

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

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THE WHITE HOUSE

~~SECRET/NO DIS~~

WASHINGTON

Thursday - November 6, 1969 - 1:30 p.m.

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY KISSINGER

ACTION

FROM: Roger Morris *Regm*

SUBJECT: Late Developments Affecting a Presidential Statement on Biafra.

At Tab A is a statement (relevant points underlined) made this morning by Ojukwu accusing the US of "maneuvers" on the relief issue which only helped the Feds and British against Biafra. The story got some play in today's Washington Post. This is a predictably tough and defensive effort to pre-empt what Ojukwu undoubtedly anticipates as a major blast from us on the failure of our daylight flight initiative. (The Biafrans obviously expect what they call the "State Department hawks" to carry the day now within the USG).

I think this alters somewhat the recommendation I gave you yesterday (copy at Tab C) against a statement blaming the Biafrans for the failure of daylight flights. Now that Ojukwu has chosen to make a public issue of our role, it may make sense to get on the record at least an explanation of those "maneuvers". But there remain good arguments -- in terms of poisoning the atmosphere on both relief and political initiatives -- against a harsh statement from the President personally.

An alternative would have Richardson deliver a version of this statement when he meets the press following his talks with Foreign Secretary Stewart this weekend. He could cast the statement as an explanation in response to the Ojukwu charges, and keep it an even-tempered recital of our efforts to accommodate rather than pressure the Biafrans on this issue. (A proposed Richardson statement, a revision of the original State draft, is at Tab B.)

State and Richardson, of course, will be more anxious than ever to have a strong condemnation in the light of the Ojukwu statement. And ER will find it much less satisfactory to issue the statement himself just because he wants to disabuse the Biafrans of the idea (not unperceptive) that they enjoy some sympathy from the President. Yet it is precisely the preservation of that idea -- that the US is still capable of dealing fairly -- that argues against a strong Presidential blast.

Even with a Richardson statement, however, I think we can and should go ahead with a nice message to Gowon, as proposed in yesterday's memo.

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Recommendation

- (1) That you take up this latest development orally with the President, in connection with the memorandum (Tab C) you have already sent regarding a statement on the Biafrans.
- (2) That Richardson be authorized to make a statement (Tab B) in light of the Ojukwu accusation this morning.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

Attachments

Tab A - Ojukwu statement (FBIS 24, 6 November) criticizing the US.

Tab B - Possible Richardson Statement from London.

Tab C - Copy of original action memo, 11/5/69, on Presidential statement.

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Tabs A

M. Harris
(Received 12 noon)

FBI 24

OJUKWU CRITICISM OF U.S.

EASTERN NIGERIA SECESSIONIST RADIO IN ENGLISH 0600 GMT 5 NOV 69

(TEXT) GEN ODUMEGWU OJUKWU HAS REITERATED BIAFRA'S STAND ON RELIEF. BIAFRA, HE SAID, WOULD LIKE TO GET RELIEF BUT THIS MUST COME IN SUCH A WAY AS NOT TO JEOPARDIZE HER SECURITY. BIAFRA HAS ACCEPTED A NUMBER OF PROPOSALS TO FACILITATE THE SUPPLY OF RELIEF, BUT LAGOS IN TURN HAS TURNED THEM DOWN IN KEEPING WITH HER POLICY OF USING STARVATION AS A WEAPON OF WAR. HE SAID THE LATEST AGREEMENT BETWEEN LAGOS AND THE ICRC FOR DAYLIGHT FLIGHTS SOUGHT TO NEUTRALIZE BIAFRA'S USE OF ULI AIRPORT AND ALLOWED NIGERIA FLEXIBILITY IN ITS USE, THUS EXPOSING BIAFRA'S SECURITY TO DANGER.

GENERAL OJUKWU SAID THE ENTIRE CONFUSION OVER RELIEF IS DUE LARGELY TO THE MANEUVERS OF THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT. HE ACCUSED THIS GOVERNMENT OF HELPING NIGERIA AND BRITAIN TO NEUTRALIZE THE BIAFRA AIR POTENTIAL. HE THOUGHT THE UNITED STATES, BEING A POWERFUL NATION, SHOULD HAVE INTERVENED ONLY ON THE SIDE OF PEACE BY BRINGING PRESSURE ON LAGOS TO GO TO THE CONFERENCE TABLE. BUT, INSTEAD OF USING ITSELF FOR PEACE, IT IS INCREASINGLY INVOLVING ITSELF ON THE SIDE OF NIGERIA DIPLOMATICALLY.

ON THE ROLE OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT, GENERAL OJUKWU OBSERVED THAT IT HAS A STAKE IN THE WAR. ITS MAIN AIM IS TO EXPLOIT THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF BIAFRA FOREVER. FOR IT, ANY POSITION WHICH SATISFIES THIS AIM IS ACCEPTABLE.

HE SAID HE DOES NOT THINK THE SEVERANCE OF CONNECTIONS WITH THE ICRC WILL SERVE ANY USEFUL PURPOSE. THE FAULT IS NOT THAT OF THE INDIVIDUALS WHO RUN THE ORGANIZATION. RATHER IT IS THE DIFFICULTIES INHERENT IN THE INTERNATIONAL POSTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION. HOWEVER, HE THOUGHT THAT THE RED CROSS WAS IGNORING THE FACT THAT THE PEOPLE IT WANTS TO GIVE SUCCOR TO ARE DYING.

THE HEAD OF STATE SAID IF THE RED CROSS HAS FAILED BIAFRA IN RECENT TIMES IT IS IN ITS FAILURE TO FIND AN INTERIM SOLUTION. IN THIS REGARD, HE WONDERED WHETHER IT IS NOT MORE REASONABLE FOR THE ICRC TO PASS SOME RELIEF STOCKS TO SOME RELIEF AGENCIES WHICH ARE NOT IN THE SAME DIFFICULTY AS IT IS, WHILE TRYING TO FIND A LONG-TERM SOLUTION.

GENERAL OJUKWU EXPRESSED THE PEOPLE'S APPRECIATION FOR THE EFFORTS OF RELIEF AGENCIES TO ALLEVIATE THEIR SUFFERING. HE SAID THE EFFECT OF THE STOPPAGE OF RED CROSS FLIGHTS HAS BEEN A CUT IN THE QUANTITY OF RELIEF COMING INTO THE COUNTRY, BUT BIAFRANS HAVE BEEN DOING A LOT TO HELP THEMSELVES TO REDUCE THE MORE DRAMATIC EFFECTS IT WOULD HAVE HAD. GENERAL OJUKWU SAID HE HAS FAITH IN THE ABILITY OF THE BIAFRANS TO SURVIVE ANY DIFFICULTY.

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Wednesday - November 5, 1969
7:00 p.m.

OBE
NOV 10 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY KISSINGER

ACTION

FROM: Roger Morris

Roger

SUBJECT: State's proposed condemnation of Biafra

As I alerted you at this morning's staff meeting, attached is a package for the President conveying State's recommended statement blaming the Biafrans for the failure of our initiative on daylight flights.

I have recommended an alternative approach -- a brief message to General Gowon praising his agreement to the proposal.

You should know, however, that AF enlisted Richardson in pushing this statement, and he probably expects it to be issued by Friday or Saturday. He is scheduled to begin his talks on Nigeria Friday in London.

If the President decides against the statement, I think you should personally break the news to Richardson by phone or eyes-only White House cable.

Recommendation

That you sign the attached memorandum to the President.

Attachment

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

ACTION

FROM: Henry Kissinger

SUBJECT: Status of Initiatives on Nigeria/Biafra

As you instructed, we have been moving along two lines in dealing with the Biafran problem: (1) an initiative to break the current relief impasse on Red Cross daytime flights, and (2) probing the possibilities for negotiating a settlement of the war itself.

The following summarizes where we stand on these initiatives, with State's recommendation on the next step.

Relief

You will recall that the impasse on daylight flights stemmed from the Biafran fear of a Federal violation of the airlift for a sneak attack on the airfield which is Biafra's sole lifeline for arms and food. This long-standing fear remained despite the Federals' general pledge to the Red Cross that they would refrain from attacking the airfield during the day.

The Biafrans approached us through a private intermediary about four weeks ago asking that the US provide some "guarantee" that Nigeria would not abuse the daylight flight route. There was no question -- and the Biafrans seemed to understand this -- of our direct involvement in policing the airlift. But we did seize the opportunity to offer them (a) a Presidential statement that we took the inviolability of the airlift as a solemn commitment of the Federal side, and (b) help in getting both communications equipment and Canadian observers as practical safeguards.

Elliot Richardson received a commitment on the inviolability of the airlift from the Nigerian Foreign Minister when he was here recently. Clyde Ferguson, our Relief Coordinator, then carried our offer to West Africa to lay it before the Biafrans.

What followed among Ojukwu and his colleagues is not clear. Our intelligence [REDACTED] suggests a major wrangle in the Biafran leadership between their Foreign Ministry, whose people had floated the initiative with us in the first place, and the Biafran military. In any case, over the last two weeks it has become clear that the military has prevailed and Ojukwu has turned down our initiative.

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There were probably two main grounds for the rejection: (1) increasing use of the Biafran airfield by their mini-air force during daylight hours, which the agreement would have prohibited, and (2) a predictably hard-nosed conclusion by Ojukwu that not even a U.S. assurance and the threat of our opprobrium, short of military intervention, would deter the Federal mercenary pilots from trying a sneak attack that could have a decisive effect by severing Biafra's arms supply. There is also the consideration, real or imagined, that night relief flights provide some cover for arms flights. A daytime agreement would probably have tempted the religious relief agencies to give up their hazardous night runs for the safer Red Cross route.

In the face of this rejection, State is now recommending that you issue a statement revealing the secret initiative and condemning the Biafran refusal. Their proposed statement is at Tab A. Under Secretary Richardson argues that the statement is needed to (1) protect our standing with the Federals, who claim that we have never given them due credit or the Biafrans due scorn on relief, and (2) generally to show the Biafrans that we mean business when we go out of our way to meet their position. State believes (and I think with some justification) that Ojukwu has exploited relief for political advantage. They want to get his "intransigence" on the record.

The other side of the argument, however, is that a public condemnation of the Biafrans at this point is unlikely to force any change in their position. It might only harden the already deep distrust and cynicism which lie behind their rejection. These are people who see themselves, rightly or wrongly, as having gone it alone in a noble cause against great odds. Their strong point -- a fierce pride and independence -- is precisely what makes them tough to deal with. A public slap from you, adding to their sense of isolation, could damage whatever chance we may still have to play a useful role in trying to get a relief arrangement.

It can also be argued that a statement of this kind might reawaken the domestic debate in the Congress and elsewhere. Our critics have been muted largely by the knowledge that we are sticking with the problem in an even-handed way, despite the frustration.

There is, moreover, an important consideration on the timing of this statement in relation to our efforts on the political side to probe the prospects of a negotiated settlement.

Political

The last few weeks have seen another flurry of African diplomatic activity with Haile Selassie and various parties trying to bring the two sides together.

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The Africans made clear that they wanted no outside help on these efforts. Thus, we stood on the sidelines, knowing little of the backstage moves but trying to give them every chance to succeed. It is now obvious, however, that these African efforts have failed again -- apparently for the usual reasons of poor coordination and absence of real leverage.

Richardson feels -- and I agree -- that the way is clear now for us to move ahead on the peace probe you authorized earlier. Richardson plans to begin, while he's in Europe for the NATO sub-Ministerial, with an approach to the British and French this weekend.

The question is whether a Presidential condemnation of Biafra on the relief problem helps or harms this political initiative. State argues that a hard line on relief tells the Biafrans they can't take advantage of us in a peace effort. But a stubborn Biafran counter-reaction of the kind described above could poison the atmosphere on political as well as relief matter. Our peace probe will not go very far if Ojukwu and his wary advisers believe we are looking for the first opportunity to tag them with public exposure.

My own view is that State's proposed statement raises more problem than it solves. I agree with Richardson that we need some gesture with the Federals to keep them cooperative on both relief and political matters. But that could be done with a brief message from you to General Gowon (proposed draft at Tab B) which praises his agreement to daylight flights without a public branding of the Biafrans.

At some stage -- either as a counter to domestic critics or a tactic in negotiations -- we may well have to reveal the record and assess the blame in the Biafran problem. But a statement now seems to me premature -- and perhaps harmful to our beginning effort to spur a negotiated settlement. I think we have to expect a lot of frustration -- and endure it quietly -- if we hope to make a dent in this bitter and complex problem.

Recommendation

That you approve the message to General Gowon (Tab B) instead of the proposed statement on Biafra's rejection of our relief initiative (Tab A).

Approve _____. Disapprove _____. See me _____.

Attachments

Tab A - State's proposed statement on Biafra's rejection.

Tab B - Proposed Presidential message to General Gowon instead of State's statement.