prelude to relieving Dave Newsom in our death (or life) watch in Lagos.)

11. Explore having Ethiopian Red Cross to offer its services to the Feds. We could play a role in flying the Ethiopians to Nigeria.

12. Planning: Commission a group of experienced Nigerian hands to look ahead of current operations at potential problems over the next six months to a year. This could include: former Ambassador Matthews (now at the Senior Seminar), Roy Melbourne and Bob Smith (former Nigerian Desk men), Bob Barnard (our last Consul in Enugu and now in J/PM), Chris Beal, Chuck Hermann (formerly NSC Staff, now Consultant from Princeton) and representatives from CIA and DIA who had experience with Nigeria. This group could report directly to the Under Secretary, recommending actions to be taken now either to avoid trouble or start necessary action in order to be where we want to be in six months.