

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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August 21, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR HENRY KISSINGER

ACTION

FROM: Roger Morris *Roger*

SUBJECT: Political Initiatives in Nigeria/Biafra

I understand that the President asked Secretary Rogers when they were last together in California to look into the question of mediating the Nigerian civil war. Rogers is apparently scheduled to see the President Friday, August 22, to give his response.

State/AF's recommendation to the Secretary for this meeting is at Tab A. (The memorandum is being pouched to Rogers, and you are probably seeing this bootleg copy before he sees the original.)

The AF memo reflects Dave Newsom's readiness, as I described to you earlier, to begin a negotiating effort. But while Newsom's original penchant was for a very cautious indirect approach, the fear of steadily worsening relations with the Feds over the relief impasse (and, I suspect, a wish to accommodate the President's apparent readiness to move) produced a recommendation to Rogers that State be authorized to launch a full-fledged probe immediately. The elements in the State plan boil down as follows:

- Newsom flies to Lagos next Monday to assuage prospective Federal wrath over a long-standing but oft-postponed US commitment to supply 2 more cargo planes to the Church airlift into Biafra, which the Feds regard as illegal. Newsom tells Gowon we are holding off on the planes for the airlift for a few more weeks and, in the meantime, we want to try to get talks started between the two sides. Newsom asks, in effect, if the Feds will give us a chance to play honest broker. He emphasizes that we're on the Federal side and want the war to end with a unified Nigeria. He promises to lean on the French to bring around the Biafrans;
- Clyde Ferguson reconvenes the cross-river talks in Geneva, as scheduled, August 25. In low key, with each party

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-2-

separately, Ferguson tries to probe for a readiness to expand the Geneva venue to political discussions or at least talks about talks;

- Newsom returns from Lagos and Ferguson recesses the Geneva discussions for the two of them to meet in Paris September 1 with Schumann to ask for French help in the US initiative (assuming, that is, the Feds gave their OK earlier in Lagos);
- Newsom will have informed the British of our gambit on the way to Lagos and will report to London again on the way home from Paris;
- At the end of this first round, the Feds and Biafrans are supposed to be talking politics with Clyde Ferguson in Geneva, with their British and French patrons respectively urging them on;
- Through it all, Newsom will have been speaking with the personal authorization of the President and everything will be super secret with no publicity of any sort.

This is very roughly the pattern I had in mind in recommending a probe of both sides in the memorandum for the President you took to California. The crucial difference, however, is that State's idea of a probe, predictably enough, is heavily weighted toward the Federal side. Newsom is currying the Feds with reassurances of our fidelity to one Nigeria, and we apparently expect the Biafrans (and indirectly the French) to come running to the table at a nod.

I certainly agree that we should move quickly if we are to salvage any influence in Lagos for a negotiating gambit. The constant pulling and hauling on relief negotiations and the continuing frustration over the military stalemate is indeed poisoning the atmosphere in Lagos. I suspect delivery of two more cargo planes to the Church relief airlift will be regarded by Gowon and Co. as a hostile act by the US. Thus, it is important to do some frank talking in Lagos about our relief obligations, and to make a strong effort to get the Feds to the conference table before we're out in the cold.

~~SECRET~~/SENSITIVE

-3-

But eager as the Biafrans are for negotiations, our good offices will be suspect to both Ojukwu and the French if we are not scrupulously even-handed in our approach. Newsom can "hope" (for the Feds' benefit) that the two sides negotiate a reunification, but we simply cannot go into a mediation effort committed a priori to the war aims of one side. And to match Newsom's demarche in Lagos, there should be a direct US invitation to the Biafrans -- either a quiet envoy to Ojukwu or another approach through Houphouet-Boigny of the Ivory Coast.

Finally, as I stressed in my talk with you before you left Washington, there should be a direct and visible White House hand in a mediation effort to reassure both the Biafrans and the French that this is not going to be another marriage made in Whitehall and Foggy Bottom.

Recommendation

That you weigh in with the President on this matter with three principal points:

1. A serious peace probe in Nigeria/Biafra does make sense in ending a nasty war and saving a gifted people. And the sooner, the better in light of a steadily worsening atmosphere between Washington and Lagos over the relief impasse.
2. But we protect our own options in the uncertain outcome of the war as well as the credibility of our mediation effort by being as even-handed as possible. Specifically, we should (a) formally probe the Biafrans just as we sound out the Feds, and (b) make no promises to either the Feds or the British that we are committed to one Nigeria as the outcome of the talks.
3. To strengthen our credentials with the Biafrans and the French (and to protect the President's neutrality) there should be direct White House participation in whatever negotiating gambit we undertake.

Attachment

Tab A - State/AF's recommendation to the Secretary for his meeting with the President, Friday, August 22.

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TO : The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S

FROM : AF - David D. Newsom

SUBJECT: Action Options in Nigeria - ACTION MEMORANDUM

The following is by way of further briefing for your meeting August 22 with the President.

A. Present Situation - Current circumstances and decisions associated with the Nigerian war threaten serious problems between the United States and the Federal Military Government. These could militate seriously against wider peace-seeking efforts by the US. At the same time these circumstances suggest opportunities for US action.

1. A continuation of the current relief impasse can place relations between the USG and the FMG under increasingly serious strains. If agreement is not reached on relief routes acceptable to both sides, domestic and international pressure will require the USG to sustain relief operations into Biafra probably against the vehement opposition of the FMG.

2. Two additional C-97's have now been promised to Joint Church Aid (USA) by September. JCA, according to FMG views, is operating an illegal airlift to Bisfra. If these planes are delivered, this is certain to increase the strain between the USG and the FMG.

3. The possibility exists that, in the next two weeks, the ICRC relief effort may break down because neither side agrees to conditions for daylight flights. The question will arise of the disposition of the 4 C-97's sold by us to the ICRC. (telegram attached)

4. Ambassador Clyde Ferguson is resuming talks with the two sides on the Cross River route in Geneva August 25. This provides a unique opportunity to explore Federal and Biafran attitudes on peace, but such an exploration requires FMG authorization to its delegation. There is mounting FMG suspicion over our intentions re these talks and those with the French.

5. Ambassador Ferguson is also tentatively scheduled to see French Foreign Minister Schumann again when the latter expects to

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discuss the political aspects of the war. This expectation is based on the fact that the French take credit for producing the Biafrans at the Cross River talks.

6. The Organization of African Unity meets in Addis Ababa with the Foreign Ministers meeting August 27-September 4 and the Chiefs of State September 6-9. The Nigerian war will be a major topic on which we plan to be solely an interested observer.

7. In the absence of other progress toward peace, the United Nations General Assembly may be faced with requests to discuss the Nigerian question. Such requests could not obtain inscription of the subject but could place us in a difficult position with the FMG and many other African states.

8. While there are some indications of war weariness in Federal Nigeria, there is a continuing determination to end the war by military means. At the same time continued military activity threatens greater suffering and has brought, within the last two weeks, the first Biafran attacks on American owned installations (Gulf Oil). These circumstances suggest a need for early action on our part.

B. Assumptions - In the above situation I am making the following assumptions.

1. That a decision in principle has been made to take a more active role in efforts toward peace.

2. At this stage, we should present no specific plans that might run the risk of premature attack, but should concentrate on advancing our ideas and exploring the views and activities of the parties concerned and of other involved nations.

3. That our purpose should be to induce private negotiations between the two sides which need not initially be face to face but could be conducted through an intermediary.

4. That, while we will not at this stage seek precisely to define what we mean, our stated objective should be a solution within the framework of a single Nigeria.

5. That the British Government and the Federal Military Government of Nigeria should be informed of our intention before others, such as the French.

6. That we see little to be gained at this time, either from UN consideration or from discussions with the Russians.

7. That we should continue our efforts toward relief.

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Our Alternatives

Under these circumstances, we appear to have two alternatives. We can run the risks of Nigerian reaction to these events, minimizing these as much as possible, concurrently examining the possibilities of a US peace initiative in a low key. Alternatively, we can undertake an immediate initiative designed to allay the fears of the FMG and accelerate our own efforts to encourage moves toward peace.

The delay, while it has the risk of a serious reaction in Nigeria against US interests once the disposition of the aircraft is known, would have certain advantages.

1. By showing our hand right away in Lagos and London, we may draw fire from both the Nigerians and the British, who will be suspicious of our ultimate motives.
2. The Nigerians might not react well to pressure in the present circumstances when ICRC negotiations are still in progress and before they fully explore the situation at the OAU.
3. It is precisely because they fear we may seek, with Biafran encouragement, to discuss wider issues that the Nigerians are reluctant to participate in the Cross River talks.
4. Utilization of a special envoy to Nigeria now could reduce the usefulness of this possibility at a later time.
5. If, by facing the FMG with so major a presentation on both peace-seeking and relief at this stage, we get a strongly negative response before the groundwork is laid through more gradual probes, our further effectiveness will be seriously impaired.

On balance, however, we believe the risks to our interests are too great and the need to further the peace efforts too compelling. We would favor the alternative of immediate action. Under this plan, we would:

1. Ask the JCA in the interest of our approach to the FMG on peace to hold up acceptance of the 2 C-97's for four weeks;
2. Forestall ICRC action on the other C-97's for as long as possible.
3. I would proceed with Mr. Brubeck next week via London to Lagos

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to inform the British and explain fully our intentions to the Federal Nigerians. My message would be that (a) the US was under strong pressure to facilitate relief. We understand the concerns of the FMG. We were committed to provide additional aircraft to the JCA but in the hopes that we can make progress on these issues we have postponed action, (b) the continuation of the war is inimical to the Federal interest as well as ours, (c) the US wants the earliest possible negotiated settlement in the context of a unified Nigeria, and (d) I would like Federal cooperation in a peace effort in which we will try to bring along the Biafrans by way of their French patrons.

4. While I am in Lagos, Ambassador Ferguson would be reconvening the Cross River talks in Geneva, and trying informally on the side to probe the two parties on political issues.

5. I would then proceed to Paris with Ambassador Ferguson and would call on French Foreign Minister Schumann for a continuation of the Franco-American dialog on this subject. Ferguson's earlier conversations had touched upon not only issues of relief but political questions involved in the war. These approaches would be low key, however, and we could build on this or take a new tack as the reaction in Lagos seemed to warrant.

The advantages of this approach would appear to be:

1. Goes to the source of our problem in trying to soften the damage which will inevitably result from the C-97 transactions and the potential break down of the ICRC program.
2. Seeks to allay FMG and UK suspicions arising from our continued conversations with the French and paves the way for further negotiations.
3. A personal mission to Lagos by me--as a first step in our negotiating scenario--generally strengthens the credibility and support for a negotiated solution within the context of a single Nigeria.
4. Would attempt to exploit the current face to face talks between the parties in Geneva. We would urge the FMG either to appoint a new representative, or appropriately instruct the Geneva delegation to deal with the political aspects of the war.
5. It is responsive to the Under Secretary's pledge that the US Government would explore all possible avenues leading to a negotiated settlement.

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Recommendation

1. I therefore recommend that you request the President to approve immediate action on our part along the lines suggested above.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

2. That I be authorized to say that I am speaking on behalf of the President.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

Clearances:
U/CF-Amb. Ferguson (sub)
EUR-Miss Tibbetts

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