

MEMORANDUM

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

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

*2006*  
*Ed Roberts*  
*Copy*  
*W/James*  
ACTION

September 20, 1969

*File - special file*  
*Not to be sent*

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *H*  
SUBJECT: Presidential Initiative in Nigeria/Biafra Relief  
Impasse

The Biafrans have quietly approached my staff -- through a young MIT scholar, Christopher Beal -- asking our help out of the current impasse on Red Cross relief flights. The problem is as follows:

- The Red Cross has proposed an internationally-inspected daylight airlift which neither side would exploit for military advantage.
- The Federals, after much hesitation, formally signed the agreement for a trial period of three weeks. In so doing, they committed themselves to a broad, non-specific pledge to refrain from attacking the Biafran air field during daylight relief operations.
- The Biafrans, however, have so far refused to agree to the Red Cross plan on the basis of their long-standing fear of a Federal violation of the airlift. Specifically, they worry that Federal MIGs will shadow relief planes for a sneak attack against the air field which is Biafra's sole lifeline for arms and food.
- The Biafrans are now asking us to make a public statement to "give a guarantee that Nigeria will not abuse the route".
- This request has two distinct motives. First, the Biafrans are genuinely afraid the Feds will violate the agreement while the world looks on, with the result that Biafra loses

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both relief and the air field. But second, they obviously want to escape the inevitable public opprobrium which will come with their refusal to match Federal acceptance of the Red Cross plan.

In my judgment, the Biafrans have given us a chance to offer them a face-saving device which might well break the relief impasse. There can be no question -- and Ojukwu knows it -- of a U.S. "guarantee" or any implication of our direct involvement in policing the airlift. But we can seize this opportunity to offer:

1. A firm Presidential statement that we (as well as the Red Cross and other donors) understand the Federal pledge of military restraint to be a solemn and statesmanlike commitment.
2. A quiet offer to the Red Cross to (a) help them obtain simple but effective communications equipment to distinguish the relief aircraft from Federal fighters; and (b) help enlist the Canadians (who have already offered) as neutral observers in the relief planes and at the Biafran air field.

A proposed Presidential statement is at Tab A. It is entirely consistent with your earlier letters to all the parties in the relief problem. Tactically, it binds the Federal side by imputing the most praiseworthy motives to their agreement. It also warns the Biafrans we will not be maneuvered politically on the relief question. To bring around Ojukwu, however, it deposits a diplomatic warning to the Federals (without specifying our actions) in case they violate the relief airlift.

I believe the initiative here is worth seizing. The alternative is likely to be mounting starvation in the enclave, a steady worsening of our relations with the Federals, and complete reliance on the dangerous night-time airlift of the Church voluntary agencies, whose US-donated planes and American civilian crews are bound to be shot down by the Federal MIGs sooner or later. A daylight flight arrangement is the only real remedy to these considerable risks.

If you approve this initiative, I will coordinate with the State Department both your statement and offer to the Red Cross, in order to produce a carefully-timed scenario for maximum effect on all parties.

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Recommendation -- That you authorize (a) the Presidential statement at Tab A and (b) a quiet offer of help to the Red Cross in implementing an inviolable relief airlift -- in an effort to secure Biafran agreement to daytime flights.

Approve

*[Signature]*

Disapprove \_\_\_\_\_

Attachment

Tab A - Suggested Presidential Statement

*good work !*