

Norman Cousins, Editor

August 25, 1969

Confidential

Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President
for National Security Affairs
The Summer White House
San Clemente, California

Dear Henry Kissinger:

The two main points of my report on Nigeria and Biafra are; first, it may be a serious error to base a policy on the probability of early Federal victory; second, President Nixon may be in a position to play an effective role in bringing the war to an end.

Let me briefly develop these two points.

1) The Biafrans are demonstrating sustained resistance capabilities. There is no shortage of arms, nor is there likely to be one. About 90% of Biafran military equipment is obtained not from France but from Nigerian forces, which has difficulty in maintaining its lines of supply. The Federal government "occupies" most Biafran territory but does not control it. Biafran strategy is one of strategic initial retreat along the main roads, followed by systematic and highly trained guerrilla activity against Nigerian lines of supply. This strategy was responsible for the recapture of the entire Owerri area - far more important, strategically, than the loss of Umahia. Incidentally, there is a better than fair probability that Umahia will be retaken within three months.

The continuing critical food shortage should be considered in the light of two facts. First, the most serious part of the problem by far pertains to the refugee population (between three and five million people; no reliable records available). The resident population will probably be able to get by. Second, the large crops planted by the land army are just now coming in. Hence, the food situation may be a serious but not decisive factor in Biafra's ability to persevere.

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2) The significance of the present military standoff is that a precarious opportunity now exists for bringing about talks. Neither side is so strong that it has unlimited confidence in its ability to achieve its objectives by force. Yet neither is so weak that it fears its bargaining power would be seriously reduced.

How long the present balance will last is difficult to say. What we do know is that the Federal government has given some hints of its readiness to negotiate and Biafra has made a specific statement to the President on the matter.

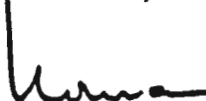
This brings us to the possible role of the President.

General Gowon told me he is prepared to hold talks without pre-conditions immediately but he is certain that General Ojukwu is not. This is precisely what General Ojukwu believes about General Gowon. Both sides have indicated an interest in having a respected third party take responsible initiative in proposing or facilitating talks. There is an opening for the President, therefore, to convey separate, unofficial, and secret word to both sides that he is prepared to urge negotiations if the leaders think any useful purpose will be served by so doing.

You have asked me what I would say to General Gowon on my return to Lagos. I intend to reiterate that I brought to General Ojukwu the General's message of peace with justice and mercy and that I have reason to believe that the message was seriously considered. Also, that on my return to the United States, I conveyed to the President through you the report of my private and unofficial trip to Nigeria, reporting my clear impression that the President's good offices would be welcomed in the present situation. I would also say to General Gowon that the President expressed a deep interest but would feel free to proceed only if he had from both sides specific encouragement and a clear indication of the kind of initiative he might take that would optimize the chances for successful negotiations.

I would have with me private letters from the President that would give substance to this view. The drafts enclosed are suggestions in that direction.

Sincerely,



Enclosures

Draft

Dear Norman:

I understand you are returning to Lagos. It would please me deeply if you would convey to His Excellency, Major General Yakubu Gowon, expressions of my high regard and respect.

Your report of your meeting with His Excellency was of the deepest interest to me. I note especially the point you make concerning General Gowon's desire to bring about peace with justice and mercy and the fact that he is resolutely opposed to any approach that will retard the essential process of reconciliation and reconstruction.

Your report indicates that General Gowon would welcome any steps or measures that would have the effect of persuading the leaders of the Eastern region to agree to peace talks without preconditions. You have also indicated that you believe the United States might perform a useful function towards this end.

As you know, the United States has no warrant or desire to interfere in the internal affairs of other nations. If it is felt, however, that the good offices of the United States would be useful in advancing the possibilities for meaningful negotiations, I am of course eager to assure General Gowon of our desire to be helpful.

In your capacity as private citizen, therefore, I hope you will convey to General Gowon these sentiments and obtain his further views

about the kind of initiatives he believes we might usefully take in
bringing about effective negotiations.

Sincerely,

Draft

Dear Norman:

On your return to Biafra, I should be grateful to you if you would thank General C. Odumegwu Ojukwu on my behalf for his letter. I am most pleased by his most generous and gracious comments on the voyage to the moon; I agree with him that great as are the achievements in outer space, man's greatest achievement of all will be to make his own planet safe and fit for human life. I can think of no finer distinction for the United States than to contribute towards that goal.

It is in this sense that I of course respond affirmatively to General Ojukwu's suggestion that we do whatever we can to bring about negotiations. I should be grateful to General Ojukwu if he could advise me further on the kind of proposals we might make that he believes might lead to effective negotiations. Is it General Ojukwu's opinion that the United States, or any other nation or nations, should have a role in the talks themselves?

I am certain General Ojukwu recognizes that the United States has no desire to superimpose itself upon the efforts of other nations to deal with their problems. At the same time, I recognize with General Ojukwu that unresolved tensions in today's world are a matter of common concern to all the world's peoples. Our planet has become

much too small for anything except a great unifying idea.

My compliments to General Ojukwu and my best wishes to you
on your journey.

Sincerely,