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FM PRETORIA

TO DESKBY 211000Z FCO

TELNO 510

OF 210835Z NOVEMBER 1985

*Mr G...  
P 21. 11*

MY TELNO 508: <sup>(S)</sup> COMMONWEALTH EMINENT PERSONS GROUP.

1. WHEN I SAW PIK BOTHA YESTERDAY TO MAKE OUR POINTS ABOUT THE EPG HE HEARD ME OUT FOR SOME MINUTES AND THEN INTERRUPTED TO CHALLENGE OUR ASSUMPTION THAT A COMMONWEALTH GROUP COULD SERVE ANY USEFUL ROLE HERE WHATSOEVER. THIS WAS NOT JUST THE VIEW OF THE GOVERNMENT BUT OF PUBLIC OPINION GENERALLY.

2. HE ACKNOWLEDGED SOUTH AFRICAN APPRECIATION OF THE POSITION WHICH MRS THATCHER HAD TAKEN AT NASSAU. BUT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT MUST TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. THERE WAS NO WAY IN WHICH THE SAG COULD AGREE TO BE LECTURED BY REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENTS WHO THEMSELVES DID NOT PRACTICE DEMOCRACY. I AM GLAD TO SAY HE DESCRIBED LORD BARBER AS QUITE DIFFERENT. BUT AS FOR MALCOLM FRASER, IN PIK BOTHA'S VIEW HE WAS NOT ONLY BIASED BUT MAD. (COMMENT: IF FRASER WERE TO BECOME EPG CHAIRMAN AS SUGGESTED IN LUSAKA TELNO 473, I BELIEVE THIS WOULD IRRETRIEVABLY LOSE THE LAST HOPE OF ANY SAG CO-OPERATION). NOR COULD SUCCESSIVE GROUPS OF OUTSIDERS BE ALLOWED TO COME TO SOUTH AFRICA TO TELL SOUTH AFRICA WHAT TO DO. THERE HAD BEEN CAREFUL NEGOTIATIONS IN PRIVATE WITH EUROPEAN COMMUNITY GOVERNMENTS BEFORE THE TROIKA VISIT AND THE TERMS OF REFERENCE EVENTUALLY WORKED OUT HAD BEEN ACCEPTABLE. BUT THIS WAS DEALING WITH A LIMITED NUMBER OF GOVERNMENTS WHOSE COUNTRIES HAD SIMILAR STANDARDS AND INSTITUTIONS AS SOUTH AFRICA. THE COMMONWEALTH WAS DIFFERENT. WHERE WOULD THE PROCESS END ? WITH A UNITED NATIONS MISSION AND DEMANDS TO ACCEPT VISITING GROUPS INCLUDING REPRESENTATIVES OF COMMUNIST STATES ?

3. IN REPLY I CONCENTRATED ON TWO POINTS:

(A) THE FATAL EROSION OF MRS THATCHER'S EFFORTS TO SECURE A CONSTRUCTIVE INTERNATIONAL APPROACH TO SOUTH AFRICA IF THE EPG WERE REJECTED,

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(3) THE FACT THAT DETAILS OF HOW THE EPG WOULD OPERATE HAD NOT EVEN BEGUN TO BE DISCUSSED AND THERE MIGHT PROVE TO BE MORE FLEXIBILITY THAN THE SAG YET SEEMED TO REALISE.

FOR INSTANCE I POINTED TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT NOT ALL MEMBERS OF THE EPG MIGHT SEEK TO VISIT SOUTH AFRICA BUT COULD PERHAPS COME MORE INDIVIDUALLY AT LEAST FOR A START. I ALSO ASKED PIK BOTHA TO LOOK CAREFULLY AT THE PRECISE TERMS OF THE COMMONWEALTH ACCORD WHICH MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE EPG'S BROAD MANDATE WAS TO ENCOURAGE THE PROCESS OF DIALOGUE. SURELY THIS SHOULD BE HELPFUL FROM THE SAG'S POINT OF VIEW, COUPLED AS IT WAS WITH A CALL FOR THE SUSPENSION OF VIOLENCE ON ALL SIDES. MOREOVER THE DEADLINE TO WHICH THE SAG TOOK EXCEPTION WAS TO BE FOLLOWED BY A REVIEW OF ADEQUATE PROGRESS, WHICH I SUGGESTED COULD BE SEEN AS A CONVENIENTLY ELASTIC PHRASE.

4. BOTHA CONCEDED THAT THE TERMS OF REFERENCE WOULD BE IMPORTANT BUT SAID THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT SHOULD UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT SITUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA. RECENT UNREST APPEARED TO BE SUBSIDING. THE SAG NEEDED TO BE LEFT TO DEVELOP ITS PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE. IN ANY CASE CHANGE COULD ONLY TAKE PLACE AS A RESULT OF DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN SOUTH AFRICA. CONTINUING FOREIGN INTERFERENCE WAS COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. IT WAS NOT JUST A QUESTION OF WORRYING ABOUT WHITE REACTIONS. THE SUBJECT WAS BOUND TO COME UP WHEN THE PRESIDENT MEETS LEADERS OF THE INDEPENDENT HOMELANDS TODAY. PIK BOTHA WAS SURE THESE LEADERS WOULD BE OPPOSED TO COMMONWEALTH INTERFERENCE. ON TOP OF THIS THE SAG HAD EVIDENCE THAT A NUMBER OF BLACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA HAD BEEN ON THE POINT OF TALKING TO THE SAG BUT THAT DEVELOPMENTS AT NASSAU HAD MADE THEM SHEER AWAY. THE COMMONWEALTH DECLARATION HAD MADE PROSPECTS FOR DIALOGUE NOT BETTER BUT WORSE. APPEARANCE OF THE EPG ON THE SCENE COULD ACTUALLY MAKE BLACKS LESS WILLING TO NEGOTIATE BECAUSE OF EXPECTATIONS THAT OUTSIDE INTERVENTION WOULD INCREASE PRESSURE ON THE SAG.

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5. THE FOREIGN MINISTER WENT ON TO SPEAK OF A GROWING FEELING IN THE SAG THAT THEY HAD TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN WHAT WAS ECONOMICALLY DESIRABLE AND WHAT WAS POLITICALLY ESSENTIAL. THERE COULD BE NO COMPROMISE OVER CERTAIN ESSENTIALS. IF THIS MEANT THAT THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WERE OBLIGED TO GO ALONG WITH HARSH MEASURES INCLUDING SANCTIONS, SO BE IT. SOUTH AFRICA COULD WITHSTAND SUCH PRESSURES. THEY WOULD NOT HESITATE TO CHOOSE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP RATHER THAN SURRENDER ON QUESTIONS OF VITAL NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

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6. AT THIS LOW POINT WE HAD THE EXCHANGE ABOUT AN IMMINENT ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY GENERAL REPORTED IN MY TUR, AND DETECTED A SLIGHT THAWING FROM THE APOCALYPTIC ATTITUDE OF A COUPLE OF MINUTES EARLIER. PIK BOTHA INDICATED THAT ALL MIGHT NOT BE LOST IF, AS I HAD TOLD HIM, DETAILED IDEAS FOR OPERATION OF THE GROUP HAD STILL TO BE WORKED OUT. THIS IMPLIED SOME ROOM FOR MANOEUVRE. BUT IN THAT CASE HE SAID IT WAS ESSENTIAL IF THE SAG WERE TO ACCEPT ANY EPG ROLE, FIRSTLY THAT THE GROUP'S INTENTIONS SHOULD BE PRESENTED IN A MANNER ACCEPTABLE TO SOUTH AFRICA AND SECONDLY THAT THE SAG SHOULD HAVE A CHANCE TO KNOW PRIVATELY WHAT WAS PROPOSED BEFORE TERMS OF REFERENCE ETC. WERE PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED.

7. WE ENDED BY MY URGING AGAIN THAT THE SAG SHOULD KEEP AN OPEN MIND UNTIL IT BECAME CLEAR HOW THE EPG THEMSELVES INTENDED TO OPERATE, AND THAT MEANWHILE THEY SHOULD DO NOTHING TO CLOSE THE DOOR PUBLICLY. THE MINISTER'S FINAL REMARK WAS THAT PRESIDENT BOTHA WAS BOUND TO REACT IMMEDIATELY IF RAMPHAL CAME OUT AT THIS STAGE WITH AN INSENSITIVE ANNOUNCEMENT. BUT HE WOULD CONVEY OUR REPRESENTATIONS TO THE PRESIDENT.

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TO FLASH FCO  
TELNO 508  
OF 201605Z NOVEMBER 85  
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COMMONWEALTH EMINENT PERSONS GROUP

1. I HAVE JUST RETURNED FROM SEEING PIK BOTHA TO CARRY OUT THE INSTRUCTIONS IN YOUR TELEGRAM NO 282 AND PARAGRAPH 1 OF YOUR TELNO 283. IT IS CLEAR THAT THE TERMS OF THE EXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL WILL DETERMINE WHETHER THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT IMMEDIATELY REJECT THE COMMONWEALTH GROUP OR NOT.
2. I SHALL BE REPORTING THE CONVERSATION WITH PIK BOTHA IN A SEPARATE TELEGRAM. DESPITE ALL OUR ARGUMENTS FOR KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN ON THE COMMONWEALTH GROUP HE WAS EXTREMELY NEGATIVE. I DID MY BEST TO GET ACROSS THE POINT THAT THERE IS NO NEED FOR THE SAG TO TAKE A FINAL POSITION ON THE PROPOSED GROUP, CERTAINLY NOT IN PUBLIC, UNTIL THEY HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO HEAR HOW THE GROUP ITSELF PROPOSES TO SET ABOUT ITS TASK.
3. PIK BOTHA SOFTENED SLIGHTLY AT THE END WHEN I TOOK HIM THROUGH THE KEY PASSAGES OF THE COMMONWEALTH DECLARATION RELATING TO THE EPG, REVIEW AFTER SIX MONTHS, AND THE CALL FOR DIALOGUE AND SUSPENSION OF VIOLENCE. BUT HE WAS ADAMANT THAT IF RAMPHAL'S EXPECTED ANNOUNCEMENT IS CAST IN TERMS WHICH THE SAG REGARD AS HOSTILE OR THREATENING, THERE WILL BE NO WAY HE COULD STOP PRESIDENT BOTH FROM REACTING PUBLICLY AGAINST ANY POSSIBILITY OF CO-OPERATING WITH IT. COULD NOT THE SAG BE INFORMED OF WHAT WAS PROPOSED AND GIVEN A CHANCE TO COMMENT BEFORE ANY ANNOUNCEMENT WAS MADE?

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4. I SAID THAT I DID NOT THINK THERE WAS ANY HOPE OF RAMPHAL DELAYING AN ANNOUNCEMENT ABOUT THE GROUP'S COMPOSITION, WHICH IN ANY CASE WAS LARGELY PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE ALREADY. BUT MY OWN VIEW WAS THAT THEREAFTER THE SAG MIGHT REASONABLY EXPECT THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY-GENERAL TO BE IN TOUCH WITH THEM PRIVATELY BEFORE ANY FURTHER ANNOUNCEMENT E.G. ABOUT THE GROUP OR ANY OF ITS MEMBERS VISITING SOUTH AFRICA.

5. IN SHORT PIK BOTHA'S LINE WAS THAT THE SAG WOULD STRONGLY PREFER NO ANNOUNCEMENT AT THIS STAGE IN ADVANCE OF PRIVATE EXCHANGES ABOUT MODE OF OPERATION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE ETC. BUT THE MINIMUM PRICE TO KEEP THE PRESIDENT FROM INSTANT REJECTION IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT BY RAMPHAL CAST IN UNCONTROVERSIAL TERMS AND LIMITED SIMPLY TO ANNOUNCING THE NAMES OF THOSE CHOSEN AS MEMBERS OF THE GROUP.

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