

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET/EXCLUSIVELY EYES ONLY~~

Sept. 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Bureaucratic Responsiveness to the President

The past few weeks have seen a series of incidents in which the bureaucracy was either unresponsive to the President's desires or displayed an extraordinary inability to coordinate matters within itself. These problems have too often been due to a failure to clear public statements and policy cables with the White House. These incidents are in addition to past problems with regard to SALT, Vietnam and the Middle East, with which you are familiar.

Failures of this sort are increasing in frequency, and if something is not done soon, the interests of the United States and the Presidency could be seriously damaged. In addition, we must now face the question of the Secretary of State's working relationship with me. If not, what seems to be an increasingly serious sort of bureaucratic guerrilla war may have very serious consequences for the management of our foreign affairs.

[Omitted here is information unrelated to Nigeria.]

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1. Nigeria/Biafra

In a note on a memorandum from me to him on April 8, and in subsequent notes, the President has made clear his desire to avoid a pro-Federal Government bias by the US in the Nigeria/Biafra conflict, and to lean more towards Biafra. The President indicated to the Secretary of State and myself a few weeks ago that he wished a US initiative to be undertaken which could speed the resolution of the conflict.

On August 25 -- without checking with the White House -- the Secretary authorized the initiation of an initiative which would have prejudged the issue in favor of the Federal Government and would have been rejected by the Biafrans. On the same day, I raised the subject of Biafra with the President, without knowing exactly what the Secretary of State had been doing. The President informed me that he had not authorized an initiative, and asked that no move be made until after his return to Washington. When this decision was communicated to the State Department,* the Secretary in violent telephone calls to me and to a member of my staff insisted that he did not want the members of my staff spending so much time at the State Department and that all such messages to the State Department should be passed through him from me.

Such an arrangement would make everything an issue -- a test of strength -- and would mean that one or the other would have to back down. The dangers of this are clear. (In fact, there was a case a month ago in which the Secretary had issued an instruction which was clearly against the President's wishes, as indicated in a memorandum I had received. But I did not attempt to have the Secretary's instruction reversed since it was not an important matter and it would have undermined his authority over his Department.)

[Omitted here is information unrelated to Nigeria.]

*A technical mistake was made in communicating the President's wishes. It was communicated by mistake from a member of my staff to a member of State's Bureau of African Affairs, rather than to the State Department Secretariat. (My staff member was in the State Bureau of African Affairs when he received the news, and he had no choice but to pass the word on when asked.)

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