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MR P W BOTHA'S EUROPEAN TOUR

The British Chargé d'Affaires at Cape Town to the
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

SUMMARY

1. The first visit to Britain by a South African Prime Minister since 1961. The European tour was made possible by the Nkomati Accord (paragraphs 1 – 2).
2. Mr Botha's objectives: to break out of South Africa's international isolation, to draw attention to the serious deterioration in Southern Africa's economic situation, to explain the complexities of the internal scene at the highest level and to establish personal contact. A successful visit which has enhanced Mr Botha's standing (paragraphs 3 – 4).
3. Mr Botha delighted with his personal reception in Europe, but he can have drawn little comfort from European responses to his appeals for an understanding of South Africa's internal policies. European anxieties over forced removals (paragraphs 5 – 8).
4. No progress on Namibia (paragraph 9).
5. Mr Botha impressed by the strength of feeling on internal questions. South Africa unlikely to change its policies, but could well pay greater attention in the future to international susceptibilities (paragraph 10).
6. Mr Botha has welcomed the thorough and frank exchange of views with the Prime Minister. He has expressed concern about the vulnerability of the sea route, a desire to strengthen trading links, the need to improve antennae for identifying trouble in advance. We need to be careful of too sweeping generalisations (paragraphs 11 – 12).
7. The timing of a visit by you, Sir, needs careful consideration. A visit by the Minister of Trade most useful, perhaps fairly early in the New Year. A further round of official talks would be welcome when the new Ambassador has taken up his post (paragraphs 13 – 14).
8. Black reaction not at all positive; they think it unlikely that the tour will dispose Mr Botha to genuine reform (paragraph 15).
9. Future plans: a tour of Africa and a tour of the United States, after the Presidential election (paragraph 16).
10. South Africa has a long way to go before she will again be internationally respectable (paragraph 17);

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Cape Town

3 July 1984

Sir

1. Mr P W Botha, the South African Prime Minister, had an extended working lunch at Chequers with the Prime Minister and yourself, Sir, on Saturday 2 June. His brief visit to Britain – the first by a South African Prime Minister since Dr Verwoerd's visit in 1961 when he took South Africa out of the Commonwealth – was part of a two-week European tour during which Mr Botha, who was accompanied by the Foreign Minister Mr R F ("Pik") Botha, also paid official, working or private visits to Portugal, Switzerland, the Federal Republic of Germany (and West Berlin), Belgium, France, Austria, Italy and the Holy See.

2. For the South African Government, the fact that the tour took place at all was a major breakthrough. For several years South Africa has been anxious to escape from the international isolation which has been imposed on her because of her apartheid policies and practices. There was little likelihood of this happening while South Africa was engaged, for most of 1981, 1982 and 1983, in what was generally but somewhat simplistically interpreted as attempts to "destabilise" certain neighbours known to be harbouring guerillas of the African National Congress. Pik Botha's visit to Europe in late November/early December 1983 appeared to herald a change in policy and he put in some useful groundwork. But it was the Nkomati Accord of 16 March 1984 with Mozambique which opened the way. With the additional stimulus of a deteriorating economic situation at home, Mr Botha felt that the time was right to take up the offer of a visit to Lisbon. He prevailed on the Federal Republic to extend an invitation as well; and when news of this broke prematurely in Bonn, a number of other European countries made a cool assessment of where their best interests lay and agreed to receive him. The invitation from Britain was especially important – the Foreign Minister has told Mr Fergusson that the lunch at Chequers was in the event the high point of Mr Botha's tour. Only France responded negatively to South African overtures, but Mr Botha still managed a private visit there.

3. Mr Botha said on his return that he had not gone to conquer Europe, nor to seek favours or charity; and he said much the same thing in Parliament on 27 June. He had drawn, he said, attention to the seriously deteriorating economic situation in Southern Africa and had sought Western economic and financial support. He had had an opportunity to explain at the highest level the complexities of South Africa's internal situation. He had established personal contact with European Heads of Government.

4. On the whole, Mr Botha must be well pleased with the results of his tour, which he could reasonably claim to have been a success. He has enhanced his standing within South Africa, and to a lesser extent internationally. He must feel that he made an impact with his appeal for increased development assistance in Southern Africa, especially for Mozambique, though he is uncertain about the extent to which this is likely to be channelled, as he strongly recommended, through South Africa itself. He made a strong bid for private sector investment and had as many meetings with businessmen as with politicians. He sought, not unsuccessfully, to persuade European leaders that South Africa is a regional power which cannot be ignored and that peace and prosperity in Southern Africa are to a large extent dependent on the region's industrial giant.

5. Mr Botha was clearly delighted with the courtesy and respect with which he was everywhere received, even though European leaders were careful to maintain a certain reserve in their public welcoming. Mr Botha will be convinced that the personal contacts established have made the trip

worthwhile. He spoke most warmly to Mr Fergusson of the reception from the Prime Minister. He was also particularly impressed with Herr Kohl. He was pleasantly surprised with the depth of knowledge and interest in Southern African affairs shown by Signor Craxi and Signor Andreotti.

6. Although he welcomed the opportunity to explain at first hand the complexities of the internal situation in South Africa, Mr Botha can have drawn little comfort from European responses. He is reported to have told the National Party caucus on his return that South Africa would never be able to evolve a system of government which would satisfy Europe; they could not even agree among themselves what kind of system they wanted to see in South Africa. Mr Botha may have had some success in persuading his European hosts that the limitations of resources were a major obstacle to resolving the glaring inequalities between blacks and whites in South Africa; but none whatsoever in securing the understanding of his hosts for internal policies supposedly designed to promote the separate development and "self-determination" of South Africa's population of minorities. The Portuguese Ambassador has told me that in Lisbon Mr Botha's private audience with President Eanes almost ended abruptly when, after a ten minute indictment by the President of South Africa's apartheid policies, Mr Botha looked at his watch and announced that it was time to leave; he was prevailed upon to stay.

7. Particular emphasis was placed by European Governments on the question of the forced removal of black people under the Government's plans to consolidate homelands, to eliminate "black spots" – land held freehold by blacks since before the First World War in areas subsequently designated white – and to rehouse certain urban communities. Mr Botha gave broad assurances that physical compulsion was no longer being used and that blacks would be continuously "persuaded" until they agreed to move to designated locations. (But only a week after his return, Western Cape Development Board inspectors, backed up by police with armoured vehicles and a "sneeze machine", tore down 701 "illegal shelters" – the Board's figure – in raids on black squatter settlements near Cape Town.)

8. Mr Botha attempted during his tour to put across a number of basic themes about the internal situation in South Africa. "Apartheid" as such was long since dead and the term no longer relevant. The real problem in South Africa was the relations between the various population minorities, including several black minorities who in no sense formed a coherent black majority. It had taken countries like Switzerland some 400 years to evolve a confederal system and South Africa could reasonably ask for a little more time. They were moving in the right direction, but Mr Botha would be out of office at the next election if he moved too quickly and the only alternative government in South Africa was to the right. When it was pointed out to Mr Botha that, much as he might say that one minority should never be in a position to dominate other minorities, this was nonetheless precisely what the white minority were doing in South Africa, Mr Botha attempted to argue that under the new constitutional dispensation South Africa was moving away from the Westminster system to consensus politics incorporating the Indian and coloured minorities and that suitable arrangements for the blacks were being discussed as a matter of urgency. The logic of his argument did not impress his European hosts.

9. No progress was made on the Namibian question, although it was extensively discussed in every capital visited. The likelihood that Namibian independence under the terms of SCR 435 might be achieved in the not too distant future has receded once again. At Chequers Mr Botha suggested somewhat jocularly that Britain might care to share in the administration costs of Namibia prior to independence. He took this further with Herr Kohl in Bonn, suggesting that any or all of the Western Contact Group might care to help out, before or after independence, even taking over the administration of the territory from South Africa, but naturally only on the understanding that the Cubans withdrew from Angola. The South African and international press not unexpectedly

took up the story and the South Africans were more than happy to let it run; it went down well in South Africa. Pik Botha even boasted to the press that South Africa, as a regional power, "demanded" Cuban withdrawal and had the capability to achieve this. In Namibia itself, the Police succeeded in embarrassing Mr Botha by arresting almost the entire SWAPO leadership at a barbecue on land belonging to a Catholic seminary only two days before Mr Botha had an audience with the Pope. Although the Administrator-General of Namibia later disclaimed prior knowledge of the arrests, his public statement the following day showed that the police action enjoyed his full support. The South African Minister of Law and Order denied all responsibility. It has been suggested that the arrests were politically motivated by the right, to embarrass Mr Botha. The only reasonably safe assumption is that the Bothas did not know that the arrests were to take place; they were said to be furious.

10. At a news conference in Vienna, Mr Botha conceded that "it would be a dumb person who listened to another's point of view and then went away without new ideas". Mr Botha cannot fail to have been impressed by the strength of feeling everywhere shown on the question of South Africa's racially discriminatory policies. He found himself repeatedly endeavouring to assure his audience that he did not believe in the inferiority of one man against another because of the colour of his skin. It seems however unlikely that as a result of the tour there will be any intrinsic changes in South Africa's policy of separate development. But it is reasonable to assume that the South African Government are now much more aware of the political pressures on European Governments, especially on Her Majesty's Government, over South Africa and will pay much closer attention to the need to improve South Africa's international image. Greater efforts may be made to prevent the international embarrassments which inevitably arise when local officials execute policy in too ruthless a manner. If this leads to the delay or suspension of arbitrary executive actions in the fields of forced removals and the suppression of civil liberties, European leaders may feel that it was worth their time and trouble to receive Mr Botha. Such beneficial results however are unlikely to be immediately apparent.

11. As far as UK-South African relations are concerned, Mr Botha told Mr Fergusson on 27 June how very much he enjoyed meeting the Prime Minister. He had been particularly pleased by the attractiveness of the venue. He did not expect, and he was sure that the Prime Minister did not expect there to be complete agreement between them. He had however much welcomed the opportunity for a thorough and frank exchange. Mr Botha does not seem to have gone to Britain with any specific objectives, such as the closure of ANC office in London, the supply of BAe Coastguarder aircraft or the release of the four South Africans facing arms embargo violations charges. But he is concerned about the vulnerability of the Cape Sea Route and he told Mr Fergusson that he is anxious to build on our healthy trading links. He also suggested that we should both seek to improve our antennae for identifying trouble in advance, by improving the means of communication between us. The love-hate relationship with Britain seems bound to continue, though Mr Botha must be convinced that we now have a better understanding of South Africa's problems. The visit will have helped to clear the air in our relations after recent difficulties.

12. The visit has however pointed up the need for our critical stance towards South Africa's internal policies to be based upon a sound factual knowledge of the complexities of the internal scene and not on sweeping and sometimes outdated generalisations. There are a welter of laws and regulations under which, for example, individuals and communities are likely to be resettled or rehoused and it is often exceedingly difficult to track down the unvarnished truth about a particular incident. The proposed resettlement of the KwaNgema community in the Eastern Transvaal, whose case was raised by the Prime Minister, was misleadingly explained away at Chequers by the Bothas as a dispute within the community. The facts as known to us are that Gabriel Ngema, at one time the representative of the community, was in favour of moving to the homeland of KaNgwane. But he was replaced in March 1982 by an elected committee chaired by Moses Ngema and supported

by 124 of the 155 household heads in KwaNgema. In February 1984 Gabriel Ngema died, which was very inconvenient for the authorities who continue to refuse to recognise the elected committee and to insist that Gabriel Ngema's family nominate a successor. All the evidence suggests that the "dispute" is an invention of the authorities.

13. So far as the development of the dialogue with South Africa is concerned, I do not wish to recommend any acceleration of existing plans, though I believe it to be important that the impetus created by the meeting of Prime Ministers should be maintained. A first choice would be a visit by you, Sir, though I believe also that, for this to have the right impact, it would be desirable that such talks could centre on serious practical questions in which the United Kingdom was directly involved, such as Namibian developments, or aid for the region. The timing, too, needs to be carefully considered, given that between now and the New Year the Government will be preoccupied with introducing the new constitutional arrangements before the first Plenary Session at the end of January. The outcome of the Presidential Election in the United States will also be relevant, given the overriding impact of US policies on the affairs of the region. All this makes me cautious about suggesting a possible date for a visit within the next six months.

14. Given our major trading and investment interests, and the current good performance of our exporters, a visit by the Minister of Trade would be most useful, perhaps fairly early in the New Year. We have been told that a further round of talks at official level when the new Ambassador has taken up his post in early October would be welcomed. The emphasis in the continuing official dialogue should also be on practicalities and specifics, not so much on principles and generalities. We will pursue these proposals separately.

15. Mr Botha's position in the National Party as well as among the white community as a whole has been enhanced by his European tour. The black population, however, are generally uncertain about the results. Buthelezi was very much in favour in KwaZulu, but politically conscious blacks on the Reef generally doubt that it was wise for European Governments to receive Mr Botha and think it unlikely that the tour will dispose Mr Botha to introduce genuine reforms. But this attitude is not unanimous nor unqualified. The "Sowetan" commented before Mr Botha departed that if the Europeans spoke out firmly against apartheid, the tour might, perhaps, be worthwhile. Even Bishop Tutu relented somewhat and said that if the Prime Minister had said to Mr Botha what she was reported to have said, then it was not so bad that the meeting had taken place.

16. Mr Botha was known to have been a little nervous about his reception at Chequers; but even if the excursion to Britain had been a fiasco, with massive demonstrations, he would not necessarily have lost political capital at home, since National Party supporters would have rallied to the cause. It was of course a major objective of the visit to improve his standing at home and internationally. Mr Botha may now see himself in the role of the economic saviour of Southern Africa. He may be contemplating a visit to African countries later this year or to the United States, but only after the Presidential election in November. The precedence accorded to his visit to Europe could have been related to his expected assumption of the position of State President in September this year, which would be likely to complicate protocol.

17. Mr Botha has emerged from his laager. He found Europe willing at least to listen. His tour was essentially exploratory. He must realise that he still has a long way to go before South Africa is again acceptable in the international community. He may have drawn some comfort from the relatively insignificant nature of the hostile demonstrations which generally greeted him, though the ten thousand or so disparate demonstrators in London will have confirmed his awareness that Britain remains the centre of overseas political opposition to his regime. The relationship with Britain has a deep and continuing significance. Elsewhere in Europe, the message may simply be that South Africa is not really all that important to European interests.

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18. I am sending copies of this Despatch to HM Representatives at Washington, Paris, Bonn, Lisbon, Rome, Harare, Luanda, Maputo, Lusaka, Nairobi, Lagos, Lilongwe, Mbabane, Maseru, Gaborone and to the Permanent UK Representative at the United Nations in New York.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully,

Derek Tonkin
Chargé d'Affaires a.i.

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