

ECR



Prime Minister

Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

10 February 1987

Agree with the Foreign Secretary should reply in the terms proposed to Pik Botha's letter? Personally don't see much point in stroking it up, Dear Charles, since nothing is going to happen before the elections anyway. A much shorter reply that simply confirms our support for the concept of matching commitments but see no prospect of early meeting on the South African side would hold the position & keep our powder dry. CDP 11/2

South Africa: Letter to the Foreign Secretary from Pik Botha

Thank you for your letter of 5 January about the Foreign Secretary's meeting with Sir Michael Edwardes.

On 6 January the Foreign Secretary received a letter from Pik Botha. I enclose a copy. While the message conveyed orally (and therefore disavowably) through Sir Michael Edwardes goes virtually the whole way to meeting the points which the Foreign Secretary put to Pik Botha, the letter (which could not be disavowed) does no more than reassert the well-established SAG position.

Pik Botha's letter is a further attempt to reopen discussion of the principle of matching commitments. It seeks to shift the responsibility for lack of progress on to us: Pik complains that we have abandoned the principle of reciprocity by dropping the call for a matching commitment from the ANC for a halt to violence, although he must know that that has been, and remains, at the heart of our case.

The Foreign Secretary is struck by the fact that there is one crucial difference between the letter and the message delivered orally by Sir Michael Edwardes: Pik offers no concession on the SAG's insistence that as a precondition for talks the ANC should be required to make a commitment to 'abandon' violence completely, rather than merely to 'call a halt to it'.

The Prime Minister will recall that she explained to President Botha in her letter to him of 18 April 1986 why she believed that progress on the concept of matching commitments would only be possible if he would stop asking for an ANC commitment to cessation of violence and concentrate instead on the formula in the Commonwealth Accord, which referred to a suspension of violence. She

/reiterated



reiterated our support for suspension of violence in her letter of 4 July 1986 to the State President. It is true that in her brief message of 7 July the Prime Minister told P W Botha that the Foreign Secretary would be placing particular emphasis during his visits to Southern Africa on the need to abandon violence. But this is an example of the South African penchant for seizing on a phrase which suits them and wrenching it out of context.

The Foreign Secretary went over this ground at inordinate length with Pik Botha during their talks in July. Sir Geoffrey explained very clearly the distinction between the desirable and the feasible : 'abandonment' of violence by the ANC was not negotiable; a 'suspension of' or 'halt to' violence was the best we could hope for, and then only in exchange for freeing Mandela and other political prisoners and unbanning the ANC and other political parties. He also made the point repeatedly that, even if a commitment by the ANC to abandon violence could be achieved, nothing would stop a resumption of violence if negotiations broke down. The surest means of ending the violence was if negotiations between the SAG and freely chosen black leaders got under way and made progress, bringing with them the realisation among black South Africans that peaceful change was possible.

/ Sir Geoffrey Howe agrees with Sir Patrick Moberly's assessment (enclosed) that the SAG's recent words and deeds in regard to the ANC belie the suggestion that they might be willing to negotiate seriously on an EPG-type package at this stage. Since Sir Patrick gave his views, his judgement has been borne out by President Botha's speech at the opening of Parliament on 30 January, in which he stated that discussions with the ANC would only be possible if the latter severed links with "and terminated its subservience to" the South African Communist Party, abandoned violence and participated in constitutional processes in South Africa. All three of these conditions go well beyond what was envisaged by the EPG and amount to a public hardening of the SAG's position. Pik Botha too took a discouraging line with the press on 3 February saying that it would be difficult for the South African Government to attempt again an EPG-type exercise to facilitate dialogue, and emphasising that the ANC would need to give a commitment to end/abandon violence.

/When



When Dr Worrall paid his farewell call on the Foreign Secretary on 9 February, he confirmed that he too sees no hope of a change in his government's hard line stance unless the forthcoming election strengthened the hand of "verligte" Afrikaners. Meanwhile, with the election campaign underway in South Africa it seems inconceivable that President Botha would offer the right wing an opportunity to make political capital at a time when the predominant mood of the whites is one of refusal to bow to external pressure. The SAG would moreover certainly not wish to create the impression that sanctions had been effective in weakening government resolve. President Botha's statement last week ruling out a fourth Chamber for blacks exemplifies the hard line which he has been taking.

The Foreign Secretary considers that, despite our strong doubts about Pik Botha's messages, it would be right to reply to him to keep communication open and to keep Pik in play as a potentially influential and comparatively moderate participant on the SAG side. I enclose a draft of the reply which he proposes to send. The aim of the message is to put the ball firmly back in Pik Botha's court without impugning his motives. Sir Geoffrey Howe hopes thereby to offer him the chance, if he is serious, to come back with more fruitful proposals.

The Foreign Secretary also intends to have a further meeting with Sir Michael Edwardes. Given the misunderstandings which can easily arise from passing oral messages through an intermediary, Sir Geoffrey will explain to him that, now we have had a written communication from Pik Botha, it would be best to continue this exchange direct between the two governments.

Yours ever,
L. Parker

(L Parker)
Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
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DSR 1 (Revised Sept 85)

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despatch/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1 +

FROM:

Reference

SECRETARY OF STATE
DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

Your Reference

BUILDING:

ROOM NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Copies to:

Top Secret

HE MR R F BOTHA

Secret

Confidential

Restricted

Unclassified

SUBJECT:

Chander - this is a real had any one can't will deny in any influence whatsoever after the election. That would be a foolish course to adopt. Must simpler reply would be all?

PRIVACY MARKING

..... In Confidence

CAVEAT

Thank you for your letter of 6 January about the British Government's approach to the problem of South Africa and, in particular, to the idea of matching commitments.

You are right to recall our support for the ideas put forward by the EPG in their negotiating concept. This was the strategy which underlay the formula I discussed with you last summer. We continue to believe that matching commitments offer the most promising path to peaceful dialogue. When I met Oliver Tambo on 20 September last year I put to him forcefully the case for advocacy rather than confrontation. I stressed our opposition to the use of violence and urged the ANC to make clear that they were ready to take part in peaceful dialogue. I made this clear again to the group of Foreign Ministers of the NAM who visited me on 30 October.

Enclosures flag(s)

I think he was told that violence is not acceptable

This language is much too weak

But much has happened in South Africa since we met last July. Your Government have maintained the state of emergency; declared the UDF an affected organisation; embarked on a further series of detentions without charge; introduced further restrictions on the freedom of the press; and appear to have resumed forced removals. As regards your commitment to move ahead with a programme of reform of apartheid there has been little visible progress, and some recent reforms - for example, the Restoration of Citizenship Act - have turned out to be more limited than we had hoped. All this has inevitably reduced confidence in your Government's intentions on the part of people inside and outside South Africa, especially those black leaders whose support and participation seem essential to dialogue and a peaceful solution.

In present circumstances I think it unrealistic to reopen discussions on matching commitments as if nothing had changed since our conversations in July. I notice you told a press conference on 3 February that it would be difficult for your Government to attempt another EPG-type exercise. This confirms my present impression that no negotiating formula, however skilfully balanced, stands a realistic chance of making progress unless and until a new climate favourable to negotiation has been created. And the crucial role in creating that climate must rest, of course, with your Government.

If you
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 to have
 any influence
 after the
 elections this
 time will
 be
 we could have
 some control over
 influence -
 it would be
 much better
 to have a brief
 reply

This brings me back to the point that I emphasised when we last talked in Pretoria: that there is a real risk that pressing the idea of matching commitments from the wrong stable would in itself be likely to prevent it gaining ground. You yourself said in your press conference on 3 February that the Europeans could not solve South Africa's problems. This is in line with my own view that renewed efforts on our part, or by the European Community generally, to promote matching commitments would not in the present climate produce the momentum that is required to create the conditions for effective dialogue.

Nevertheless, given real evidence of readiness on the part of the South African Government to take the steps which we have for so long been urging on you, I believe that the international community would be prepared to play their part in getting dialogue going. The British Government would certainly be ready to do so. But the onus lies with you: it is not the British nor any other Government whom you have to convince of your intentions, but those with whom you have to negotiate. Unless you are able to make a start on overcoming their suspicions, there is little the international community can do to help. There is no need, I am sure, for me to repeat how seriously and deeply we hope that you and your countrymen will find the courage to take the immensely difficult decisions that are called for.

*This is
the only
constructive
part.*

SOUTH AFRICA Relations PT14

