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

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN.

SECRET

INFORMATION
July 7, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM : Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Next Steps in Nigeria-Biafra

biafran.org

For your background, the following summarizes where we stand in the wake of the recent Federal decision to take over the relief operation.

-- The Red Cross airlift into Biafra, which had been flying from neighboring Dahomey to feed one-two million people, is at an end. The Federals insist on daylight flights with inspection in Federal territory. Yet the Biafrans fear "inspection" means Federal poisoning and, more important, will not risk daylight relief flights becoming a cover for Federal MIGs to stage surprise raids. The Red Cross, as a matter of principle in its strict adherence to the Geneva Conventions on sovereignty, will not operate without agreement from both sides.

-- There is now no plausible alternative to daylight flights. Neither side will accept the river corridor negotiated by Clyde Ferguson: the Federals because they claim the food will go to rebel troops in that sector, the Biafrans because they fear a military violation of the point where they open their defensive lines to receive and trans-ship the food.

-- The Federals are now committed to their own public to try to maintain a military embargo on any night time relief flights. This leaves the other half of the original airlift -- the U.S. and European church agencies flying from the island of Sao Tome -- liable to be shot down by Federal MIGs. (The irony here is that the Federals charge night relief with being a cover for arms flights. Yet since the night food flights have stopped, arms flights seem to have gone into Biafra as heavily as ever despite increased MIG activity.)

SECRET

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

-- At the present impasse, both sides distrust our good offices on relief. The Biafrans think that Clyde Ferguson is a captive of a pro-Federal State Department. The Federals regard Ferguson as secretly pro-Biafran, concerned only with feeding the rebels while the war drags on. The Biafrans, of course, would like to have our military "guarantee" that an air corridor or river route would not be violated by a surprise Federal attack -- a demand Ferguson cannot meet under present policy.

-- The new Federal relief policy (laced with some bloody-minded talk from Federal politicians about starvation as a "legitimate weapon") can only appear to the world, and particularly U.S. opinion, as a form of genocide. U.S. acquiescence in the Federal action could appear to our critics at best as insensitive, at worse as complicity.

Biafra.org

In sum: The hard-liners are in the saddle in Lagos and seem determined to crush a bitter tribal enemy whatever outsiders do or think. The Biafrans are fighting for their lives, and will not put food above what they see as legitimate concerns over their military security. The Red Cross is righteously indignant and will pull out before they compromise their historical neutrality by letting the Federals really take over the relief operation. The church agencies, with grim fervor, are ready to fly relief against Federal MIGs. With at least half the relief cut off, there is bound to be rising public and Congressional pressure.

In my judgement, all this brings us to a basic choice in our posture toward the Nigerian civil war. Our present policy -- limited largely to exhortation of both sides -- seems at the end of its usefulness. The heart of the relief problem is clearly the war itself. So long as the fighting continues, both sides will have reasons to reject relief and more Biafrans will starve.

Our policy choice boils down to (i) stay on the present course and realistically accept the futility of exhortation from the sidelines or (ii) make a serious effort to try to stop the fighting as well as resume relief. I have State working urgently with my staff on a paper to lay out our options in detail, and you will have it in the next few days.

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

Meanwhile, there are several palliative actions which you might take. None will surmount the basic problems of Federal insensitivity or Biafran intransigence. But they would highlight your concern without foreclosing our remaining policy choices.

Public and Congressional pressures bear generally on three main questions: (1) What are we doing about the Federal embargo on relief? (2) Why can't we take some initiative to break the impasse caused by Biafran insistence that any relief corridor be guaranteed against surprise Federal violation? and (3) Is our relief policy a captive of a pro-Federal bias in our broader policy toward the civil war?

There are three broad approaches:

(1) Contesting the Federal relief embargo. Here the object would be to demonstrate clearly we are not simply accepting the Federal action, on their own terms, as a routine assertion of sovereignty.

-- You could write a public letter to the heads of the main relief agencies (International Red Cross and Joint Church Aid) to express your strong continuing support for their humanitarian mission.

-- At the same time, you would publicly write General Gowon to appeal on humanitarian grounds for a prompt resumption of flights and acceptance of the river corridor. We could offer Clyde Ferguson's good offices to speed workable coordination between the Federal Government and the Red Cross. But the brunt of the message to Gowon would be that we expect humane statesmanship from Federal Nigeria.

-- The White House could release both these letters to the press with an accompanying Presidential statement that we are pursuing all public and private means at our disposal to re-establish relief, that we deplore the Federal action, and that these two letters are examples of our initiatives.

(2) How to guarantee relief corridors against military violation.

-- Charlie Yost would make a public approach to U Thant, appealing in your name for a United Nations role, on an

Biafran.org

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

emergency basis, to supervise (a) the neutrality of daylight flights into Biafra and (b) the point at which food crosses the battleline after coming up the river corridor.

-- You might reinforce this approach with a public letter to Prime Minister Trudeau (who is pretty much in the same boat with domestic pressures on relief) asking the Canadians to join us in appealing for UN action.

-- To bring along the Africans (whose pride will be wounded by an UN approach which implicitly acknowledges the failure of the OAU in its many efforts to settle Nigerian problems) you could ask Haile Selassie during his visit here next week to consider how the OAU might play a coordinating role with the UN in such supervision of relief corridors. This would be publicized after the visit.

(3) Separating relief from any appearance of pro-Federal bias. I think the essential in this respect is to show your personal involvement and direction.

-- You could call Clyde Ferguson to meet with you and Jean Mayer, whose credentials are impeccable with those pushing for more relief. Ferguson would meet the press afterwards, explaining that his report to you had to remain largely confidential but making clear your urgent and impartial concern. The point would be that Ferguson was now reporting directly to you rather than State.

-- To dramatize U.S. support of relief agencies, you could plan a three-four hour stop in Geneva on the way home from your upcoming trip. The format would be a meeting with the President of the Red Cross and heads of the church agencies. Either you could make a brief address or there could be a joint communique stressing our backing of the humanitarian agencies.

-- You could call in the major Congressional figures in the Nigerian question (Senators Brooke, Kennedy, Goodell, and Pearson; Congressmen Luckens, Lowenstein, Diggs, and Morse) for a White House briefing on our vigorous relief efforts to date. You could then give them a hearing

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

on any ideas how we can expedite relief without the U.S. taking sides or getting embroiled in the civil war.

-- At any point, to buttress any of the actions above, we could do a press backgrounder to stress U. S. neutrality, White House direction of policy, and pressures being exerted on both sides (particularly the Federals) to reach agreement on a relief route.

We can reasonably expect dramatic window dressing of this kind to soften the domestic critics for a while. But your greater involvement also raises expectations of tangible progress. This suggests the need for a re-examination of the political aspects now being undertaken. I will have recommendations to you in a few days.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you authorize the three steps outlined above.

(1) Contest Federal relief embargo.
(2) Guarantee relief corridors
(3) Separate relief from appearance of pro-Federal bias.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

Other _____