

PRIME MINISTER

REPLY TO PRESIDENT BOTHA

I attach the FCO draft reply to President Botha's recent message.

There is a very difficult balance to be struck. You must keep Botha's confidence. That remains essential if we are going to get anywhere. But you can't negotiate with the Eminent Persons Group as a proxy for him because

- (a) the proposition he wants you to sell is unsaleable. He wants a guarantee of cessation of violence, but will only consider the EPG proposals for action by the South African government. He also wants a guarantee that sanctions would not be imposed if a pledge by the ANC to suspend violence was broken and the South African government took action to restore order. The EPG can't give that guarantee and the Commonwealth wouldn't.
- (b) It simply isn't feasible for you to act as an intermediary with the EPG of which we are members. The EPG itself ~~simply~~ wouldn't have it.

So on the one hand we have to make Botha feel that his efforts are appreciated, that an important step forward has been taken, and there is a real prospect of making progress through the EPG.

On the other, we have to bring home to him first that he must deal direct with the EPG, not through us; and second that his proposals in their present form will not be enough to keep the EPG in play. He needs to wind down what he wants from the ANC to suspension of violence; and to step up what he offers in readiness to take at least some of the steps envisaged by the EPG (perhaps progressively if the suspension of violence

holds). We can assure him that we at least would not be a party to punitive measures if the South African government had to restore order.

I think the FCO draft covers these points, though it could be improved.

But the first thing is to see whether you agree the approach?

CDP

C D POWELL

16 April 1986

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CONFIDENTIAL



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

16 April 1986

Dear Charles,

South Africa: Message from President Botha

Thank you for your letter of 11 April about President Botha's reply to the Prime Minister's letter. ^{at 11ap} The Foreign Secretary agrees that the tone of the letter is reasonably encouraging.

On the substance, he considers it rather mixed. It shows that the South Africans understand the need to come up with a reply to the Commonwealth Group which is positive enough to ensure that the Group do not end the exercise forthwith. The letter no doubt reflects the split in the South African Government between those who are sceptical whether the Commonwealth Group can produce any progress and are anxious that the blame for failure should not be pinned on South Africa, and others who are more hopeful that the initiative might lead somewhere. In Sir Geoffrey Howe's view, President Botha's letter is a compromise between the two schools of thought. It is cleverly worded and contains a number of possible pitfalls which we must avoid.

As you suggested, the request for an assurance that South Africa will not be penalised by the international community for taking appropriate security measures should the ANC undertaking that violence will cease prove ineffective is particularly difficult. It may be a wrecking amendment, or reflect genuine anxieties, or be an attempt to secure a blank cheque. We shall have a better idea should the South Africans proceed with this tactic in their exchanges with the Commonwealth Group despite Mrs Thatcher's discouragement.

The Foreign Secretary also agrees that we should not allow the South Africans to draw us into the role of an additional honest broker between them and the Commonwealth Group. Not only is this bound to be ineffective in terms of the attitudes of other members; but it would risk leaving us saddled with the responsibility for failure. What is urgently needed, in view of the COMGEP meeting on 30 April/1 May, is for the South Africans to put some positive ideas direct to COMGEP.

/The Foreign

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The Foreign Secretary does not believe that what is on offer in President Botha's letter is sufficient for the purpose. The South Africans are proposing an unequal bargain. In return for a "definite" assurance of a cessation of violence (the Commonwealth Accord speaks of a suspension of violence on all sides) the South African Government would be prepared to "consider" moves along the lines suggested by the Commonwealth Group. Those in the Group who want an early conclusion to the initiative may be disposed to interpret this as a try-on which the South Africans must know would be unacceptable to the ANC.

The enclosed draft from the Prime Minister to President Botha is intended to encourage the State President to improve on his opening gambit, to re-assure him about some of the other concerns expressed in his letter, and to emphasise the need for urgent action vis-a-vis the Commonwealth Group if the present initiative is not to go off the rails. The Foreign Secretary considers that we should emphasise that the central purpose of our contacts with the ANC has been to encourage them to be flexible and to put across the points which President Botha says they need to hear from democratic governments.

Yours ever,

A C Calsworthy

(A C Calsworthy)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:

Reference

Prime Minister

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

The Honourable P W Botha DMS
State President of the Republic
of South Africa

Copies to:

SPWABX

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your letter of 10 April. I am much encouraged that you felt able to respond in ~~this way~~ *(a positive way)*.

CAVEAT.....

You know the importance I attach to the Commonwealth initiative. ~~It seems to me vital that we should not lose an historic opportunity to make progress.~~ *It is well worth making a serious effort to see if progress can be made by this route*. If the present effort founders, I see nothing to replace it except a rising chorus of calls for economic sanctions.

do urge you to
I think ~~it essential~~ that you should as soon as possible communicate your interest in their "Negotiating Concept" *as soon as possible* direct to the Commonwealth Group. While I follow closely what they are doing and am trying to channel their efforts into constructive directions, the Group are, as you know, independent of governments. There is a real risk that in the absence of what can be seen by the Group as a whole as a positive South African response, there will be ~~considerable~~ pressure at the next meeting on 30 April to wind up the exercise. Tony Barber is *already* doing all he can to ensure that the Group produces a helpful report. It would only increase suspicions of Britain's role if I tried to insert myself as honest broker between them and the South African Government.

Enclosures—flag(s).....

// You are the best judge of where your interests lie. ~~But~~
while I have drawn encouragement from what you have told
me in your letter, ~~I~~ ^{But I} ought to say frankly that I do not
believe that in its present form your offer is likely to
be seen by the Commonwealth Group as giving them enough
to go on. They will say that what you are asking for is
an indefinite cessation of violence in return for which
you would "consider" moves along the lines suggested in
the negotiating concept. I entirely agree that a
cessation of violence is what we should be aiming for.
But I suspect that the Group would not regard your
formulation as a fair exchange, especially since the
Commonwealth Accord speaks in terms of a suspension of
violence. I would encourage you to explore with the
Group exactly what a suspension of violence would entail.

and recognise
all the
difficulties for
you

// I well understand how concerned you feel at the possibility
that the South African Government might be blamed if it
had to take action to restore control should a call for
suspension of violence prove ineffective. I of course
accept the right of any government to take reasonable
measures to maintain law and order. ^(and would stand up publicly for that) But I fear that the
Commonwealth Group as a whole would see the condition
you suggest as a request for a blank cheque. ^{and will not} Obviously,
neither ~~I~~ ^{be disposed to give you} nor the Commonwealth can give you a blanket
assurance. ^{But I} What I can say is that the British Government
would try to ensure that you were given credit for acting
in good faith, especially if the measures sought by the
Commonwealth Group were being implemented. There is
bound to be some risk in taking such a step. ^{they have} but I believe
^{to} that the dangers ^{of} in rejecting the proposal ^(are greater.)

I ~~hope~~ // I do not need to assure you of my ^{own} commitment to Western democratic values and my unwavering opposition to communism, to terrorism and to totalitarianism of all kinds.

If a dialogue can be established between your government
 It is my hope that if progress can be made this will

is should encourage legitimate black political aspirations at the expense of the ideologues: *frankly frustrated nationalism is the most defensible ground for* in my experience Soviet communism in Africa has been able to exploit frustrated nationalism.

For our part we shall continue to emphasise to the ANC our condemnation of violence and our commitment to dialogue.

There is a readiness on their part to talk; but realistically they will need something they can show to their supporters to justify calling for a suspension of violence. I realise the difficulties; but I cannot believe that, given the political will, it is impossible to find a way of resolving the question of who accepts who's conditions first. The Commonwealth Group could play a valuable mediating role over this. We shall give them every encouragement to do so.

~~You would, I know, expect me to speak frankly. We are now at a very critical moment.~~ // Your letter reinforces my belief that the Commonwealth initiative can succeed and that a breakthrough can be achieved. I do therefore urge you to send an early response to the Group and to cast your offer in as positive terms as possible. I believe that they too will be ready to show some flexibility. Certainly I shall do my best to encourage them to consider very seriously any firm proposal you might make to them and to explore it thoroughly with black African leaders with whom we are in contact,

with best wishes.

and genuine representations of black South Africa

SOUTH AFRICA Relations Act



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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 April 1986

Dear Sir,

SOUTH AFRICA: MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT BOTHA

Thank you for your letter of 10 April conveying the text of President Botha's reply to the Prime Minister's recent letter.

The Prime Minister is reasonably encouraged by the tone of the reply. The rub is, of course, the request for an assurance that in the event of a continuation or escalation of violence - in the wake of an ANC assurance of its cessation - South Africa would not be penalised by the international community for taking appropriate security measures. In one sense this is not unreasonable. The South African government could not stand by if violence erupted again. If the ANC break their understanding, or it is broken against their wishes, the South Africans must be able to uphold order. On the other hand, an undertaking or even an understanding of the sort which the South African Government seek is not deliverable and would anyway amount to giving them a blank cheque. The fact that they have sought it poses the question whether it is a 'wrecking amendment'.

The Prime Minister would like to make an early reply to President Botha. She will want to encourage him to respond positively to the EPG, but equally make clear that we cannot answer for the latter or give assurances about what will be acceptable to them. We shall need to point out the likely snags in the South African Government's line, while making clear that we accept their right to take reasonable measures to uphold order if violence were to continue.

I should be grateful for a draft reply.

Yours sincerely,

CHARLES POWELL

Colin Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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