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Biafra - Nigeria

By: [Signature] NARA Date: 2/18/98

OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: COLLECT CHARGE TO

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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy MONROVIA IMMEDIATE

Info:

STATE

SUBJECT: Relief Negotiations, Briefing of President Tubman

REF: State's 57155

1. Since timing for Ferguson visit did not prove satisfactory prior to Concom meeting, believe Ambassador should inform Secstate Grimes that he has received background information on Ferguson relief activities which at Grimes' convenience or that of President Tubman be in position to convey. The following material is for guidance in your briefing:

2. Dr. Ferguson arrived in Lagos on March 15 for talks with General Gowon and a tour of the battle areas and then flew to Cotonou and entered Biafra and held extensive private conversations with Colonel Ojukwu. On March 25 he returned to Lagos for further conversations with Gen. Gowon. The return trip included stops in Addis Ababa, Geneva and the Hague.

3. In discussions with Gowon and Ojukwu following plan proposed: Both Uli and Obilago air fields should be utilized for daylight relief flights for period of sixty days or until

(1)

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Page _____ of telegram to _____

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surface corridor could be opened into Biafran-controlled areas. The two airfields had never previously been linked in one proposal and as single proposal they offered new negotiating position for both sides. Various surface corridors were proposed including new proposals which offer both good logistic possibilities as well as political advantage of being US proposal.

4. Both Gowon and Ojukwu were receptive to a surface corridor. Gowon stated that he would have to refer the proposals to his military commanders for their advice. Ojukwu expressed his willingness to enter into secret negotiations with Nigerian officials on a surface corridor. There were ^{some} indications that both leaders would be willing to meet face-to-face for these negotiations. Both parties sought assurances that the initiative remain a US initiative, that the USG arrange the site with their agreement and that the US be present as intermediary.

5. While both sides expressed their willingness to enter secret talks on a surface route, they both stuck to their known positions regarding daylight flights and use of the Obilago airstrip. In order to keep our initiative and to guard the secrecy of these negotiations this office has refused to discuss surface corridors and in cooperation

with the Dutch Foreign Office has encouraged countries participating

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in the "Luns Plan Group" to discuss only daylight flights. In the meantime, contacts with both sides are being maintained in order to move as rapidly as possible to the second phase of negotiations -- the choice of an African site and an agreed date to bring both sides together.

6. Since Luns Group meeting Dutch have undertaken demarches Lagos, Abidjan, Dar es Salaam and Addis Ababa to press for daylight flights in addition existing night flights and agreement both parties to certain conditions -- e.g. non-interference by FMG and no arms flight to Biafra during daylight. GON pointed out that Group would not support proposed construction new airstrip for relief flights which opposed by FMG. Joint Church Aid which reviewed new airstrip proposal has also turned project down because construction materials would displace relief supplies on air bridge, proposal would not guarantee increase in relief over existing level, and proposal has political-military implications.

END

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