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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

31 May 1985

Prime Minister

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Dear Charles,

South Africa/Angola: The Cabinda Incident

You told us that the Prime Minister had expressed interest in the incident involving South African soldiers in Cabinda on 21 May. The Foreign Secretary thought the Prime Minister might like the following assessment of this incident.

The Incident

The incident has been fully reported in the press. Briefly, on 21 May a group of Angolan troops surprised a number of South African soldiers near the oil installation managed by the US company Gulf Oil at Malango, the capital of Cabinda province in the north of Angola. Two South Africans were killed and one taken prisoner, while others escaped. The Angolans seized military equipment including radios, weapons and explosives. The Angolans claimed that the South African forces were engaged in an attempt to sabotage the Gulf Oil installation. This claim was substantiated when the captured South African, du Toit, appeared at a press conference making a long statement and answering questions. Du Toit said it was the South African intention to present the operation as one carried out by UNITA.

For its part, the South African Government has claimed that the target in Cabinda had been the ANC. They have also admitted that their forces operate inside Angola, but have emphasised that their purpose is to gather intelligence on the ANC and SWAPO. They have denied that the operation at Cabinda was aimed against Gulf Oil.

Assessment

the South Africans have in the past undertaken sabotage operations in Angola which have been attributed to UNITA. (In 1982, South African special forces mounted a clandestine attack on the oil tank farm in Beira, Mozambique.)

that a further such operation in Angola was planned. Although there are ANC training camps in northern Angola, so far as we are aware there are neither ANC nor SWAPO camps in Cabinda province, and du Toit's public statements must seriously undermine the credibility of the South African line. Our own assessment is that the South Africans were almost certainly engaged in an operation to sabotage the Cabinda oil installation which, after its

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successful execution, would have been attributed to UNITA. It would, of course, have been economically very damaging, and would have had significant consequences for the Angolan Government's morale.

Significance

While the information available to us remains incomplete, and in particular it is not clear how far the operation would have been authorised at the highest South African level, its serious implications are now beginning to unfold. It could not have come at a worse time. The UN Security Council is to discuss Namibia in the week beginning 10 June; and the US-led negotiations on Namibia have just entered a very sticky patch, following the discouraging Angolan response to the compromise proposals on Cuban withdrawal recently put forward by the Americans. The Cabinda incident will give powerful ammunition to those in the UN and inside Angola who argue that the South Africans cannot be trusted and that their real purpose, supported by the US, is to bring down the MPLA government; moreover, that they are not seriously interested in the US-led negotiations. This view has been passed on to our Ambassador in Luanda who has reported from his contacts with the Interior Minister, Kito Rodriguez (the principal negotiator in the US negotiations), that the Cabinda incident has discredited the negotiating process and destroyed Angolan confidence in South Africa and the US. Moreover, the incident has had an immediate and serious effect not only on the Namibia negotiations but, perhaps above all, on South African/US relations at a particularly sensitive moment over the disinvestment campaign in the US. It must also have caused considerable embarrassment to President Mobutu of Zaire.

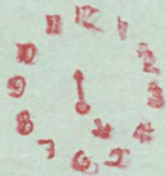
We are seeing Dr Crocker in Paris today and in London next week. This will give us an opportunity to discuss the potential consequences and what further action might need to be taken. We will keep you posted on developments.

Yours ever,
Le Appleyard

(L V Appleyard)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

31 MAY 1985



Handwritten text, possibly a signature or address, written vertically in blue ink.