

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

Ed
INFORMATION

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

January 20, 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HK*

SUBJECT: Nigerian Relief

Attached is a memorandum from a member of my staff, which argues that there will soon be increasing public evidence both of famine in the former Biafran enclave and of failure by the Nigerian Government adequately to deal with it. He bases his argument on the Western Report, written by a team of Public Health doctors from the Atlanta Communicable Diseases Center. He believes that this will lead to increasingly serious political problems here.

I have talked to Dr. Western and his associates and find their evidence persuasive. It indicates that 1 to 1-1/2 million people are in danger of dying from starvation or epidemics over the next three weeks.

Several Senators and public figures have already called about the situation. This reaction will grow. It is interesting to note that both the Right (Bill Buckley and Congressman Lukens) and the Left (Senators Goodell, Kennedy, et al) are united in arguing that America is not doing its duty on this problem.

Attachment

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*T. Kennedy told me
Kennedy + Foreign
had done well in their
appearance before his committee
- He said he was not
concerned about Pope
etc - I but always
happens - but that
starvation is the
problem*

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January 20, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM: Roger Morris *RM*
SUBJECT: The Nigerian Relief Crisis

I have seen your account of the noon meeting today with the President on Nigeria. I must re-emphasize the point of your recent memorandum to the President (attached). The President may be sitting on a political time-bomb. Our only chance to protect him, and to save a million or more lives, is to move decisively and urgently in pressing the Nigerians.

The only authoritative survey of famine in Biafra -- the Western Report, done by a team of our Public Health doctors from Atlanta -- tells us that 1 to 1-1/2 million Biafrans will be dying over the next 2-3 weeks unless there is a massive injection of high-protein food. This means (a) 3-4 times as much food as State/AID and the Nigerians now plan to put in, and (b) an emergency airlift into Biafra, which both the Nigerians and State say is unnecessary. The State/AID and Nigerian plans were not based on a scientific on-the-spot survey of the need, but rather estimates made outside Biafra.

Dr. Western and his colleagues (who worked in the Federal Relief Program last fall as well as in Biafra):

- have documented in a thorough study of historical famines that all eye-witness accounts have been seriously inaccurate in such cases in the past. They contend that in the Nigerian case, as in every recorded famine in modern history, initial observer reports have vastly under-estimated the magnitude of the problem.
- conclude, with the same scientific authority, that the Nigerians cannot conceivably cope with the starvation upon them. There is no question of their good intentions. But they do not understand the size and urgency of their task, and they lack the people or equipment to deal with it.

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

- 2 -

-- are willing to put their professional reputations on the line in support of their findings. They are fully backed by the Atlanta Communicable Diseases Center.

Thus, we are in the position of knowing that the collapse of Biafra would bring a disaster of the first magnitude unless a massive effort were undertaken immediately. Without impressing this upon the Federals and urging their immediate action in strong terms, we open the President to the charge of complacency in the face of mass deaths, after we have committed ourselves publicly to rendering all assistance possible.

The Western Report is already known in relief circles and may well have been leaked on the Hill. It is only a matter of time until the storm breaks. Blame will fall unjustly but inevitably on the President rather than on those responsible in the bureaucracy.

Nigeria is certainly important in the future of Africa. But it is equally clear that beyond the euphoria of victory, the country will be prey to the same powerful forces of instability and division that have plagued it for 50 years. Gowon remains the figurehead of an expedient compromise between elements whose clashing ambitions will be rekindled with the end of the war. His own future is murky at best.

Even at that, however, I am not suggesting a break with Nigeria. What we have to do is tell them the unpalatable facts and stand clear if they refuse to act. This may wound their pride, but it will scarcely be the end of the U.S. position in Nigeria.

The alternative may well be to avoid ruffling feathers at the price of large-scale human loss in the enclave and serious political damage here.

Attachment

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