

MEMORANDUM

WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

January 19, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Nigerian Relief Status Report

At Tab A is a State Department appraisal of the situation in Nigeria and a run-down of present and proposed actions. The State report illustrates all too clearly the very serious problems we face -- both in the realities of the situation and bureaucratically here -- in dealing with this tragedy.

The main points of the State memo -- set beside updated information or relevant facts State did not explain -- are as follows:

1. State says Nigerian relief is "progressing reasonably well" and first-hand reports indicate a return to "normal."

-- But: Several eyewitness reports so far (Tab B) report "critical" conditions. One American doctor just out of Biafra says one million could die in the next three weeks.

2. State says the International Observers toured the war zone and bear out optimism.

-- But: The observer team got only to the fringe of the enclave, travelling behind Federal troops. Thus they were separated from the mass of the fleeing Biafrans. And, as they have admitted publicly, they were not qualified medically to judge the relatively few people they saw.

Incidentally, Gowon has turned down any increase in the observers. So far, we have no evidence of military atrocities.

3. State says we are sending in an urgent "survey team" to assess the need.

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- But: The Federals prohibited our team's travel to the affected area over the weekend. They were given permission to go in today, but are still not clear on permission to examine the area in detail.

4. State reports a series of U.S. actions, including a distribution of funds and a Nigerian request for 50 jeeps which is yet unconfirmed.

- But: Though the Nigerians requested the 50 jeeps and 50 trucks today, the hard fact is that after your offer one week ago, no significant U.S. aid is yet flowing into Nigeria, and least of all into the starving area. The prospects are that the Nigerians will ask us only for marginal items such as small vehicles or generators. Our actions thus far sum up to readiness, not results.

State concludes that we must continue to observe Nigerian sensitivities about running relief themselves, and thus avoid pressing "unneeded" aid. This means, in effect, leaving the job to the Nigerian Red Cross relying solely on trucking in locally stored food.

#### The Case for Action

The facts on the magnitude of the need -- which underlie our reliance on the Nigerians -- are fundamentally in dispute. During October and November, Ambassador Ferguson sent a special U.S. relief survey team into Biafra. The team was led by Dr. Karl Western, an expert from our Atlanta Communicable Diseases Center. Dr. Western's findings -- and his resulting analysis this week of the current crisis -- argue that State/AID and the Nigerians are grossly under-estimating the emergency. The Western Report is the only scientific survey made of conditions inside Biafra. All other figures, on which State/AID are planning, are estimates from the outside.

The most vital factors in the crisis bear on two judgments: (a) how much food is necessary for how many people, and (b) the objective ability of the Nigerians to handle the need, as they claim. The findings of Dr. Western (and nearly all other eyewitnesses) compare the State/AID position as follows:

##### 1. The Food Need

- State, working on reports from our AID mission in Lagos and Nigerian estimates, plans on 2,000 tons needed per week to feed less than a million starving people.

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Dr. Western and others found:

- between 3 and 4 million in Biafra, of whom nearly half require full rations just to survive while the rest need 500-600 calories to stave off starvation edema. This means 6,000 to 10,000 tons per week (Ferguson estimates at least 7,000 tons).
- although State and the Nigerian plans rely on local foods, the exhaustion or devastation of fertile areas -- plus the fact that January-March are the worst agricultural months anyway -- mean far too little local food available.
- while State and Nigerian plans (2,000 tons) are based on how much food Biafra was getting by airlift, the mass social disruption of the collapse plus the deterioration Biafrans were experiencing even with the airlift (which goes to explain the military collapse) argue that the needy will not be saved by the old 2,000 ton figure.
- While Nigerians (and State) have pointed to initial observer reports of good condition, historical experience with famine (e. g. The Western Netherlands in 1945, The Irish Potato Famine) indicates fragmentary reports are unreliable and first estimates of need are always very deficient.

## 2. The Ability of the Nigerians

-- State/AID think the Nigerians seem able to meet the need.

Dr. Western and others, who worked on the Federal side as well, contend:

- the past history of the Nigerian relief effort is not hopeful. One estimate charged that only 15% of the food available actually got through over several months last year.
- The Nigerian relief teams are already strained to feed 500,000 needy behind the old Federal lines. They cannot abandon that half-million. Even if they did, the 19 Nigerian teams are at a ratio of 1 relief worker per 4,000 needy Biafrans. Training for new workers is slow and an untrained volunteer does more harm than good.
- Though they have more than 200 trucks available or on the way, the Nigerians cannot organize the kind of truck-lift

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it takes to get in anything close to 6,000 tons a week. In the nine days since Biafra has been without outside relief, we have reports of only 140 tons going in by truck.

Dr. Western and his colleagues are willing to put their reputations on the line in the objective judgement that some portion of 1 to 1.5 million Biafrans will probably die of starvation or disease in the next two weeks unless there is a massive injection of high protein food into the area of greatest need. This means precisely the round-the-clock airlift into Biafra which the Feds proudly argue is "unnecessary" (and which State is advising not to suggest).

#### The Bureaucratic Positions

State and AID have long discredited eyewitness accounts from Biafra, on the grounds of pro-Biafra "bias" among relief workers. That charge hardly applies to Dr. Western (our own objective expert), yet present planning somehow presumes Dr. Western cannot be right. The Western Report has been available to the bureaucracy for 6 weeks.

AID probably disregards the Western Report because it proves them so far wrong. State finds Western's data unpalatable because it points to a show-down with Nigeria. Thus the disparity between State's policy this week and the clear dictates of Western's analysis.

No one will ever know conclusively the facts of the Biafran tragedy. The war, the chaos, the terrain make that impossible. But given the human stakes and the scientific weight of the Western survey, the presumption must be in favor of greater need -- rather than the opposite. The price of under-estimating -- when we have expert opinion to the contrary -- could be millions of dead.

#### The Domestic Political Problem

There is a good possibility of a storm gathering here, ready to break as soon as the first reports of mass need hit the papers (as they will when reporters get out of Lagos and into the area). Your quick moves last weekend signalled recognition of need and urgent response. State has spent the past week saying (a) we don't know the need, (b) the Nigerians can handle the problem, and (c) in any case, we won't push them.

Senator Kennedy is holding hearings this coming week. Senator Goodell and others will be giving press conferences. Catholic, Protestant and

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Jewish groups are reported planning national appeals for action. The bipartisan pressure on this issue is likely to revive quickly. Catherine Menninger (Dr. Menninger's wife) has already referred to the Western Report in the Post, and the pursuit of that subject could be explosive.

The Necessity for Decision

Time will not make the Nigerians less proud or more cognizant of a need which requires scientific rigor to perceive. Even if our survey team leaves tomorrow, it will take days to "prove" Western and other eye-witnesses are wrong. If the need is massive, the moment when our decision will affect the saving of lives is now fleeting.

There is no prospect that others will act first. Clyde Ferguson did not report it in his cables, but he told my staff privately last night that Prime Minister Wilson told him he expects at least a half-million deaths. The British, Ferguson reports, are deeply cynical about this problem and are as unwilling to push the Federals now as during the war.

Ferguson and Newsom were briefed orally today by Dr. Western and his team, and the facts seem finally to have sunk in. State reports it is moving to approach the Federals. They will do so, however, still in a low-key, and we do not have the luxury of time for gradual persuasion.

The Nigerians may balk despite our evidence, but we must convey it quickly and powerfully to protect your position in the likelihood of further disaster.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you instruct an immediate approach to General Gowon in strong terms to present the potential disaster and a proposal for an immediate airlift into the severely affected area.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

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THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

January 16, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Nigeria

This memorandum summarizes the present situation in Nigeria as well as US actions under way and in prospect.

Present Situation

Evidence from the field, while still fragmentary, indicates that the Federal Government is taking a conciliatory and magnanimous approach to reintegration of the former rebels, that the relief program is progressing reasonably well, and that fighting has virtually ended. Reliable first-hand reports on conditions in some parts of the Biafran enclave are now becoming available and nearly all report the relief effort functioning, no evidence of atrocities, and the beginnings of a return to normal life.

The International Observer group (UK, Canadians, Swedish, Polish, OAU and UN representatives established by the Federal Government in 1968) has just made a tour of a limited part of the war zone, including the former Biafran capital of Owerri, and its report bears out other observers. While the sudden military collapse and administrative breakdown have created a mass feeding requirement, the most serious problem will arise if large numbers of Ibos flee into the bush out of fear, and are inaccessible to relief teams. Reports on the extent of this problem are

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inconclusive but our own survey team in the field should provide us with more precise information in the next few days.

### Relief

The emergency high-protein stockpile in Nigeria and nearby ports, 24,000 tons, should meet for at least the next 30 days anticipated requirements on the basis of the Ferguson Mission survey in the enclave in October. Another 10,000 tons is due to arrive before the end of February and additional stocks can be diverted to Nigeria as necessary. We will know in the next few days, from field surveys, whether stocks need further augmentation.

The FMG is in process of developing detailed plans for meeting its further relief needs. It has rejected help from what it regards as hostile sources, but will levy over coming days requests on the United States and other sources, as it already has on the British. The Nigerians are determined to run their own relief effort and control outside contributions. They will not accept military aircraft or personnel, but will probably ask us for medical supplies and pre-packaged hospitals, surface transport, and perhaps bridge materials.

### US Actions in Progress

Given Nigerian sensitivities, we are making clear in all our actions that we seek to respond to Nigerian requests to help meet the actual need, that we are not seeking to force unneeded assistance on them, and that we are continuing to consult closely with them in order to be as helpful as possible.

The range of actions we are taking, some of which have been made public, in addition to the offer of C-130 transport aircraft and four helicopters you have made, and the \$10 million you have made available for emergency relief, includes the following:

#### A. Relief

##### 1. Financial Assistance

\$2 million of your \$10 million offer has already

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been provided to the Nigerian Red Cross via the League of Red Cross Societies for local food purchase or other desired use.

2. Airlift

The Nigerians have under consideration our offer to airlift up to four packaged disaster hospitals by commercial air and we expect a response shortly. They have asked for 50 jeeps for transport of relief team personnel which we will send by commercial airlift as soon as they agree to shipment. In addition, we have made arrangements for charter of commercial C-130s if required.

3. UNICEF

We have pledged \$2 million for such projects as Executive Director Labouisse determines during his present trip to Lagos.

4. Field Personnel

AID, US Public Health, and American Red Cross are making available relief and medical personnel and stand ready to add to these as needed.

5. C-97 Transport

Two of the four US-supplied ICRC C-97s at Cotonou and the four JCA C-97s at Sao Tome are immediately available if required. Four reserve C-97s in the US are being readied by the Air Force against possible need.

6. Local Shipping

AID has procured three vessels in Nigeria in addition to those in operation or being procured by the relief agencies, the British and the Dutch. Four US LCMs (30-50 ton capacity) are arriving at Lagos on January 19. US funds are available to the Nigerian Red Cross for charter of local lighterage.

7. Aircraft

US funds are being made available to the Nigerian Red Cross for charter of light aircraft, if needed.

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We have located and can make available on request commercial helicopters.

#### 8. Relief Survey

Ambassador Ferguson's professional survey team including doctors, as well as relief and logistic experts, is today leaving Lagos for the war zone to provide us a first-hand appraisal of conditions and needs.

#### B. Security

##### 1. Information on Conditions

In order to meet public concern, a fuller flow of objective first-hand information is required. We are seeking to obtain information from the Nigerian Police (now responsible for security in the enclave). We are urging the FMG to permit freer movement of newspaper reporters into the war zone. We have proposed to U Thant that he visit the war zone during his visit to Lagos. In addition to the Ferguson survey team, we have asked the Embassy and AID urgently to send US Government observers into the area.

##### 2. International Observer Team

We are working with the Canadians and the UK to persuade the Nigerian Government to expand the ten-man International Observer group at least to its former strength of 17 and if possible to a larger number.

#### Recommendations:

We are making a major effort to assure full public understanding of the contributions the US is making to assist the Nigerians in meeting their problems. I therefore propose that you consider the following steps:

1. That you receive Ambassador Ferguson (returning this weekend from consultations with Prime Minister Wilson and with relief agencies in Europe) and

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Assistant Secretary Newsom (returning tonight from Lagos) on Monday for a first-hand report on their activities.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

2. That the White House issue a statement tomorrow detailing those actions the United States is taking which can be made public and announcing that Ferguson and Newsom will be reporting to you. We hope clearance will be received from the Nigerians in time to include the announcement that we are airlifting 50 jeeps to Lagos. A proposed draft of this statement will be provided to you tomorrow.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

3. That a further White House statement be issued on Monday following your meeting with Ferguson and Newsom reporting any further US actions at that time. The Nigerians may have agreed by then to an airlift of packaged disaster hospitals, which can then be included in that statement. A draft will be provided on Monday.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

4. That you consider issuing the latter part of next week a statement addressing the need for immediate relief and rehabilitation in Nigeria and pledging a substantial US contribution for this purpose. This requires prior consultations with the Nigerian Government and the World Bank, which are now being undertaken. A specific proposal will be submitted at a later date.

Approve \_\_\_\_\_ Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

*WR*  
William P. Rogers

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