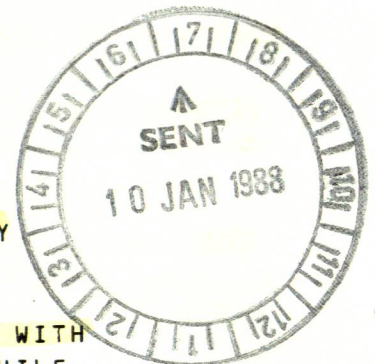


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MY TELNO 023: VISIT BY THE PRIME MINISTER 7-8 JANUARY

SUMMARY

1. A MOST SUCCESSFUL VISIT. WARM RAPPORT ESTABLISHED WITH PRESIDENT BABANGIDA. TOP NIGERIANS DELIGHTED. WORTHWHILE BRITISH COUNCIL CEREMONY. SMALL DEMONSTRATIONS OUTWEIGHED BY LARGE FRIENDLY CROWDS. PERFORMANCE OF THE BRITISH MEDIA PARTY DEPLORABLE. NIGERIAN MEDIA ON THE WHOLE DISOBLIGING, BUT BETTER THAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED: FEELINGS OVER SOUTH AFRICA PREDOMINANT. MUCH WORK STILL TO BE DONE ON OUR RELATIONS, BUT THE VISIT HAS CREATED THE BEST POSSIBLE ATMOSPHERE.

DETAIL

2. THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO NIGERIA WAS TO ESTABLISH A CLOSE AND FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT BABANGIDA. IN THIS, AS I HAD CONFIDENTLY EXPECTED, SHE SUCCEEDED IN FULL MEASURE. HER LONG DISCUSSION WITH THE PRESIDENT COVERED ALL THE ESSENTIALS OF THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP, IN AN EXTREMELY POSITIVE WAY. THE PRESIDENT REFRAINED FROM DWELLING ON MINOR ISSUES BUT CONCENTRATED ON HIS ECONOMIC CONCERNS, MAKING IT CLEAR THAT HE GREATLY APPRECIATED THE SUPPORT HE HAD RECEIVED FROM BRITAIN. HE SPOKE CALMLY ON SOUTH AFRICA AND READILY ACCEPTED THAT OUR DIFFERENCES OVER SANCTIONS SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO DAMAGE THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP. THE READING WHICH WE HAVE HAD FROM DODAN BARRACKS OVER THE WEEKEND IS THAT THE PRESIDENT IS DELIGHTED AT THE WAY THE VISIT WENT AND ONLY WISHES IT COULD HAVE BEEN LONGER, AND THAT BOTH HE AND (POSSIBLY NO LESS IMPORTANT) MRS BABANGIDA ARE EXCEEDINGLY PLEASED WITH THE PERSONAL RAPPORT WHICH THEY FEEL THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT THE RELATIONSHIP THUS CREATED WILL STAND US IN VERY GOOD STEAD FOR AS LONG AS PRESIDENT BABANGIDA IS IN POWER.

3. THE WARMTH SHOWN TOWARDS THE PRIME MINISTER BY THE BABANGIDAS

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IS SHARED BY ALMOST EVERYONE WHO MATTERS HERE. THE EMIR OF KANO COULD NOT HAVE DONE MORE, AND THE SIZE AND SPENDOUR OF HIS DURBAR FOR THE PRIME MINISTER EXCEEDED ALL EXPECTATIONS. THE GIFTS WHICH SHE RECEIVED WERE LAVISH (AND I FEAR I MAY STILL HAVE TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH THE EMIR'S HORSE (EXCLAMATION MARK)). THOSE PRESENT AT THE OFFICIAL BANQUET AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S RECEPTION AT MY RESIDENCE, WHICH INCLUDED A LARGE NUMBER OF THOSE IN POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE IN THIS COUNTRY, WERE ALL EXTREMELY GRATIFIED BY HER VISIT. I HAVE HEARD NOTHING BUT EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION AT THE RENEWAL OF THE REALTIONSHIP WITH BRITAIN WHICH TOP NIGERIANS FEEL THAT THE VISIT HAS ACHIEVED.

4. I WAS PARTICULARLY GLAD THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS ABLE TO OPEN THE NEW BRITISH COUNCIL OFFICE IN LAGOS. NIGERIANS VALUE THE COUNCIL HIGHLY (AND IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT HER REFERENCE TO THE COUNCIL IN HER ADDRESS ON ARRIVAL DREW APPLAUSE FROM HER AUDIENCE). TO HAVE DRAWN THIS ATTENTION TO THE HIGH PROFILE THAT THE COUNCIL IS NOW ADOPTING HERE CAN DO NOTHING BUT GOOD FOR OUR OVERALL INTERESTS.

5. THE PUBLIC RELATIONS ASPECTS OF THE VISIT WERE LESS STRAIGHTFORWARD. AS I HAD WARNED, THE PRESIDENT WAS ABLE TO DISCOURAGE PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, BUT NOT TO PREVENT THEM ALTOGETHER. SMALL GROUPS OF DEMONSTRATIONS WERER THEREFORE IN EVIDENCE BOTH IN LAGOS AND IN KANO, AND THE MEDIA INEVITABLY LATCHED ON TO THEM. BUT THEY WERE MORE THAN OUTWEIGHED, PARTICULARLY IN KANO, BY THE LARGE NUMBERS OF FRIENDLY AND INTERESTED PEOPLE WHO TURNED OUT TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE PRIME MINISTER. MR INGHAM TOLD ME THAT HE BELIEVED THAT THE CROWDS IN KANO WERE LARGER THAN ANY WHICH HAD GREETED THE PRIME MINISTER ANYWHERE ABROAD, AND THEY WERE CERTAINLY TO BE NUMBERED IN SIX FIGURES.

6. THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE ACCOMPANYING BRITISH MEDIA WAS, TO MY MIND, DEPLORABLE. THEY SEEMED ALMOST TOTALLY DISINTERESTED IN THE CONTENT OF THE VISIT, EXCEPT INSOFAR AS THEY COULD UNEARTH BONES OF CONTENTION. LARGELY THWARTED IN THIS DIRECTION, THEY HUNTED DESPERATELY FOR UNTOWARD INCIDENTS AND WENT TO TOWN, WITH LURID EXAGGERATION, WHEN MEMBERS OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S PARTY WERE CUAGHT UP IN A MINOR SCUFFLE IN THE EMIR OF KANO'S PALACE. SUCH PEOPLE GAIN LITTLE RESPECT FOR THEIR COUNTRY.

7. THE RESPONSE OF THE NIGERIAN MEDIA HAS BEEN MUCH MORE WORTHY

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OF ATTENTION. FOR AN AFRICAN COUNTRY, THEY ARE REFRESHINGLY FREE AND OUTSPOKEN, AND BOTH THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AND I AND MY HIGH COMMISSION WENT TO CONSIDERABLE LENGTHS WITH THEM, TO TRY TO PUT THE VISIT IN THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE. SENIOR NIGERIANS HAVE TOLD ME THAT, AS A RESULT, THEY HAVE BEEN MORE MODERATE THAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED, AND I AM INCLINED TO AGREE. BUT THEY WERE ALL TOO READY TO ASSUME THAT SUCH ISSUES AS DIKKO AND VISAS WERE THE ONES WHICH MATTER BILATERALLY AND IT HAS BEEN HARD TO DISPEL THE MYTH, WHICH HAS SOMEHOW GOT AROUND, THAT WE HAVE BEEN LESS THAN HELPFUL TO NIGERIA OVER HER ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. BUT BENEATH ALL THE DISOBLIGING COVERAGE AND COMMENT WERE THEIR FEELINGS OVER SOUTH AFRICA. LIKE BLACK PEOPLE EVERYWHERE, ARTICULATE NIGERIANS CANNOT TOLERATE THE THOUGHT OF OTHER BLACKS BEING MURDERED AND OPPRESSED BY WHITES, AND NOTHING WILL CHANGE THEIR GUT FEELING THAT THE BOERS MUST BE PUNISHED FOR THEIR CRIMES. IT IS TRUE, AS THE PRIME MINISTER SAID HERE, THAT THERE IS LITTLE IN THE CASE FOR SANCTIONS BEYOND RHETORIC: BUT THIS RHETORIC ARISES FROM NAKED AND IRRADICABLE RACIAL EMOTIONS. NOTHING WILL BE PLAIN SAILING, HERE OR ELSEWHERE IN AFRICA, UNTIL THE SOUTH AFRICAN BOIL HAS BEEN LANCED.

8. IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, THERE REMAINS A GOOD DEAL ON OUR AGENDA WITH NIGERIA. WE MUST FIND A WAY TO RESOLVE OUR DIFFICULTIES OVER AIR SERVICES, TALKS ON WHICH START THIS WEEK. IT IS FRUSTRATING THAT WE HAVE BEEN PREVENTED FOR MANY MONTHS FROM GOING AHEAD WITH OUR NEW ECGD CREDIT, AS A RESULT OF UNRESOLVED DIFFERENCES OVER THE TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT AND THE CALCULATION OF THE AMOUNTS OF UNPAID INTEREST INVOLVED. IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT THESE OBSTACLES SHOULD BE CLEARED OUT OF THE WAY WHEN THE ECGD TEAM COMES HERE TOWARDS THE END OF THIS MONTH. WE MUST ALSO SETTLE THE QUESTION OF THE DEBT OWED TO THE MOD. THE NIGERIANS HAVE STILL TO AGREE TO THE USE OF THE WEST AFRICA CURRENCY BOARD ASSETS, BUT I UNDERSTAND THAT THEY MAY NOW BE PAYING OFF A PROPORTION OF THE OUTSTANDING AMOUNT, IF THEY HAVE NOT DONE SO ALREADY. ABOVE ALL, NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES ARE BOUND TO PERSIST, AND HER PROBLEMS WITH HER EXTERNAL CREDITORS AND ECONOMIC PARTNERS CONTINUE. SHE WILL, PROBABLY MORE THAN EVER, LOOK TO US FOR ASSISTANCE. IT IS HOWEVER CERTAIN THAT AS A RESULT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT, WE SHALL BE ABLE TO TACKLE ALL THESE PROBLEMS IN THE BEST POSSIBLE ATMOSPHERE OF FRIENDSHIP AND GOODWILL.

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