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

~~SECRET~~

Saturday - August 30, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY KISSINGER

Information

FROM: Roger Morris
SUBJECT: Biafran Relief

You should know that we are about to reach the moment of truth in the negotiations over the resumption of the Red Cross half of the relief airlift into Biafra. You will recall that the Church agencies have continued flying relief at night in defiance of Federal restrictions, but the Red Cross halted all its flights following the June 30 decision in Lagos to require inspection on Federal territory.

Predictably, the Feds have been dragging their feet in negotiating a daylight flight arrangement with the ICRC. Thursday night the Committee met in Geneva and decided to put to the Feds a final take-it-or-leave-it proposal for an interim arrangement, which would allow Red Cross flights to go into Biafra from neighboring Dahomey with the Feds exercising only the option to call down random flights for inspection on Nigerian territory. The Red Cross has given the Feds until midnight Monday, September 1, to respond. If the answer is anything but yes, the Red Cross will simply pull out its operation.

Apparently it has finally dawned on Gowon and Co. that the Swiss have lost their patience, and the Feds -- uncharacteristically -- are holding a series of urgent meetings in Lagos to try to decide what to do. As you know from your talk with Elliot Richardson, our Embassy will be pushing the Feds for an affirmative reply. But the odds are still less than even that Gowon can overrule his hawks, who would just as soon be rid of the Red Cross once and for all.

If the Red Cross departs, of course, this leaves the Church agencies and their "illegal" airlift as the only relief operation with a chance of stemming the starvation inside Biafra over the next few months. We will then face a choice of (a) supporting a relief airlift which the Feds regard as a violation of their sovereignty or (b) bowing out of the relief business in Biafra altogether.

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As I have indicated to you before, this climax of relief negotiations was inevitable. When the Red Cross goes, we will face two tough questions: (1) what to say in public, when both the Feds and the Red Cross will expect us to vindicate their respective positions, and (2) how we treat the Church agencies, who will almost certainly use the Red Cross departure to pressure us for more money and planes.

I am persuaded there is nothing we can do at this point but wait out the Monday deadline. Not even State can devise a way to save the Feds from themselves.

I will have an analysis on next steps for you to send to the President as soon as we know the decision in Lagos.

RM:mm