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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

June 2, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY KISSINGER

FROM: Roger Morris

SUBJECT: Potential Problem in Nigerian Relief

You should be aware that we could face in the next couple of weeks a nasty little run-in with the Feds over relief flights.

The problem stems from the growing frustration on the Federal side as the war drags on. Lagos has been predictably testy during the last few weeks as their offensive stalled and the Biafrans made major gains on the southern front. But feelings have come to the flash point with the dramatic appearance a few days ago of a Biafran "air force." Piloted by Swedish mercenaries and armed with French rockets, 5 or 6 tiny piper cubs have hit hard at the Nigerian Air Force in surprise raids on Federal bases around the perimeter -- more damage in a week than Federal MIGs and Ilyushins managed in two years. (These little planes symbolize all too vividly the tragic-comic plight of the Feds. The Swedish pilots serve Biafra with an ardor Lagos can't even muster among its own people (let alone the seemingly myopic Egyptians who've been flying Federal MIGs). Then too, the one-seaters are a brilliant improvisation perfectly suited to the rustic technology of this war. While sophisticated Soviet jets dart around hitting hospitals and villages, the cubs lumber along at tree-top with simple but telling accuracy. Biafran air raids are thus an embarrassing mockery of Federal leadership as well as a military threat.)

The Feds could save face by (1) shopping for small prop planes of their own or (2) diverting attention with an offensive somewhere along the perimeter. There is evidence that they may be planning both. But the planes will take time, and the offensive is also time-consuming and all but foredoomed. Gowon needs a dramatic gesture now.

Wlyz

That leaves what has always been the most obvious and vulnerable scapegoat of Federal frustration -- the relief airlift. You will remember that the food flights go into Biafra only at night under the auspices of the International Red Cross and religious voluntary agencies. The Feds have suspected all along that the voluntary agencies were running guns. In any case, the relief flights do constitute, willy nilly, a cover for the French arms flights which also come in at night.

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Rejoice  
What is that  
Keeps Feds from  
whinnies

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So far, Gowon has sullenly tolerated the relief airlift -- ostensibly for moral reasons, though the decision was made easier by the knowledge that his own mercenary pilots would have considerable difficulty with moving targets. Now, however, he is pressed by wounded pride as well as xenophobia. And even without a conscious decision to bar relief flights, some jittery Federal pilot could take on a Red Cross or church transport.

Whether by declaration or action, a Federal outlawing of relief flights would surely bring us some tough decisions. The Biafra lobby here would find new life and press for Presidential intervention. Our choice might boil down to acquiescence in a relief blockade or some kind of open confrontation with the Feds.

There is still the chance that cooler heads, few as they are, will prevail in Lagos. But I wanted to alert you to the more unpleasant possibilities. I have State hard at work on planning for a crisis of this sort -- including some fast acceleration of Clyde Ferguson's relief negotiations which might yet yield a surface corridor to substitute for the night airlift.

I'm afraid, though, that this episode is only symptomatic. As long as this war continues, not even our low profile will shield us from some sizable brickbats both there and here.

*When all we fancy to see paper?*

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