

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

H/C

February 17, 1970

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger
SUBJECT: Message to General Gowon

To: Henry Rush

Secretary Rogers will be in Lagos, Nigeria, on February 18 and will see the head of the military government, General Gowon. Elliot Richardson seconds Ambassador Trueheart's recommendation that the Secretary take the opportunity to deliver a personal message from you to General Gowon, and that he extend on your behalf an invitation to General Gowon to visit the United States at a date to be determined (Tab C).

Both of these steps are calculated to improve our relations with the Federal Military Government in Nigeria and specifically with General Gowon. Our relations have been somewhat strained in recent weeks as Gowon has reacted to what he considers unfair and unwarranted criticism in the western press including that of the United States.

Gowon believes that he has acted magnanimously in his treatment of the vanquished secessionist Biafrans and that he is moving rapidly and effectively to meet the needs of the suffering in the former secessionist area. He considers that our pressures for greater relief efforts reflect a lack of confidence in him and his government.

I am convinced that our best hope of a real and rapid improvement in the relief situation in the stricken areas of Eastern Nigeria lies in closer and more understanding relations with Gowon and recommend therefore that you authorize Secretary Rogers to convey a letter from you to General Gowon (Tab A).

At the same time we must recognize that relief efforts still are moving slowly and that we can help the Nigerians solve this problem. This may be the only opportunity we will have for a meaningful high-level dialogue with Gowon on the relief needs in Nigeria. Moreover, if we do not express continuing interest in relief efforts during the Secretary's visit, our failure to do so may

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be taken by Gowon and his associates as evidence that we are wholly satisfied with progress thus far. Accordingly, I have revised State's draft letter to General Gowon to advise that you have asked Secretary Rogers to discuss ways in which we might be of assistance in Nigeria's relief efforts.

An invitation to Gowon to visit the United States at some future date would be a warm gesture and probably would be well received. It carries with it, however, some risk of unfavorable domestic reaction. Congressional voices, which are quiet for the moment, probably will be raised again if the momentum of the relief effort does not increase. If word of an invitation to Gowon, however vague as to date, were to get out and progress on relief were inadequate we would be open to criticism for having taken such a step in the absence of satisfactory Nigerian moves on relief. The gesture, however, would help to establish the rapport we need if our relief efforts are to have prompt and full effect.

Recommendation:

That you authorize the Secretary to invite General Gowon to visit the United States at a date to be determined later, but that no announcement of the invitation be made at this time. A draft cable for this purpose is at Tab B.

Letter to General Gowon

Approved ☒

Disapproved ☐

Invitation to Gowon for Visit to U. S.

Approved ☒

Disapproved ☐

*but keep it
very vague*

Attachments

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