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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

24 September 1985

Dear Colin,

POLICY TOWARDS SOUTH AFRICA

Thank you for your letter of 24 September about the question of lifting our reserve on the package of restrictive measures against South Africa agreed by the Nine on 10 September.

I note that subscribing to the position of the Nine would not in any way affect the current position on oil exports to South Africa.

The Prime Minister continues to believe withdrawal of defence attaches a futile measure which will achieve nothing and buy us only (to quote Benjamin Franklin) "a little temporary safety". If we are to go along with this step it would be much better to speak of recall rather than withdrawal of the attaches and to make it clear that they will return to South Africa at a time and under circumstances which we and we alone shall choose. I have spoken to the Foreign Secretary on this point, and do not think any further instructions are required.

It would be better, however, if the press line could be made a good deal more forthright and give more prominence to the points being made in the statement in political cooperation, that is to the fact that we were applying the great majority of the measures already and do not regard the position of the Nine as going significantly beyond our present position. The point about defence attaches should be expressed in the terms set out above. And you should avoid the term "political pressure" in the last paragraph, substituting "political signal".

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours.

Yours sincerely
Charles Powell

CHARLES POWELL

C.R. Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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Je k.

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From the Private Secretary

24 September 1985

POLICY TOWARDS SOUTH AFRICA

I have written separately about the question of our rallying to the position of the Nine on South Africa.

The Prime Minister has asked me to say that she regards withdrawal of defence attaches as a futile action. It will have no effect upon the situation in South Africa. Rather it will diminish such influence as we have with the South African Government and increase its sense of isolation which we have on other occasions said we think the wrong way to proceed. The arguments for doing so have been based entirely on expediency and the need to establish a common position of the Ten which is all too likely to prove ephemeral. She regards it as a sign of serious weakness in our diplomacy that we allow ourselves to be governed by herd instinct rather than by what we calculate is the right thing to do. It is also a mistake, in her view, to allow a defence matter to be settled by political cooperation. So the decision is taken against her better judgement. It is her strong conviction that under no circumstances should we go further than this in the direction of measures against South Africa.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'CP' or similar initials.

CHARLES POWELL

C.R. Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.