WASHINGTON NOTES ON AFRICA

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I. Prospects of the New Administration

The slow unfolding of the Nixon administration still has not revealed very much about what American policy towards Africa is likely to be. Members of the Africa Bureau in the State Department predict that there really won't be too many changes. Because Africa has largely been ignored in recent years by the outgoing administration, it is difficult to tell whether the predicted absence of change is good or bad.

In sifting through a number of policy statements, articles and speeches by President-elect Richard Nixon, there does appear to be a definite commitment towards non-intervention, especially on a unilateral basis. He also seems to show an awareness of the implications of the tendencies towards international racial polarization. For instance, he has said that the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. must not be seen to be ganging up on China because of the implications of racism.

On the other hand, his commitment to strengthening the NATO Alliance and American relationships with Europe seems to indicate that American policy towards Africa under Nixon might be subservient to the interests of the metropolitan powers in Europe. Our bases in the Azores continue to distort our policy towards Portugal with respect to Angola and Mozambique.

The appointment of Henry Kissinger to the White House on national security matters is interesting because one of his strong interests is supposed to be long range planning. If this is so, southern Africa may receive more attention than it does now under the current practices of "crisis" planning.

William P. Rodgers, with his limited range of international experience, does have some experience with Africa. He paid a goodwill visit to West Africa for President Eisenhower. As a member of the U.S. delegation to the General Assembly in 1965, he delivered a speech denouncing apartheid as a "malignant, inhuman, and vicious form of racial discrimination." He also participated in 1967 on the Ad Hoc Committee on South West Africa.

The new Congress will feature an amazing amount of continuity with the last Congress. Almost 400 Congressmen have been reelected. Most of the 70 or so Congressmen whom we regard as "friendly" or "committed" to a progressive policy towards Africa are among the returning Congressmen. In addition, a number of the new Congressmen are likely to be empathetic towards Africa. For instance, Allard Lowenstein, elected from New York's Nassau County, has an interest in South West Africa and wrote Brutal Mandate after visiting there. Louis Stokes from Cleveland and William Clay from St. Louis are two new black activist Congressmen, and Shirley Chisholm is the other new Negro member in Congress. Ed Koch, elected from Lindsay's old "silk stocking" district is also likely to show liberal concern towards our African policy. Two old African hands will not be returning. Barrett O'Hara, the Chairman of the House Sub-committee on Africa, was defeated in the primary by Abner Mikva, a reform and anti-Daley Democrat from Chicago. Frances Bolton, the ranking Republican in that Sub-committee was beaten through re-districting by a liberal incumbent.
Charles C. Diggs, Jr. is in line to take over the chairmanship of the Subcommittee. He indicates that he wants to be a very active chairman. Brad Morse, on the Republican side of the Subcommittee, has taken a very keen interest in Africa and has recently returned from a meeting in Nairobi.

In the Senate, Eugene McCarthy continues as Chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs. He has recently held hearings on Nigerian-Biafran relief. His Sub-committee has been depleted by the retiring Bourke Hickenlooper, the ranking Republican, and by departing Frank Lausche, who was defeated in the Ohio primary. It is unclear what the composition of the new Sub-committee will be. Among the Republicans, Senator John Sherman Cooper has recently spoken out at the United Nations against apartheid. Senator Brooke, of course, is also taking an interest in Africa. The new Pennsylvania Senator, Richard Schweiker, has, as Representative, paid some attention to African questions. Maryland's new Republican Senator, Charles Mac Mathias, has also established himself as "liberal" on international affairs while in the House.

It is unlikely that there will be any additions on the Democrat side of the Sub-committee. Senators Church and Dodd will continue to sit with Senator McCarthy.

In the weeks ahead ACCA Washington will be preparing an "Africanist" guide to the new Congress. There is some feeling here that a new era of American relationships with Africa could develop. After the euphoria of the Kennedy years and the alienation by Johnson's Vietnam policy, there is scope for a new period of realism to develop between Africa and the United States. But such a policy will not emerge full-grown. It must be nurtured. Never has the role of the concerned citizen been so demanding.

II. The Biafran Conundrum

In recent weeks the rising attention on the Biafran tragedy has led the State Department to dole out its concern in increasing amounts. But the main thrust of their concern has been to hope for a quick Federal Nigerian mop-up of Biafra in order that we can rush in with a few tons of aid after all the political messiness is over. The State Department described as "incomprehensible" and "a source of intense regret and puzzlement" the refusal of the Biafrans to open their air lanes to daytime flights.

In lieu of the unwillingness of the Biafrans to give in, the "political hurdles" were too difficult for the U.S. to overcome. In a speech delivered by Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach on December 3 at Brown University, the Under Secretary of State enumerated all of the reasons why we could do nothing or little about Biafra. In so doing he eschewed as instruments of international influence all those political, economic and diplomatic initiatives with which we have for so long bludgeoned other countries when more parochial American interests were at stake.

This administration is truly weary. Like Pontius Pilate they wish to wash their hand of "messy" political difficulties. Katzenbach pleaded, "You have
heard it said that we should not be the world's policeman, and, of course, we are not and have never tried to be."

In a conversation with one of the State Department functionaries, this was much more clearly expressed to me in these words: "You want us to do something about Biafra but why did not you support us in helping South Vietnam?" But, I said, there is no similarity. A clique of generals is not ten million Ibo people.

This clearly is the problem. The lack of American diplomatic initiative is very apparent. The will to clear the "political hurdles" in this genocidal tragedy lies lost somewhere in the swamps of the Mekong Delta.

But Senator Edward Kennedy in a ringing speech on Biafra to the International League for the Rights of Man, has said "No" to this idea of a holiday from leadership. He correctly indicated that our failure to vigorously use the tools of diplomatic leadership occurs because we cannot define the Nigerian-Biafran problem in terms of our "vital interests."

But he rejected the idea that we should permit our concern for humanity to be "smothered in the complexities of international politics." More can be done, he declared. Do we not still believe ourselves to be "something different on this globe?" Senator Kennedy asks.

In spite of a misleading article which appeared in the New York Times on Sunday, December 15, our policy towards Biafra relief is still very much being played in low key. The Desk Officer for Nigeria in State denies that any new initiatives are being implemented.

It is clear that the public response to the Biafran crisis was instrumental in forcing the administration to take even a weak initiative. More public pressure and interest needs to be directed towards both the Administration and Congress. That pressure which has been directed towards Congress has been somewhat uneven. Senator Church from Idaho and Congressman Fraser from Minneapolis have received considerable correspondence on Biafra while Senator Percy from Illinois has received virtually none.

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