



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

2 July 1985

Dear Charles.

UK Policy towards South Africa

The Prime Minister is aware of the effect which the recent South African raids on Cabinda and Gabarone have had in heightening increasing international pressure for measures against South Africa. The Foreign Secretary is concerned that South Africans are undeterred by the international reaction and could make further raids at any time against neighbouring states who they believe are harbouring members of the ANC responsible for the continuing violence within South Africa. This violence has continued with a further series of grenade/bomb incidents on the East Rand and Transkei on 26 June. Possible targets for South African retaliation are Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Zambia (where the ANC have just held their congress). You will have seen from Washington telno 1992 that the Americans are also concerned about the possibility of a further South African raid on Lesotho and that Crocker has asked us to support US diplomatic representations in Pretoria and Maseru. Over the weekend, the South African Defence Forces did in fact cross into Angola in pursuit of SWAPO infiltrators but we regard this action as in a different category of seriousness to the unprovoked attacks on Cabinda and Gabarone.

The result of any further South African raids could well be to plunge us back into the Security Council where there is likely to be a renewed call for sanctions. The pattern of discussion at Milan suggested that we might well find ourselves totally isolated in resisting proposals for a limited package of mandatory economic measures similar to those already supported in one form or another by both Houses of the US Congress. This would face us with disagreeable alternatives. Either we would have to veto alone and face the reality of political and economic retaliation by other countries. (We have already seen how sharply British trade in Commonwealth countries - India and Malaysia - can be damaged by a political steer from the top.) Or we would have to go along with the measures which (apart from their immediate cost) would set a most unwelcome precedent. Even if such a situation does not arise, we would face strong pressure at home for action going beyond verbal condemnation.

The Foreign Secretary therefore believes that there is an urgent need to dissuade the South Africans from any such further attacks. This would involve leaving them in no doubt that the next time they strike at their neighbours there will be a real cost to their relations with us. To have the greatest impact the warning would best be conveyed in a message from the Prime Minister to President Botha. A message at the highest level would be the most effective way of reinforcing American efforts to restrain the South Africans.



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Before sending such a message, however, we need to have cleared our minds on what action we would be prepared to take if a further attack were to take place. The Foreign Secretary has given this careful thought. We should not want to take any economic measures, even relatively cost-free ones, because of the precedent they would set. We have therefore concentrated on bilateral political measures which would have a significant adverse impact on the South Africans. The possibilities are obviously limited but of those we have been able to identify the following three seem least unattractive:

- (i) the withdrawal of our Ambassador and of Dr Worrall;
- (ii) the ending of the reciprocal exchange of Defence Attaches;
- (iii) the cancellation of Ministerial visits then pending.

The Foreign Secretary recommends that we should opt for (ii) and (iii). The withdrawal of our Ambassador and of Dr Worrall would clearly have the greatest public impact, but would carry a number of obvious disadvantages. Moreover, there might be little prospect in practice of restoring diplomatic relations to Ambassadorial level since there would never be a right moment to do this. It would also be regarded as merely being a step behind the Americans, who have already taken such action.

The cancellation of Ministerial visits then pending arises as a possible, and immediate, option because the South African Ministers for Finance and Budget are due to meet their Treasury counterparts later this week. It would have a certain symbolic effect, but would be unlikely to have much influence on South African policy. Nevertheless, it would be difficult not to cancel the visits if an attack had just taken place.

The end of the exchange of Defence Attaches seems particularly appropriate as a response to some new military action by the South Africans. The exchange is the last vestige of our military relationship with the South Africans. It provides us with information on the South African armed forces, keeps the door open to a wider relationship,

There are, of course, no defence sales to South Africa but there might be some modest penalty. The Foreign Secretary does not, however, think that the disadvantages are significant when compared with the disadvantages of the other options we have examined.

The Foreign Secretary believes that this is a matter which requires further careful assessment and at this stage would not wish to advance it as a possibility.

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The Foreign Secretary hopes that in the light of the above, the Prime Minister will agree to sending an immediate message to President Botha in the terms of the attached draft. As you will see, the letter does not specify what action we would take in response to a South African action, but makes it clear that some concrete step would be taken. In response to the American request for diplomatic support in Maseru, we shall also be approaching the Government of Lesotho urging them to stay in close touch with the South Africans on matters of security.

The above recommendation is intended to deal solely with the immediate risk of a further South African raid. We will still face the continuing problem of the growing build-up of international pressure for economic measures against South Africa. The Foreign Secretary is preparing a paper on this subject which he intends forwarding to the Prime Minister shortly.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for Defence, who will no doubt have views about this proposal, and also to the Private Secretary to the Chancellor.

Yours ever,

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