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NIGERIA 568

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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July 1, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HENRY A. KISSINGER

FROM : Roger Morris

SUBJECT: Nigerian Crack-down on Relief

You should be aware that the Feds have all but kicked out the Red Cross and imposed a de facto embargo on relief flights into Biafra. This is the climax of the mounting frustration and belligerence I have been describing to you over the last three or four weeks.

The new hard line was announced yesterday and today in Lagos in a meeting between the Feds and the International Red Cross. The official tack is that the Federal "Rehabilitation Commission" (an organization pretty much in name only) is "relieving" the Red Cross of responsibilities for coordinating a relief effort. In fact, this means:

- All relief contributions must be channeled through the Feds.
- Decisions on distribution, status of relief workers, etc. are reserved to Lagos.
- Most important, the Red Cross airlift into Biafra can only operate in daylight and after inspection on Federal territory. Since the Biafrans have objected all along to such daylight flights (as a possible cover for tail-gating MIGs to attack the vital Biafran air-strips), this really puts an end to the Red Cross airlift.
- The other half of the airlift, run by the church relief agencies out of the island of Sao Tome, is declared illegal and subject to military interdiction.

Technically, of course, the Feds are well within their rights of sovereignty. And they have probably satisfied what conscience they have by offering daylight flights which the Biafrans cannot accept for security reasons. The practical result is that the Red Cross relief

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- 2 -

effort will be hamstrung on the Federal side and strangled in Biafra. The food situation in Biafra is not yet as desperate as last summer before the flights began, but the margin is so close that things will get very bad in two or three weeks.

For their part at least, the church agencies seem willing to continue their airlift even in the face of increased night activity by Federal MIGs. Even at that, though, starvation will reappear, and so probably will the public and Congressional pressures on us (particularly if one of those planes from Catholic Relief gets shot down).

We were banking, as you know, on Clyde Ferguson's negotiations for a river route into Biafra -- if not as a genuine alternative to the airlift, at least as a tactic to fix the blame on the rebels for obstructing relief and thus give us a defensible public case with Senator Kennedy et. al. in the Biafra lobby. Now the Feds have even backed away from their agreement "in principle" on the river route. My guess is that the xenophobic hawks in Lagos have won the day amid Federal frustration on the battle field, and they have thrown down the gauntlet to everybody, including us. The truth is they don't care either about starving Biafrans or foreign humanitarianism.

I have submitted an item for the morning brief to alert the President on this with a capsule rundown. Elliott Richardson is pulling together a review of the new situation, and we should have a paper in the next few days on next steps in our relief policy (if any) and public posture.

I would like very much to have about 15 minutes with you on this some time in the next couple of days. I'm afraid Clyde Ferguson, and the policy he represents, is at a deadend. We face a basic political choice between tolerable relations with the Feds and continuing relief.

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