

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

BRIEFING

JAN 19 1970

~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Your Meeting with Secretary Rogers, Relief Coordinator  
Clyde Ferguson, and Assistant Secretary Newsom on Nigerian  
Relief -- 12:00 Noon, January 20, 1970

You have a detailed run-down on the immediate problem in meeting emergency relief needs. (A copy of this memo is at Tab A for easy reference.)

The problem in brief is that State and AID, as well as the Nigerians, have (a) seriously underestimated the food requirements in terms of tonnages and people in severe need, while (b) overestimating the ability of the Nigerians to cope. For various reasons, our people here and in Lagos have refused to accept an authoritative factual survey done by U.S. public health doctors in Biafra just before the collapse -- the Western Report, named after Dr. Karl Western of the Atlanta Communicable Diseases Center who led the team. Following a personal briefing by Dr. Western and his colleagues today, however, Newsom and Ferguson have at least begun necessary action by instructing our mission in Lagos to try to persuade the Nigerians of the serious implications of the Western Report.

State will argue in this meeting that we must go slow in pointing out the Nigerians' error. The hard truth, however, is that we do not have the luxury of time for a low-key selling job. According to Dr. Western and his colleagues, the food situation in Biafra now is like a precipice, with large numbers of people dropping over everyday. The need must be recognized quickly and acted upon, or the mass damage will be done.

Your purpose in this meeting should be to impress upon State the urgency of presenting the situation to the Nigerians. This means not only an effort by our embassy in Lagos to convey the problem, but also a strong political push to protect your position should the Nigerians -- as they well may -- still refuse to act. This means pressing for an emergency airlift.

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Talking Points

1. There is strong evidence that we face a very serious problem in Nigerian relief. Our own scientific survey of food needs inside Biafra -- the Western Report -- indicates the problem is likely to be much greater than the Nigerians have anticipated or are able to deal with.

2. (Ask) Clyde Ferguson to outline the relief problem, including the major implications of the Western Report.

3. (Ask) Secretary Rogers and Assistant Secretary Newsom (on the basis of his trip to Lagos) to assess the political situation -- how we should approach the Nigerians to have maximum impact both in persuading them to move and in protecting your position if they do not and there are mass deaths.

4. Given the sensitivity of this problem, we should avoid commenting to the Press after this meeting. I want to reflect further on my decision in dealing with the Nigerians.

Attachment