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FM PRETORIA

TO PRIORITY FCO

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INFO ROUTINE CANBERRA, OTTAWA, LUSAKA, HARARE, DAR ES SALAAM
 INFO ROUTINE NEW DELHI, NASSAU, WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK
 INFO SAVING JOHANNESBURG, CAPE TOWN CONSULATE, DURBAN

SOUTH AFRICA AND THE COMMONWEALTH
 SUMMARY

1. THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT ARE TAKING NO FORMAL POSITION OVER THE COMMONWEALTH MISSION UNTIL THEY KNOW MORE PRECISELY WHAT IS PROPOSED. THEY APPRECIATE THE LINE TAKEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER AT NASSAU AND HER WISH TO SEE THE MISSION GIVEN A FAIR CHANCE. BUT THEY CONTINUE TO HAVE GREAT RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE WHOLE IDEA.
 DETAIL

2. I HAVE YET TO MEET ANYONE IN THE GOVERNMENT OR AMONG ORDINARY SOUTH AFRICANS WHO RELISHES THE PROSPECT OF A COMMONWEALTH EMINENT PERSONS GROUP (EPG) COMING TO SOUTH AFRICA. THERE ARE WIDESPREAD RESERVATIONS ABOUT A TEAM OF OUTSIDERS THINKING THEY CAN HELP IN A SITUATION OF WHICH THEY HAVE NO FIRST HAND EXPERIENCE. LESS POLITE CRITICS DESCRIBE IT AS UNWANTED INTERFERENCE WHICH IS LIKELY TO INCREASE THE DIFFICULTIES.

3. THE ONLY POINT WHICH MOST PEOPLE ARE PREPARED TO CONCEDE IS THAT THE PRIME MINISTER IS TO BE THANKED FOR HER SOLO STAND AT NASSAU AGAINST ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND FOR SECURING A MORE REASONABLE DECLARATION THAN WOULD OTHERWISE HAVE BEEN THE CASE ALTHOUGH IT CONTAINS MANY UNWELCOME FEATURES FROM THEIR POINT OF VIEW. PIK BOTHA TOLD MY CANADIAN COLLEAGUE LAST WEEK THAT HE REALISED MRS THATCHER HAD "GONE OUT ON A LIMB". AFTER SOME DISCOURAGING REMARKS ABOUT THE EPG AND RUMOURED NOMINATIONS TMO IT, PIK BOTHA SUGGESTED THAT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT MIGHT FIND IT MORE POSSIBLE TO RECEIVE MEMBERS INDIVIDUALLY THAN AS A GROUP. (NOT SPELT OUT HERE, OF COURSE, IS THE IMPLIED THREAT THAT ONLY CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE EPG WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE).

4. PRESIDENT BOTHA SPOKE ABOUT THE EPG TO SIR JOHN HOSKYNYS (FORMER HEAD OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S POLICY UNIT) WHEN HE RECEIVED HIM ON 4 NOVEMBER ON AN INSTITUTE OF DIRECTORS VISIT. HOSKYNYS TOLD ME AFTERWARDS THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD GIVEN THE IMPRESSION OF BEING REASONABLY OPEN-MINDED ABOUT THE MISSION AND PREPARED TO AWAIT DETAILS OF ITS COMPOSITION AND METHOD OF OPERATION. THE PRESIDENT HAD ALSO SPOKEN WARMLY ABOUT LORD BARBER, WHOM HE KNOWS IN HIS CAPACITY AS CHAIRMAN OF THE STANDARD CHARTERED BANK. BUT HE HAD MADE TWO POINTS STRONGLY TO HOSKYNYS:

- (A) HE REJECTED A SIX MONTH DEADLINE WHICH HE CONSIDERED QUITE UNREALISTIC.
- (B) HE DESCRIBED MR MALCOLM FRASER AS UTTERLY BIASED. THERE WAS NO WAY THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WOULD ACCEPT THAT FRASER HAD A USEFUL CONTRIBUTION TO MAKE. IT MIGHT BE DIFFERENT IF THE SOUTH AFRICANS COULD BE PRESUADED THAT MEMBERS OF THE EPG WOULD BE GENUINELY OBJECTIVE.

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5. THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENT ON MALCOLM FRASER'S APPOINTMENT DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR SOUTH AFRICAN REACTIONS IF AND WHEN IT IS ANNOUNCED THAT EX-PRESIDENT NYERERE IS BEING APPOINTED TO THE GROUP.

6. PIK BOTHA'S CHEF DE CABINET TELLS ME THAT HE BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT MAY LAY DOWN CONDITIONS FOR ANY COMMONWEALTH VISIT IN THE SAME WAY AS THEY DID FOR THE EC TROIKA VISIT IN AUGUST. (THEY INSISTED THEN ON THE THREE MINISTERS ACCEPTING THAT THEIR VISIT DID NOT IMPLY ANY RIGHT ON THE PART OF THE TEN TO INTERFERE IN SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS NOR TO PRESCRIBE FORMULAS FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNAL COMPLEX PROBLEMS.) IF THIS WERE ALL THAT WAS REQUIRED BEFORE AN EPG VISIT I IMAGINE IT MIGHT BE MANAGEABLE.

7. IN THE END, HOWEVER, THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN TWO COURSES NEITHER OF WHICH THEY WILL FIND AT ALL EASY. EITHER THEY MUST OVERCOME THEIR SCRUPLES ABOUT DEALING WITH A GROUP WHICH INCLUDES INDIVIDUALS WHOM THEY REGARD AS TOTALLY HOSTILE, OR THEY MUST FACE UP TO REBUFFING A COMMONWEALTH INITIATIVE AND THEREBY OPENING THE WAY TO STRONGER ACTION AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA. NATURALLY I AM TAKING EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PUT ACROSS OUR REASONS FOR HOPING THAT THEY REACH THE RIGHT ANSWER. BUT IT WILL BE TOUCH AND GO.

CCN:- PARA 6 LINE 1 ... BELIEVES THE GOVERNMENT ... ETC

MOBERLY

(REPEATED AS REQUESTED)

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