



~~CONFIDENTIAL~~
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Washington, D.C. 20520

July 7, 1969

TO : The Under Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM : AF - Joseph Palmer 2nd

SUBJECT: Nigeria - BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

1. The FMG decided on June 30 to withdraw from the ICRC its relief coordinating role in the Federally-controlled area and to impose restrictive conditions on relief shipments into the Biafran enclave which the Biafrans reject. If both sides remain intransigent, the specter of renewed mass starvation arises.

2. Great public concern has been expressed. Strong Congressional concern has been manifested and could lead to constraints in our relations with the FMG, including our economic aid program. In the face of this situation we can (a) take further initiatives still open to us under existing policy, or (b) take a decision to change our policy.

Present Policy

3. Our policy to date has been to give large-scale support to international relief efforts through the ICRC and other agencies and to make a sharp distinction between humanitarian assistance and military or direct political involvement. We have avoided the latter, have continued to recognize the FMG and have considered the political problem as one that can best be solved by the Africans themselves.

GROUP 3
Downgraded at 12 year intervals,
not automatically declassified.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

3 COPY

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

2

Present Situation

4. Starvation as an instrument of war has become a major issue. Each side has chosen to subordinate relief to political and military advantage. In imposing its new conditions, the FMG is reflecting the predominant attitudes amongst its own public that what is considered uncontrolled international assistance to the rebellion must be stopped. These conditions were imposed with full knowledge of Biafran opposition to the controls imposed, with full awareness that they could result in a cessation of this flow of relief and with an apparent willingness to accept the international implications. The Biafran leadership, on the other hand, has shown itself only too willing to utilize the suffering of its people to generate foreign support. It appears to be calculating the risk of mass starvation as acceptable at least for some weeks or months in the expectation that foreign intervention will materialize. Relief needs in Federal territory are manageable even in the new situation. The problem facing us continues to be that of getting relief into Biafra. Our support of efforts to do this and the consequent strong pressure on the FMG to assure a relief flow have very seriously strained our relations with that regime. There are still a few hopeful signs but they are not too encouraging. The FMG, in response to our demarches, has expressed to us its willingness to discuss modalities of daylight flights with the ICRC or any other relief organization wishing to continue the relief airlift, including the JCA. (It has also announced its willingness to have neutral participation in FMG inspection procedures.) It has, however, refused to reconsider its prohibition of night flights and has in effect rejected the water route for the time being. Elsewhere, there is encouraging evidence that the French may be shifting toward greater interest in the relief, as contrasted with the political, aspects of the problem. Vatican interest continues high.

Dangers in Present Situation

The present situation has very dangerous implications for the United States. We are already

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

3

at a threshold in our relations with Nigeria which opens the serious question of whether further pressures on them in a direction they regard as adverse to their interests in any matter, will not seriously damage our already strained relations. Against the background of continuing U.S. Congressional and popular interest and frustration, past events have already pushed us a long way towards assuming primary responsibility for relief. The current impasse and our doubtful ability to bring about a satisfactory resolution of the relief problem increasingly exposes us to additional pressures to assume primary responsibility for ending the conflict. This will be an even more intractable problem than relief. At this juncture, we see little prospect of success in the political realm given the present irreconcilable attitudes of the two sides, African opinion, and current British, French and Soviet policies. A summary of peace efforts to date is attached (Tab H).

Further Implementation

6. In furtherance of our primary objectives of (a) assuring an internationally recognized sponsor for a daytime airlift and a water route into Biafra, and (b) bringing about resumption of relief shipments into the enclave, we have taken some actions and contemplate others which, given the attitudes of the parties, may be little more than palliatives. However there are areas worthy of more exploration such as the modalities of daylight flights originating in Federal territory.

7. We have: (a) made representations to the FMG and to the Biafrans (Tab B) on the four point action program set forth in the Secretary's July 2 statement (Tab A); coordinated approaches with the British (Tab C); suggested discussions with the Emperor (Tab D); communicated with the United Nations Secretary General (Tab E), the ICRC (Tab F), and the Vatican (Tab G); and we are planning to send Ambassador Ferguson to Geneva, Paris, London and the Vatican.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

4

We Contemplate

8. (a) Your talking with the Emperor or the Ethiopian Foreign Minister on Tuesday or Wednesday; (b) possible Three Power talks (U.S., U.K., France), depending on the results of Ambassador Ferguson's mission; (c) continued efforts to induce the FMG and the Biafrans to agree to resume relief shipments; (d) continuing encouragement to both the ICRC and the Federal Government to work out a new relationship; and (e) urging the FMG and the ICRC to publicize the resumption of discussions between them about modalities for daylight flights and any other relief efforts that may materialize.

We Might Consider

9. (a) Bilateral exchanges on the relief problem with other interested countries, such as Canada, the Scandinavian countries, West Germany and Italy; (b) bilateral talks with African countries which have expressed interest in resolving this problem including those which have recognized Biafra; and (c) discussions with the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Possible Actions with Regard to Congress

10. A more intensive effort could be made to mobilize Congressional opinion behind present policy, building on (a) those elements favoring the FMG position, (b) those who tend to oppose direct U.S. involvement in uncertain situations abroad, and (c) those who are generally uninformed on the issues and their implications for the United States.

Possible Actions in the Public Domain

11. Public knowledge of the steps we have taken, consistent with the effective security of delicate negotiations, and evidence of our intention to continue

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

5

to grapple with the problem are of equal importance. Any or all of the following steps could be taken in an effort to make it clear to the Congress and interested citizens that there is still a possibility of renewed relief shipments and that, in any event, delicate negotiations to that end are in progress. (a) Action by the President to emphasize his concern with the problem that could take the form of (1) a visit to Geneva for discussions with the ICRC President and the Voluntary Agencies on his way home from Romania; or (2) public messages to the ICRC, the heads of state of other concerned nations, or even to Gowon and Ojukwu; (b) issuance of a White Paper on Ambassador Ferguson's efforts, although this would probably make any further progress in breaking the impasse on his part impossible; (c) a public reply by the Secretary to any of the numerous communications he has received from interested groups, particularly JCA; (d) appearance of one or more highly placed Departmental officials on TV at an appropriate time for a public explanation of United States policy.

Change in Policy

12. If the relief impasse continues, we face three stark choices:

(a) Disengagement. This will only be possible if a clear, acceptable and credible statement can be made to the effect that the United States has exhausted all current possibilities short of the use of force. In the present climate of opinion, disengagement will be possible only if both sides or the Biafrans alone can clearly be shown to be at fault.

(b) Resumption of relief shipments into Biafra in defiance of either the Nigerians or the Biafrans or both. Possibilities open to us for relief actions to be undertaken without the consent of either or both parties are extremely limited and fraught with grave risk. Such actions might include an attempt to initiate a relief airdrop from FMG territory over Biafran objections or

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

6

militarily escorted relief flights into Biafra over FMG objections. The latter action would, of course, involve direct violation of Nigerian sovereignty with serious consequences for our relations not only with Nigeria but with the rest of Africa.

(c) Political Involvement: We should be clear about the risks. To the extent that U.S. political involvement seemed to run counter to FMG interests and stated OAU positions, we run the risks of alienating the FMG, placing strains on our relations with the rest of Africa, undermining the British, and enhancing the posture of the Soviet Union, which could emerge as the principle ally of Nigeria. We would also endanger the safety of the 5,000 or more American citizens resident in Nigeria, to say nothing of an American investment in excess of \$200 million. Ironically, having incurred these great disadvantages, the relief effort would have been endangered rather than helped. Political courses of action proposed by interested parties have included calls for an arms embargo, engaging the United Nations, and convening of a great power conference to consider the question. While these dramatic solutions seem attractive, we strongly doubt that they are within our power to bring about. To be effective an arms embargo has to be adhered to by all and impartially policed. We do not believe that those supplying the two sides will agree and, in any event, arms are readily available on the international market. To date the United Nations has been unresponsive to efforts to involve it in the Nigerian question. The Secretary General has accepted the OAU decision that it is an internal Nigerian affair ^{and} ~~who~~ has been unwilling to go beyond sending a personal representative as an observer to Lagos who works parallel with the international observer team. However, he now seems prepared to accept a broader role for UNICEF. Consultations with key member states, and the Secretary General, have made it very clear that the prospects for inscription of Nigerian relief or the Nigerian civil war has, at least to date, had no

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

7

prospect of success. As for a great power conference such as that convened on the Arab-Israeli problem, we see no evidence that the Soviets would engage in a useful exchange to that end.

Attachments:

- TAB A - Secretary's July 2 Statement
- TAB B - Representations to the FMG and the Biafrans
- TAB C - Approaches to the British
- TAB D - Suggested Discussions with the Emperor
- TAB E - Communications with the U.N. Secretary General
- TAB F - Communications with the ICRC
- TAB G - Communications with the Vatican
- TAB H - Summary of Peace Efforts

AF:AmbNewson:AF/W:GBSherry:dal
7/6/69

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~