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TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 191 OF 4 MARCH

INFO PRIORITY CAPETOWN, PRETORIA, GABORONE, LUSAKA, WASHINGTON.

YOUR TELNO 347 TO WASHINGTON.

1. ALL MUGABE'S APPOINTMENTS FOR TODAY, INCLUDING ONE WITH GENERAL SHORTIS, HAVE BEEN CANCELLED TO ALLOW FOR BRIEFING FOR THE NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT (HE LEAVES TOMORROW). SHORTIS HAS BEEN PROMISED AN APPOINTMENT SHORTLY AFTER MUGABE'S RETURN, PERHAPS 14 MARCH. I THEREFORE THOUGHT IT TIME TO SPEAK TO SEKERAMAYI MYSELF TO FOLLOW UP HIS RECENT DISCUSSIONS WITH SHORTIS AND MY DA. I SAW HIM THIS AFTERNOON, OSTENSIBLY ABOUT HUNTER REPLACEMENT (REPORTED SEPARATELY) AND TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO GO OVER THE GROUND WITH HIM. I SAID I THOUGHT THERE WOULD BE FURTHER ADVERSE PUBLICITY IN THE NEXT DAYS AS A RESULT OF THE NGO DOSSIER. I SAID THERE WAS CONCERN IN LONDON. WE SYMPATHISED WITH THE DIFFICULTIES HIS GOVERNMENT FACED IN HANDLING THE DISSIDENT PROBLEM. WE DID NOT WISH TO ADD TO THESE AND I HAD NO INSTRUCTIONS TO MAKE ANY FORMAL REPRESENTATIONS. BUT I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A NUMBER OF POINTS ON A PERSONAL BASIS.

2. I THOUGHT ZIMBABWE'S IMAGE AND INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION WOULD SUFFER BADLY IF THE KIND OF REPORTS WHICH HAD BEEN APPEARING RECENTLY WERE TO CONTINUE OVER ANY PROTRACTED PERIOD OF TIME. THE REPORTS MIGHT BE EXAGGERATED BUT THERE WAS ENOUGH EVIDENCE OF EXCESSES, INCLUDING BAYONETTING OF PREGNANT WOMEN, TO CAUSE CONCERN AND DO LASTING DAMAGE IF UNCHECKED. THE PROBLEM OF EXCESSES BY INDIVIDUAL SOLDIERS WAS NOT UNIQUE TO ZIMBABWE, BUT ONE WHICH MUST BE TACKLED. THE SHORT TERM MILITARY PROBLEM HAS TO CONTAIN AND THEN ERADICATE DISSIDENCE; THE LONG TERM POLITICAL PROBLEM WAS TO RECOVER THE ALLEGIANCE OF THE LOCAL POPULATION. AS HE HIMSELF HAD SAID, THE ATTITUDE OF THE LOCALS WAS THE CRUCIAL FACTOR IN SUCCESS FOR EITHER SIDE IN A GUERRILLA SITUATION. THE CRUCIAL THING WAS TO GET THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL NECESSITIES PROPERLY BALANCED. IT WAS A DILEMMA TO WHICH WE WERE ACCUSTOMED IN NORTHERN IRELAND. IT NEEDED CONSTANT REASSESSMENT WEEK BY WEEK. I URGED HIM STRONGLY TO ENSURE THAT EXCESSES WERE CURBED AND THAT, WHILE MILITARY FORCE WAS NEEDED, NO MORE WAS USED THAN WAS ESSENTIAL TO THE REQUIREMENT OF THE MOMENT.

3. I SAID, AGAIN SPEAKING PERSONALLY, THAT IN ADDITION TO OUR CONCERN FOR ZIMBABWE'S SECURITY AND FOR HER INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION, I THOUGHT MY MINISTERS WOULD HAVE IN MIND A PARTICULAR BRITISH PROBLEM ALSO. IN THE LIGHT OF THE KIND OF ALLEGATIONS WHICH WERE SOMETIMES MADE IN RELATION TO ULSTER, WE HAD TO BE PARTICULARLY CAREFUL OF THE REPUTATION OF OUR ARMY. AS A HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE POLITICALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO PROVIDE A BRIGADE TRAINING TEAM FOR THE 5TH BRIGADE AT A TIME WHEN THE NEWS-PAPERS WERE FULL OF STORIES OF 5TH BRIGADE ATROCITIES.

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4. I SAID THAT ANOTHER CONCERN OF MINE RELATED TO THE DE-MOBILISATION PROGRAMME. AS HE WOULD KNOW, THE TOWN WAS FULL OF RUMOURS THAT, IN THE 5 BRIGADE AREA OF OPERATIONS, THE POSSESSION OF A DE-MOBILISATION CARD WAS REGARDED AS EVIDENCE OF DISSIDENCE. WHETHER THE STORY WAS TRUE WAS REALLY IMMATERIAL. IT COULD BE ENOUGH, WITH TALK ABOUT LARGE SCALE DE-MOBILISATION TO PROMPT FURTHER MASSIVE EX-ZIPRA DESERTIONS AND COULD LEAD TO WHAT WE ALL WISH TO AVOID: PEOPLE TROOPING ACROSS BORDERS AND BECOMING A LONG TERM MILITARY THREAT. I URGED HIM THAT HE SHOULD LOOK FOR A WAY OF REASSURING EX-ZIPRA SOLDIERS IN THE CONTEXT OF ANY DE-MOBILISATION SCHEME. THOUGH I THOUGHT IT AN UNNECESSARILY PESSIMISTIC AND CYNICAL APPROACH THERE WAS AN ARGUMENT THAT IT WAS BETTER TO HAVE PEOPLE IN THE ARMY, WHERE YOU COULD KEEP AN EYE ON THEM, THAN IN THE BUSH OR BOTSWANA, WHERE YOU COULD NOT.
5. SEKERMAYI TOOK ALL THIS REMARKABLY WELL AND SEEMED TO AGREE WITH MOST OF THE POINTS WHICH I MADE. THE POINTS WHICH HE MADE WERE AS FOLLOWS.
6. THERE HAD BEEN EXCESSES, ESPECIALLY DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF THE 5 BRIGADE'S OPERATIONS. THIS WAS INEVITABLE WHERE INEXPERIENCED SOLDIERS WERE DEPLOYED ON SUCH A TASK. HE THOUGHT THAT EFFORTS TO GET MATTERS UNDER CONTROL OR TO TARGET THE OPERATIONS MORE CORRECTLY WERE NOW BY AND LARGE SUCCESSFUL. THE REPORTS WHICH WERE STILL COMING IN REFERRED TO THINGS WHICH HAD HAPPENED SOME TIME AGO. (THIS PROBABLY IS BROADLY TRUE, THOUGH KILLING SEEMS TO CONTINUE). HE HAD DECIDED TO USE THE 5TH BRIGADE BECAUSE USING AMALGAMATED BATALLIONS HAD LEAD TO EX-ZIPRA DEFECTIONS, WHICH BOTH INCREASED THE DISSIDENCE PROBLEM AND DE-STABILISED WHAT REMAINED OF THE BATALLIONS.
7. IN MATABELELAND SOUTH (AROUND GWANDA) THERE HAD BEEN A MARKED IMPROVEMENT IN THE OVERALL SITUATION. RECENT MINISTERIAL RALLIES HAD BEEN WELL RECEIVED. THE POPULATION, WHO HAD BEEN HARD HIT DURING THE WAR WERE NOW COOPERATING IN REPORTING DISSIDENTS. THE REAL TROUBLE HAD BEEN IN MATABELELAND NORTH, IN TSHOLOTSHO, NYAMANDLOVU, NKAYI AND LUPANE. IT WAS AN AREA WHICH HAD SEEN LITTLE FIGHTING DURING THE WAR AND THE POPULATION HAD ROMANTIC IDEAS ABOUT WARFARE AND THEIR ABILITY TO 'DEAL WITH THE GOVERNMENT'. IT HAD BEEN NECESSARY TO DISABUSE THEM. HARSH ACTION HAD NOT HELPED ZIMBABWE'S NAME. BUT THAT, AND THE GOVERNMENT'S POSITION, WOULD HAVE SUFFERED AS MUCH OR MORE IF THE INCREASING DISSIDENCE OF LAST YEAR HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO CONTINUE. THERE HAD BEEN A RISK OF A DESCENT TOWARDS A BIAFRA-TYPE SITUATION (I REMINDED HIM THAT THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT HAD FOLLOWED THE MILITARY PHASE WITH A MASSIVE UNITY DRIVE AND HE SAID HE ACCEPTED THAT PARALLEL AS VALID ALSO). HE BELIEVED THAT OBJECTIVES IN MATABELELAND NORTH HAD NOW LARGELY BEEN ACHIEVED. HE TOLD ME THAT 'THE CURRENT PHASE' WOULD COME TO AN END THIS WEEKEND. AFTER THAT THE ARMY WOULD NOT BE WITHDRAWN BUT WOULD BE TOLD TO 'STAND STILL' IN ITS PRESENT POSITIONS. HE SAID HE ENTIRELY ACCEPTED MY POINT ABOUT THE NEED TO BALANCE MILITARY AND POLITICAL OBJECTIVES AND TO AVOID GREATER USE OF MILITARY FORCE THAN WAS IMPERATIVE. -2-

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8. AS TO DE-MOBILISATION, HE ASSURED ME AGAIN THAT THE PROJECT TO DE-MOBILISE EX-ZIPRA AS SUCH WAS AT AN END. IT HAD NEVER BEEN PROPERLY AUTHORISED AND WAS THE RESULT OF FRUSTRATION IN THE ARMY COMMAND AT DESERTIONS ON ACTIVE DUTY. HE AGREED ABOUT THE NEED TO PROVIDE REASSURANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF DE-MOBILISATION. HE WAS CONSIDERING WHETHER THERE MIGHT BE A CASE FOR DEFERRING FURTHER DE-MOBILISATIONS ALTOGETHER UNTIL 'THE PRESENT SITUATION IS OVER'.

9. SEKERAMAYI'S REMARKS WERE ENCOURAGING, EVEN ALLOWING FOR SOME ADJUSTMENT TO THE AUDIENCE. I AM SURE THAT OUR BEST TACTIC IS TO CONTINUE TO TRY TO PROFER SYMPATHETIC AND CONSTRUCTIVE, RATHER THAN SIMPLY CRITICAL, ADVICE IF WE WISH TO INFLUENCE ZIMBABWEAN DECISIONS.

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