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Confidential

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Dear Margaret,

In the course of a business trip to South Africa last week I had talks with the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and the Administrator General of South West Africa/Namibia. I also spent a couple of days in South West, seeing the politicians in Windhoek and visiting Ovamboland - the most active sector of the operational area. I won't bother you with the detail of my talks but venture to send you the following general impressions and tentative conclusions.

The "war" is on a very small scale compared to what we knew in Rhodesia. SWAPO operations are virtually limited to Ovamboland - a flat, heavily populated rectangle 400/500 miles long and perhaps 100 miles deep. Their operations consist of laying mines, mostly on the unmade roads used by civilians as distinct from the tarmac on which the military depend; attacking chiefs and headmen to establish SWAPO dominance over the local population; and occasionally cutting the power lines and pipelines from the Rucana power station and dam.

There are ^{no} "no go" areas or permanent SWAPO bases; and most SWAPO raiding parties stay only a few days. No doubt some infiltrators occasionally penetrate south of Ovamboland but mainly on political missions aimed at influencing other political groups and keeping in touch with the Internal SWAPO. This is a legal organisation rather like Sinn Fein as distinct from the IRA, and has its power base among the Ovambos who work in the towns, farms and mines outside Ovamboland. No anti-terrorist precautions, such as travelling in convoy, are taken outside the operational zone which runs to a depth of only some 100 miles along the Angola border. The zone is over itself 1000 miles long but only the Ovambo sector is really active. About a quarter of its length marches with territory controlled by Savimbi who has expelled all SWAPO forces. There is, however, a substantial South African and South West African military presence throughout the country. A considerable proportion of the troops are Black, mainly South West African blacks but some South African Zulus as well.



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South African casualties are insignificant. The expense is well within the means of the booming South African economy. The South African troops are rotated every three months which most conscripts seem to consider a welcome break from the monotony of national service. The state of emergency is just high enough to keep the general public constantly reminded of the external threat to South Africa.

My first conclusion, therefore, is that the physical impact of SWAPO military operations on South African policy is negligible. It is significant only as the outward and visible sign of potential international pressures. It was the threat of these, in the climate of 1976 when detente was still taken seriously, that led the Vorster Government to encourage the Turnhalle programme just as they encouraged the Internal Settlement in Rhodesia.

Inside South West Africa the SWAPO power base is among the Ovambos - nearly half the population - though the attacks on chiefs and headmen suggests that not all Ovambos are pro-SWAPO. Dirk Mudge's DTA probably represents the majority of white and non-Ovambo tribes. But there is a substantial hard line element among the Whites who may make gains in the local elections next month, and there are some SWAPO elements among non-Ovambo tribes especially in the towns.

Given this balance of local forces the outcome of an election even if genuinely "free and fair" would be a close run thing. The South Africans argue, however, that no election supervised by the U.N. can, as things stand, be free and fair. The U.N., they claim, are not impartial for a number of reasons. First, the U.N. Finnish Commissioner has been openly pro-SWAPO. Second, the Assembly of the U.N. has publicly recognised SWAPO as the sole representative of the Namibian people. Third, SWAPO actually receives financial support from the U.N. Fourth, the proposed demilitarised zone to be controlled by the U.N. would be solely on the Namibian side of the border and would not extend to the Angolan side where the SWAPO bases are situated. For the South Africans to withdraw their forces in favour of a U.N. force, composed in part at least of contingents from avowedly anti-South African states, must, under these conditions, lead many voters to conclude that the U.N. wanted SWAPO to win and that the South Africans, by withdrawing, had accepted defeat. In a society where voting is placing a bet rather than expressing a preference a SWAPO victory would be the likely result. Of course if the U.N. changed their commissioner, withdrew



3.

their recognition of SWAPO, stopped subsidising them and extended the demilitarised zone to include the SWAPO bases in Angola their credibility as impartial arbitrators might be restored. Mr. Mudge reckons that, even then, a year or two should be needed to convince the population that the international community wanted a genuinely fair result and were not just manoeuvring to secure a SWAPO victory.

These are powerful arguments and they are compounded by a mistrust of the Five Western powers which is not, I fear, unjustified. I saw, at the time, the Note Verbale transmitted on behalf of the Five to the South African Foreign Minister in September 1978 and signed by our Ambassador Scott. This stated categorically that the proposals then made by the Five were "final and definitive". Since then the U.N. have come forward with a number of further demands which the South Africans could hardly have been expected to foresee. These have been explained as elaborations of the five power proposals; but I think Peter Carrington would agree that the South Africans have some reason to think that they were misled if not tricked. The impartiality of the Five has since been further put in question by statements made by President Carter and by the reception recently accorded in Bonn to the SWAPO leader Sam Nujoma.

I would conclude that no elections held under U.N. auspices could be regarded as free and fair unless the U.N. are seen to abandon their support of SWAPO and to remain impartial for a year or two.

It is, I think, accepted that Nujoma and his chief colleagues are very much under Soviet influence. Most of their arms and finance come from Soviet sources. SWAPO forces are trained by Cubans and East Germans. Nujoma is not a potentially independent Marxist like Mugabe. Shipanga, one of Nujoma's erstwhile colleagues, gave me an entertaining and very plausible account of their visits together to Moscow and of their dealings with Soviet representatives in Africa. He thought Nujoma too stupid to understand Marxism but a Soviet puppet just the same.

The South African Government believe - and I think genuinely - that a SWAPO government in Namibia would be as much under Soviet influence as is the Government of Angola and that much of the administration would be controlled by East Germans. There is still a sizeable German colony in the country dating from the days when South West was a German colony and opportunists among them might join the new regime.



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The South African Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister have both publicly declared that if they have to choose between a pro-Soviet Government in Namibia and U.N. sanctions against South Africa they would rather endure sanctions as much the lesser evil. Both said the same thing to me in private. They may be bluffing; but I don't think so. For one thing the P.M. as a former Minister of Defence has always held that South Africa should be defended as far to the North as possible. So, in my experience, has his new Minister of Defence, General Malan. For another, the emergence of a SWAPO Namibia on top of a ZANU/ZAPU Zimbabwe would finally shatter Mr. Botha's plans for a Southern African Constellation. There is also the consideration that the Prime Minister and his principal colleagues might not survive the loss of South West Africa politically. The militant right wing of the Nationalist Party has been recovering lost ground and would go for the jugular if Botha allowed what all or nearly all South Africans would regard as a major defeat.

Nor are South African Ministers so concerned at the prospect of sanctions as some might expect. They have plenty of liquid wealth in terms of gold and diamonds. The industrial West needs their minerals at least as much as they need imports from the West. We in Britain would certainly find any restrictions on our trade with and capital investments in South Africa very disadvantageous. Some African countries, moreover, would literally starve without imports of South African food supplies. Beyond all this they would calculate that the growing tension between East and West must tend to defuse the tension between *the* West and South Africa. It is certainly hard to see how the West could maintain a permanent large scale presence in the Indian Ocean without South African cooperation. Finally they cannot help believing that the total failure of the U.N. to grapple with the issues of Cambodia, Afghanistan, the American hostages or the Iran-Iraq war must, at last, have discredited the organisation in the eyes of thinking people. "How can you take seriously a Security Council which now includes Uganda?" is a question I was often asked. All these are arguments it is difficult if not impossible to gain say. My guess, therefore, is that in the crunch the South African Government will say "no" to Dr. Waldheim.

Mr. Urquhart is said to have been impressed by the South African arguments and it may be that Dr. Waldheim's report will once again postpone the moment of truth. We will presumably do what we can to encourage delay. There has also been talk, in a number of different quarters, of an all-party conference a la



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Lancaster House to try to agree a constitution before elections are held. It does indeed seem rather ridiculous to try to hold elections before deciding what the constitution is to be. To put a conference together would be difficult but the effort would at least have the merit of defusing the UN-South African confrontation. It would be a new ball game.

We cannot, however, exclude the possibility that Waldheim's report will conclude that the South Africans are dragging their feet and so encourage recourse to mandatory sanctions against them. This would be contrary to Western interests. It would also be wholly unacceptable to our Party and bitterly resisted by them. South ~~West~~ Africa may not have the emotional appeal which Rhodesia had for so many of us. But the material interests, the strategic considerations and the tie of kinship involved are very much stronger. The dimension is quite different.

It it should come to a vote on sanctions against South Africa in the Security Council, the options open to us, apart from going along with the majority which I take to be unacceptable, would seem to lie between finding a formula for not applying them ourselves or for using the veto. I believe we should use the veto. I say this because it seems to me high time that we took an active step to break out of the anti-South African attitude which has characterised our policy for many years. We may not like their internal policies, though the progress made in race relations in the last two years has surprised me; but we must also realise that however many concessions they may be induced to make their enemies will not relent until South Africa is prized out of the Western camp. There is a point at which we must seek to reestablish that economic and strategic cooperation between us which would be so much to our mutual advantage and to that of the West as a whole. And I believe that point has now been reached.

I am copying this letter to Peter Carrington, Francis Pym and John Nott.

— Yours ever, —
Julian
Julian Amery

The Rt.Hon. Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, M.P.