

12/12/30 13 Dec.

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Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

6 December 1985

You could exercise
a very useful influence
on Obasanjo & on the
EPG. Agree to see him
highly?
Dear Charles,
C.D.P. 6/12

Will meet nearly
certainly
yes
not

Eminent Persons Group: Possibility of the Prime Minister
Seeing General Obasanjo

/ General Obasanjo is as you know the Nigerian representative
/ on the Eminent Persons Group. I enclose a copy of our LPR
entry on him, together with a telegram from Lagos recording
a recent discussion with him.

A British friend of General Obasanjo, Mr David Lane of
Widnell and Trollope (consulting engineers with interests in
Nigeria) has told us that Obasanjo is keen to have a private
talk with the Prime Minister. He apparently has a great
personal admiration for her, though they have never met.

We have your strictures about the pressures on the
Prime Minister's programme very much in mind, and will shortly
be letting you have a survey covering the next few months.
The Foreign Secretary has however asked me to say, with
apologies for the short notice, that he believes there is a
strong case for the Prime Minister having a short meeting with
Obasanjo at some point during his visit to London from
12-15 December for the forthcoming meeting of the Eminent
Persons Group.

Obasanjo, as co-chairman and the most senior Third World
Commonwealth Eminent Person, is in a position to play a key
role in the Group. If he were to counsel a quiet, diplomatic
approach to the Group's mission, keeping open the possibility
of cooperating with the South African Government, the other
members of the Group might be willing to defer to him. His
credentials as a black African could not be in question.

When Mr Wyatt saw Obasanjo on 26 November (see the enclosed
telegram) his reactions were quite encouraging. If the Prime
Minister were to see him, stress her commitment to make the
Group's mission a success and emphasise the need for quiet
diplomacy, this might have a real influence on him. Ideally
she should see him before the Group begins its meetings on
12 December. No doubt he would be prepared to come a day earlier
if she were willing to see him beforehand.

Yours ever,
Colin Budd

(C R Budd)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
PS/10 Downing Street

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OBASANJO, GENERAL (RETIRED) OLUSEGUN

Former Head of the Federal Military Government.

Born 5 March 1937 at Abeokuta, Ogun State. An Egba Yoruba and Catholic. Educated Abeokuta Baptist High School. Joined army 1959 Commissioned 1959. Mons UK 1960-61. Royal Engineers Young Officer's Course Shrivenham, Indian Staff College 1965. Commander Ibadan garrison 1967-69. 3 Marine Commando 1969-70 and concurrently Chief Engineer. Brigadier 1972. RCDS 1973-74. Federal Commissioner for Works and Housing January 1975. Chief of Staff Supreme Headquarters July 1975. Lt General January 1976. Head of Federal Military Government February 1976-79. On Civil rule retired to commercial farming.

An excellent engineer and a dependable military commander who took over command of the 3 Marine Commando division after heavy casualties at a critical time in the Civil War and fought on to victory. Subsequently rose steadily to the top and took command of the government as the most acceptable successor after the assassination of Murtala Mohammed. Restored civil rule under a new Constitution in 1979 and subsequently shunned publicity. Strongly critical of British policy over Southern Africa, he seems to have become more active since the return of military rule and many retain some influence with the present military leadership.

Author of a book on the Nigerian Civil War.

Temporarily retained @Wayland 7/7/15

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TELNO 1193

OF 270951Z NOVEMBER 85

INFO ROUTINE LUSAKA, HARARE, DAR ES SALAAM, DELHI, PRETORIA
INFO ROUTINE OTTAWA, CANBERRA, NASSAU.

YOUR TELNO 822: COMMONWEALTH EMINENT PERSONS GROUP (EPG)

1. I CALLED ON OBASANJO ON 26 NOVEMBER AT HIS FARM AT OTTA FOR A GENERAL DISCUSSION.
2. ON THE EPG I MADE THE POINTS IN PARAGRAPH 2 OF YOUR TUR. I ALSO HANDED OVER A COPY OF THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT'S PRESS RELEASE OF 25 NOVEMBER. OBASANJO WAS GRATEFUL FOR THIS. THE ONLY OTHER DOCUMENT HE HAD RECEIVED WAS THE TEXT OF THE COMMONWEALTH ACCORD. HE HAD ALSO SEEN ANYAOKU, THE COMMONWEALTH DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL, WHO WAS IN LAGOS RECENTLY, AND MALCOLM FRASER (THE LATTER MEETING PRESUMABLY TOOK PLACE WHEN OBASANJO WAS OUT OF THE COUNTRY A FEW DAYS AGO).
3. ALTHOUGH OBASANJO DOES NOT AS YET APPEAR TO HAVE ANY PLAN OF ACTION AS CO-CHAIRMAN, HE IS CLEARLY APPROACHING THE EMINENT PERSONS INITIATIVE IN A POSITIVE SPIRIT. HE THOUGHT IT WAS IMPORTANT TO EXPLORE NON-VIOLENT OPTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND TO BUILD ON ANY SIGNS OF FLEXIBILITY. HE DREW PARALLELS WITH ZIMBABWE'S INDEPENDENCE. THERE, THE ARMED STRUGGLE HAD BEEN IMPORTANT INITIALLY BUT THE CRUCIAL ROLE HAD BEEN PLAYED BY THE COMMONWEALTH/
4. OBASANJO PARTICULARLY WELCOMED LORD BARBER'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE EPG. THIS WOULD GIVE SOME REASSURANCE TO THE SOUTH AFRICANS.
5. OBASANJO DID NOT EXPECT TO BE RECEIVING ANY BRIEFING FROM THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, WHO, HE COMMENTED, WERE PREOCCUPIED WITH OTHER PROBLEMS. INASMUCH AS HE RECEIVES ANY BRIEFING AT ALL, THIS IS LIKELY TO COME DIRECT FROM THE PRESIDENT. IN VIEW OF THE DIFFICULTY OF COMMUNICATION WITH OTTA AND THE LONG DELAYS INVOLVED IN PASSING MESSAGES BETWEEN LONDON AND LAGOS VIA THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, I OFFERED OUR ASSISTANCE OVER ANY URGENT COMMUNICATIONS OR ANY ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS IN LONDON. OBASANJO THANKED ME AND SAID HE MIGHT WELL WISH TO TAKE US UP ON THIS.

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COMMENT

6. OBASANJÓ IS A SHREWD AND SKILFUL OPERATOR. A POLITICIAN OF STATURE, HE OUTCLASSES ANY OF NIGERIA'S PRESENT MILITARY LEADERS. HE HAS THE PRESIDENT'S EAR AND, INDEED, HIS APPOINTMENT IS AN INDICATION OF THE ESTEEM IN WHICH HE IS HELD BY THE REGIME. SUBJECT TO YOUR VIEWS, I THEREFORE SEE MERIT IN ARRANGEMENTS BEING MADE WHILST HE IS IN LONDON FOR HIM TO RECEIVE FULL BRIEFING ON HMG'S POLICY ON SOUTH AFRICA. THIS COULD BE DONE EITHER BY A SENIOR OFFICIAL OR, BETTER STILL, BY AN FCO MINISTER.

7. SEE MIFT (NOT TO ALL).

WYATT

LIMITED
S AF D.
WAD
PS
PS/MR RIFKIND
PS/PUS
MR FERGUSSON
MR JOHNSON

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PRIME MINISTER ✓

EMINENT PERSONS GROUP

You were going to see General Obasanjo tomorrow at 1200. The whole Eminent Persons Group have now asked to come and see you. If you can bear it, I think it would be a good idea given your association with the whole project. It will give them an unmistakable steer on our views and also chuff them considerably.

Agree to see the whole Group?

Yes
→

But I should
also like to
see Obasanjo

CHARLES POWELL

12 December 1985

Spontaneously - that was
what he asked me

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

12 December 1985

Dear Charles,

Eminent Persons Group: General Obasanjo

Thank you for your letter of 9 December. General Obasanjo has gratefully accepted the offer of a meeting with the Prime Minister at 1230 on Friday 13 December.

I enclose a brief.

Yours ever,

Colin Budd

(C. R. Budd)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH GENERAL OBASANJO
13 DECEMBER 1985

OUR OBJECTIVES

Eminent Persons Group

1. To emphasise to Obasanjo the Prime Minister's support for the Eminent Persons initiative and her wish to make it work.
2. To persuade him that the Group should proceed by quiet diplomacy and work to secure the co-operation of the SAG.
3. To suggest that the Group's objective should be to encourage both white and black leaders in South Africa to begin to work towards dialogue.
4. To encourage the idea of the Group or members of it visiting South Africa and having the widest possible contacts with representatives of all shades of opinion.
5. To offer HMG's assistance to the Group.
6. To discourage the Group from making recommendations about sanctions.

UK-Nigeria Relations

7. To emphasise importance of Nigeria to UK and to express satisfaction at improved relations.
8. To repeat hope for satisfactory resolution of major outstanding bilateral problem ie, Bristows' engineers case.

POINTS TO MAKE

Eminent Persons Group

1. Eminent Persons Group a most important initiative. Do not underestimate difficulties. But see it as unique opportunity to encourage dialogue between white and black leaders.

2. Regard such dialogue as only hope of peaceful change. Once started it will inevitably lead towards dismantling apartheid and political power-sharing. Must overcome inhibitions on both sides.
3. Group should act as a catalyst and proceed by quiet skilful diplomacy. Better to say nothing publicly. Very fact of initiative will help focus minds inside and outside South Africa on dialogue.
4. Useful precedent of Troika mission which had wide range of contacts in South Africa. Hope Group or members of it will similarly visit the country and talk to all shades of opinion.
5. (If asked about the ANC): For Group to decide who to meet. Hope Group will encourage Commonwealth objective of political dialogue in context of suspension of violence.
6. HMG ready to provide all possible assistance. Have worked hard on SAG to get them to keep an open mind about the Group. Their announcement leaves door open. But still deeply suspicious and Group should take great care not to give them any excuse to refuse co-operation.

UK-Nigeria Relations

7. Nigeria very important to UK. Heartened by progress in restoring relations to their traditionally close level. Geoffrey Howe's visit to Nigeria in September a first step. Useful contacts at CHOGM. Look forward to Nigerian Foreign Minister's visit in January.
8. Major outstanding problem for us is Bristows' engineers. Great public and parliamentary concern at severity of sentences. Hope that appeal can be expedited and lead to a satisfactory outcome.

HIS OBJECTIVES

Eminent Persons Group

1. To discover Prime Minister's attitude to the Group and to the question of South Africa generally.



2. To press for tougher measures against South Africa.

UK-Nigeria Relations

3. To argue case for economic "gesture".
4. To explore possibility of Yusufu's repatriation and deal involving Bristows men.

YOUR RESPONSE

Eminent Persons Group

1. Understand the past African frustrations about failure of peaceful attempts to achieve change. But now a new situation with new possibilities. Internal forces and financial markets exerting strong pressures for change. Business and other sections of white community actively support change.
2. Must be realistic, however. SAG not on brink of collapse. Change will come quicker and more peacefully if Government and white community are persuaded into it.
3. Alternative is years, even decades, of bloodshed and economic ruination.
4. Sanctions will only polarise situation further. No evidence they would work. Historically unconvincing, psychologically unconvincing.

UK-Nigeria Relations

5. We have a mutual interest in healthy Nigerian economy; want to help in whatever way possible. Continue to believe that IMF agreement offers best prospect for sustained economic recovery and to inspire confidence of overseas investors. We are doing what we can to act as Nigeria's friend with Paris Club partners and in IMF.
6. No possibility of exchange between Bristows' engineers and

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Yusufu. Yusufu pleaded guilty to serious crime and now serving his sentence. Nigerian government's request for Dikko's extradition a legal matter; cannot move forward until Dikko's appeal against asylum refusal decided in courts.

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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH GENERAL OBASANJO

13 DECEMBER 1985

BACKGROUND

Eminent Persons Group

1. General Obasanjo not an auspicious choice as co-Chairman of the EPG. Has regarded himself as champion of the black South african cause and once said his life's ambition was to help liberate the country by force. As Head of Federal Military Government (1976-79), he imposed an embargo on state contracts for British firms in 1979 under the belief that we were about to recognise the Mozerewa regime.

2. Our Post consider him, however, shrewd, skillful and a politician of stature who outclasses any of Nigeria's present military leaders. He has the President's ear and indeed his appointment is an indication of the esteem in which he is held by the Nigerian regime. He is a Yoruba and Catholic, aged 48.

3. Not clear how far he has mellowed in the intervening years. But he expressed a particular wish to meet the Prime Minister and was clearly delighted that she had agreed to see him.

Acting High Commissioner

4. Our / on 26 November in Lagos had an encouraging talk with him about the EPG. He did not appear to have any plan of action as co-Chairman, but was clearly approaching the initiative in a positive spirit. He thought it important to explore non-violent options in South Africa and to build on any signs of flexibility. He drew parallels with Zimbabwe's independence underlining the crucial role which he considered being played by the Commonwealth. He particularly welcomed Lord Barber's involvement in the EPG which he thought would give some reassurance to the South Africans.

5. His public remarks in an interview with a Lagos paper on 9 December were notably restrained. He said that he would not be averse to visiting South Africa or holding talks with President Botha if this would help bring about political change. His



objective to eradicate apartheid had not changed but the method of achieving it would fully depend on the situation. The Commonwealth's aim was to institute an across-the-board dialogue inside South Africa which would lead to the dismantlement of apartheid and the establishment of a truly representative Government. Unlike Zimbabwe, such change could not be imposed from outside. Asked whether the Prime Minister could be convinced to impose tougher measures on South Africa, Obasanjo said that she was not unreasonable and not unmindful of the situation and what it could lead to.

6. As co-Chairman and the most senior Third World and African member of the EPG, Obasanjo is in a position to play a crucial role in its work. The Group will meet for the first time from 12-14 December. They will need to work out their own detailed terms of reference and programme of action.

UK-Nigeria Relations

7. Relations with Nigeria have improved considerably since installation of new government and following Foreign Secretary's visit to Lagos in September. President Babangida has expressly said he wants relations restored to their traditionally close level and the Nigerians are now less inclined to drag up old problems (eg Dikko). Friendly contacts have been established with Nigerian ministers (Foreign Secretary's visit to Lagos, contacts at CHOGM, Nigerian Finance Minister's call on the Chancellor) and the fact that the Nigerian Foreign Minister, Akinyemi, took up so quickly the invitation to visit the UK (on 7-9 January) indicates that the Nigerian government is keen to maintain the momentum.

Notwithstanding the problems of the Nigerian economy, the value of British exports (£817m in the period January-October 1985) is 33% up on the same period last year.

8. Nonetheless, problems remain. The most serious is the case of the Bristows engineers who were sentenced to 14 years imprisonment on 7 October. We have made known our concern at the severity of the sentences to the Nigerians in a number of high level representations (including the Prime Minister's personal message of 15 October to



President Babangida) and expressed the hope that a satisfactory outcome can be achieved through the appeal (expected to be heard in mid to late-February). Babangida has indicated that he is prepared to use his influence to secure this (possibly even to deport the men if the appeal fails to produce a satisfactory result). But he may be subject to conflicting pressure from his colleagues and supporters. Some senior Nigerians (although not in the government) have echoed press references to the possibility of an exchange between the Bristows men and Yusufu (whose appeal against his 12 year prison sentence was refused on 2 December). But Babangida has rejected any linkage.

9. The Nigerian government appears to assign a lower priority to the question of Dikko's extradition. The position is that Dikko's appeal against the Home Secretary's refusal to allow him political asylum is pending. A hearing should take place early next year. Until the appeals procedure is exhausted, the Home Secretary will not take a decision on extradition.

10. The major Nigerian objective, the key to "unlock the door" in the words of the Foreign Minister, is to secure new economic assistance, or a "gesture" from us. With public opinion set firmly against an IMF agreement, they are looking for interim support. We have spoken to them (in particular to Finance Minister, Kalu) in broad terms about the sort of economic help we might give, but only in the context of their agreeing a programme with the IMF. It appears that the Nigerian government's latest intention is to implement the type of reforms sought by the Fund as "national" measures, but to delay for the moment, because of the political sensitivities, seeking a formal agreement.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

9 December 1985

Eminent Persons Group: General Obasanjo

Thank you for your letter of 6 December recommending that the Prime Minister should see Mr. Obasanjo while he is in London for the meeting of the Eminent Persons Group.

The Prime Minister could see General Obasanjo at 1200 on Friday 13 December.

(CHARLES POWELL)

C.R. Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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