



*File LOSAF*  
*Sir Cadock*

10 DOWNING STREET

4 June 1986

*From the Private Secretary*

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*COPIED TO  
FOREIGN AND Correspondence  
with Ministers of Other Govts May 80*

Thank you for your letter of 4 June about Geoffrey Smith's article on South Africa in the Times of 3 June. I have shown this to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister had a brief discussion on this matter with the Foreign Secretary this afternoon. The Prime Minister said she had been extremely angry when she had first read Geoffrey Smith's story. She was not at all happy to see how wide a distribution her strictly private and confidential message to President Botha had received. This confirmed her fear that her communications and conversations with foreign Heads of Government were in general given too wide a circulation. Her preference would be to have her personal correspondence with foreign Heads of Government entirely drafted and kept in No. 10 and she would show them to the Foreign Secretary when he came over. The Foreign Secretary said that he would ensure that a firm grip was taken on the handling of the Prime Minister's correspondence in records of conversation and much more limited distribution introduced. He did not believe that the leak about the Prime Minister's message to President Botha had in fact come from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

*BSA*

You will no doubt let me know in due course what steps have been taken to introduce tighter controls over the Prime Minister's messages and records of conversation.

CHARLES POWELL

A. C. Galsworthy, Esq., C.M.G.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.



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Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

The Foreign Secretary  
will tighten still further  
the rules for circulation of  
your correspondence (on which a  
gross error was committed this time). He  
Sean Charles, thinks the leak is Geoffrey Johnson  
probably came from the South Africans.

4 June 1986

Thank you for your letter of 3 June about Geoffrey Smith's article about South Africa in The Times of 3 June. The Foreign Secretary was as shocked as the Prime Minister to read this article and agrees that it is damaging.

Sir Geoffrey Howe of course endorses the need to give the most restricted distribution to the Prime Minister's correspondence and records of her conversations with foreign Heads of Government. The Prime Minister's letters to President Botha have been given a very restricted distribution within the FCO, limited to those most closely concerned. The letter in question was copied to seven people. Including Ministers and Private Office staff, it would have been available to about twelve people, plus a limited number of staff involved in typing and registering the documents.

/the telegram containing

The telegrams to and from Cape Town containing P W Botha's and the Prime Minister's letters have normally been given matching distributions: unfortunately there have been a few exceptions, and the letter of 21 May, a sentence of which is paraphrased in the Geoffrey Smith article, was one of them. This telegram received a wider distribution, which included other departments dealing with Africa in the FCO, Mr Mallaby in the Cabinet Office, and, on a strictly personal basis, the Ambassador in Washington. This distribution was no doubt given because of the large number of persons who were involved in work arising out of the South African raids. The Foreign Secretary regards this wider distribution as quite unjustified, and has given instructions that there is to be no recurrence. Nevertheless, the additional persons who received this message would not have seen the earlier correspondence, and could not have briefed Geoffrey Smith in the terms of the first sentence of his article. It is highly unlikely therefore that this error was the cause of the leak. Indeed the reference to "four or five page letters" strongly suggests that the informant had seen the original texts, and not the telegrams.

/Geoffrey Smith





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RETAINED UNDER SECTION 3 (4)  
OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS ACT**

Geoffrey Smith is known to the FCO News Department, but very seldom has any dealings with them and has not done so recently. He is however well known at the political level, where he operates almost exclusively. The Foreign Secretary's Special Adviser, Mr Houston, has told the Foreign Secretary that he had a discussion with him earlier last week during the course of which South Africa was one of the subjects referred to. During this conversation Mr Smith mentioned the Prime Minister's correspondence with P W Botha in passing as an established fact, quoting a reference to it in the "Weekend World" programme on Sunday 25 May. Mr Houston did not comment on the letters or acknowledge that they existed. So far as we can trace at present, there have not been any other recent contacts with Mr Smith by those in a position to know the full range of the Prime Minister's correspondence with P W Botha. The only person I have not yet been able to consult is Lynda Chalker, who is visiting Zimbabwe, but I am checking with her as quickly as possible.

He should  
not know  
that they  
exist

I enclose a transcript of the "Weekend World" interview with Brian Walden. One of the persons who appeared in the programme was John Battersby, who is sometimes used as a mouthpiece by the South African Ambassador here.

The internal evidence in Mr Smith's article suggests that it may be a composite piece reflecting a number of conversations with different people. We know that Lord Barber had spoken to him, though he says that the quotation attributed to him in the article is very far from being accurate. Geoffrey Smith may also have spoken to such persons as Mr Ramphal. These persons could not of course have been the source of the information about the Prime Minister's correspondence. However one possible source for this is the South African Embassy here. We understand that the Prime Minister's correspondence with P W Botha has a fairly wide distribution both in the South African Administration and to South African posts abroad. The South African Ambassador has on more than one occasion recently been indiscreet to the press. He was certainly the source of some of the reports about COMGEP's activities in South Africa which incensed the South African Government, and which they were inclined to attribute to British sources. He was also, apparently, the source of leaks about COMGEP's most recent meeting with Mandela. More directly you will see from the enclosed teletype from the Embassy in Cape Town that at an earlier stage a South African correspondent revealed to the Embassy that the Department of Foreign Affairs gave regular off-the-record briefings to himself and other selected political correspondents, in the course of which access had been given to copies of correspondence between the South African Government

/and COMGEP,

SECRET AND PERSONAL



and COMGEP, and to President Botha's correspondence with the seven Heads of Government attending the Tokyo Summit. The letter now in question was a reply to a letter sent by President Botha to the Heads of Government of the seven Summit countries, and thus from the South African point of view part of the Summit correspondence rather than part of President Botha's more personal correspondence with the Prime Minister. There is thus evidence of a general and surprising openness of the South African system.

All this leads the Foreign Secretary to conclude that it is by no means certain that this leak has come from our side. He is nevertheless extremely concerned at the possibility and has given instructions that the precise and limited circulation of any further material of this kind should be determined either by the Private Office under rigid guidelines laid down personally by himself, or, in his absence, by the Permanent Under-Secretary.

*Yours ever,  
A C Galsworthy*

(A C Galsworthy)  
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq  
10 Downing Street



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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

3 June 1986

The Prime Minister was incensed to read Geoffrey Smith's article about South Africa in The Times this morning, since it clearly appears to have been based on explicit briefing about her personal correspondence with President Botha. The article is damaging both to the Government's position in this country on the delicate issue of sanctions and to our relations with South Africa and the prospects of the Prime Minister being able to influence President Botha in future.

The message itself was classified strictly personal and confidential; and as you know, the rule is that the Prime Minister's correspondence and records of her conversations with foreign heads of government must be handled on a very restricted basis indeed. I should be grateful if you could provide me with an estimate of the number of people who would have seen the message in the FCO (I hope there is no question of it having been copied outside the FCO); and let me know what light your internal enquiries throw upon the source of Geoffrey Smith's story. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister is considering the implications for the future handling of her dealings with foreign heads of government. She will no doubt want to discuss this with the Foreign Secretary tomorrow.

CHARLES POWELL

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A.C. Galsworthy, Esq., C.M.G.,  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.