



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

5 August 1983

Pine Mustie

John Tom

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Zimbabwe: Air Force Officers' Trial

You may wish to know where things stand.

The court hearing has ended. The trial appeared to be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. The prosecution case depended heavily on the confessions. The defence made full play of the torture allegations. The verdict is expected on 29 August.

The most probable outcome is that all the accused will be acquitted, but it is possible that the two most junior officers will be found guilty. If so, the offence could carry the death sentence, but this is not mandatory and is unlikely to be passed. It seems that Mugabe has not yet decided what to do with those acquitted, and he may well not make his mind up until after the verdict. The pressure on him within his party not to let the accused go unpunished will be great. Redetention of all or some of the defendants, if only on a temporary basis, is quite likely. However Mugabe is in no doubt about the likely serious international repercussions of redetention. The Prime Minister has made them clear to him, and the message has also been conveyed directly or indirectly by a number of British parliamentarians (including Lord Soames) as well as officials. We believe that he has taken this point fully on board.

Sir Geoffrey Howe has considered the possibility of a message from the Prime Minister to Mugabe. Such an important card should clearly be played at a time when it is likely to be most effective. Sir Geoffrey does not believe we should use it before the verdict. It would not tell Mugabe anything he does not already know and would only irritate. However once the verdict has been announced we may need to submit urgently to you a recommendation that the Prime Minister should send a message. The content and tone would of course depend on the particular circumstances.

/We shall



We shall also have to consider at that stage whether to take any other measures to demonstrate our concern. We could not hope to persuade Mugabe in this way to release the prisoners: he is more likely to dig his toes in still more. But the deployment of some degree of stick may be necessary to respond to the substantial indignation and anger which would be felt within the UK. It would seem to follow that the right time to consider whether to adopt any such measures would be after it became evident that Mugabe had reached a final decision to keep the men in prison for a substantial period. Meanwhile we are scrutinizing with particular care any proposals for new initiatives in our bilateral relations in case we need to delay our response until this issue has been cleared up.

The defence lawyers have told us that, in the period immediately following redetention, their aim would be to keep the temperature down while making discreet but urgent use of their contacts to secure release: they have asked that any representations we might feel able to make should be in the same vein. This seems right. We shall have to bear in mind that redetention might be intended as a temporary measure while the Government make their minds up or prepare the ground for release or deportation. We will need to take into account such aspects as the number of those redetained and our own views of the likelihood of their guilt (we have no firm knowledge but our degree of suspicion varies). And the timing of a message concerning a death sentence would have to take into account the accused's right of appeal.

The Prime Minister may be interested in the attached copy of a letter which Sir Geoffrey Howe has received from Mr Shultz. As you will see, the State Department have concluded a review of their policy towards Zimbabwe with a decision to stand by their support for Mugabe's Government. The thinking within the State Department on the Air Force officers' trial is also close to our own. Mugabe will be visiting Washington from 11 - 14 September, and this will give the US Administration an excellent opportunity to speak frankly to him. The Americans have promised to consult with us closely.

I am copying this to Richard Mottram (MOD).

(R B Bone)
Private Secretary

Tim Flesher Esq
10 Downing Street



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

12 August 1983

This is just to record that the Prime Minister has seen and noted your letter of 5 August about the position in the Air Force officers' trial in Zimbabwe.

Timothy Flesher

John Holmes, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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