



Subject

cc FCO

cc Master
OPS

10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

17 November 1985

PRIME MINISTER'S
PERSONAL MESSAGE
SERIAL No. T217/85

Dear Mr. President,

I have to say that I am very disappointed, indeed dismayed, by your message of 12 November and particularly by the statement that your Government consider that it would be impossible to co-operate with the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. I recognise the difficulties both of principle and of domestic politics which the Commonwealth initiative inevitably raises for you. Equally I am convinced that it would be infinitely more damaging to South Africa's future interests were you to refuse to have anything to do with the Group.

At the very least I would urge you to avoid any public statement of refusal to co-operate with the Commonwealth initiative. None of us yet know precisely what form it will take. The only guidance in the Commonwealth Accord is that it should "encourage through all practicable ways the evolution of that necessary process of political dialogue". This does not seem to me too alarming a mandate. The Group of Eminent Persons has not yet been completed, let alone held a first meeting to consider its course of action. At this stage it is far from clear whether the Eminent Persons would even want to visit South Africa as a group. It might be possible for your Government to meet individual members of it. The Group's very existence will begin to focus attention on the complexities of the South African situation, to which you have always rightly drawn attention.

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It will give you a fresh chance to put your case to important sections of international opinion in this country, in the United States, and elsewhere.

We are aware of the studies by the Foundation for International Conciliation to which you refer in your letter. I would want to encourage all well intentioned and helpful efforts. But I fear the Foundation will not carry much credibility internationally. I can see no prospect that this initiative could possibly become a convincing alternative to the Commonwealth Group.

May I ask you to consider for a moment the full implications if your Government were to reject co-operation with the Group. Your enemies in the Commonwealth would be delighted: they never wanted it anyway. We and others who had hoped for progress through dialogue will be told that we should have known better. The international pressures for sanctions against South Africa will fast gather momentum again. Most of the value of my having held the line at Nassau will be lost. My ability to help preserve the conditions in which an internal dialogue of the sort you are seeking has a chance of success will be critically, perhaps fatally, weakened.

In short I can see no need for you to take a decision about co-operation with the Group now, let alone reject it publicly. If you value my continuing help, I urge you most strongly not to do so. I do not think I could be plainer.

Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher

The Honourable P.W. Botha, D.M.S.

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 November 1985

Thank you for your letter of 17 November enclosing a draft reply to President Botha's recent message.

I enclose a somewhat revised version authorised by the Prime Minister and should be grateful if the text could be telegraphed to Pretoria as soon as possible.

(Charles Powell)

Colin Budd, Esq.,
Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

17 November 1985

C D Powell Esq
10 Downing Street

Prime Minister
I have rewritten
to draft. It is
firm but
needs to be so.
Agree to sign?
CDP
17/xi

Dear Charles,

Reply to President Botha

You wrote to Len Appleyard on 13 November asking for a draft reply to the recent message from President Botha; and later told us that the Prime Minister wanted to send an early and strongly worded reply.

I now attach a draft, which has been approved by the Foreign Secretary. If you can find the time to look at it, it would be useful if the reply could be sent to Pretoria in the course of tomorrow, to allow President Botha time to digest it in advance of the National Party Caucus Meeting planned for 19 November. It is likely that President Botha will come under severe pressure from his party during that meeting, in response to which he may well feel impelled to take a markedly negative line (perhaps in public) about the Eminent Persons Group. We are in any event sending instructions to Mr Moberly to speak to the South African Foreign Minister before the Caucus Meeting.

The Foreign Secretary has asked me to add that he is not wedded to the precise terms of the draft reply to President Botha. He recalls that when he discussed the subject with you last Friday you made a number of relevant points which might well improve the draft.

Yours ever,

Colin Budd

C R Budd
Private Secretary

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10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

indeed disappointed

I have to say that I am very disappointed by your message of 12 November and particularly by the statement that your Government consider that it would be impossible to co-operate with the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group. ~~I have told you throughout that~~ I recognise the difficulties both of principle and of domestic politics which the Commonwealth initiative inevitably raises for you. Equally I am convinced that it would be infinitely more damaging to South Africa's future interests were you to refuse to have anything to do with the Group.

At the very least I would urge you to avoid any public statement of refusal to co-operate with the Commonwealth initiative. None of us yet know precisely what form it will take. The only guidance in the Commonwealth Accord is that it should "encourage through all practicable ways the evolution of that necessary process of political dialogue". This does not seem to me too alarming a mandate. The Group of Eminent Persons has not yet been completed, let alone held a first meeting to consider its course of action. At this stage it is far from clear whether the Eminent Persons would even want to visit South Africa as a group. It might be possible for your Government to meet individual members of it. The Group's very existence will begin to focus attention on the complexities of the South African situation, to which you have always rightly drawn attention.

It will give you a fresh chance to put your case to important sections of international opinion in this country, in the United States, and elsewhere.

We are aware of the studies by the Foundation for International Conciliation to which you refer in your letter. I would ~~not~~ want to ~~dismiss any~~ ^{in some/all} well intentioned and helpful efforts. But ^{I think} ~~to be blunt~~, the Foundation will not carry much credibility internationally. I can see no prospect that this initiative could possibly become a convincing alternative to the Commonwealth Group.

May I ask you to consider for a moment the full implications if your Government were to reject co-operation with the Group. Your enemies ^{with the Commonwealth} ~~would~~ be delighted: they never wanted it anyway. We and others who had hoped for progress through dialogue will be told that we should have known better. The international pressures for sanctions against South Africa will fast gather momentum again. Most of the value of my having held the line at Nassau will be lost. My ability to help preserve the conditions in which an internal dialogue of the sort you are seeking has a chance of success will be critically, perhaps fatally, weakened.

In short I can see no need for you to take a decision about co-operation with the Group now, let alone reject it publicly. If you value my continuing help, I urge you most strongly not to do so. I do not think I could be plainer.

The Honourable P.W. Botha, D.M.S.

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despach/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM: Prime Minister

Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

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

Your Reference

Copies to:

Top Secret

Secret

Confidential

Restricted

Unclassified

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

CAVEAT.....

Thank you for your further message of 12 November.

~~I am saddened and disappointed to hear that your~~
~~Government consider that it would be impossible to~~

cooperate with the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group.

~~I believe it is essential for you to say nothing publicly~~
~~which would amount to a rejection of the Group.~~

~~I understand your concerns and the difficulties~~
~~both of principle and of domestic politics which the~~
~~Commonwealth initiative inevitably raises for you. I~~
~~am grateful to you for setting these out at some~~
~~length. I realised the problems for you when I wrote~~
~~to you on 31 October, and I tried to explain why I was~~
~~and still am convinced that it would be infinitely~~
~~more damaging to South Africa's future interests were~~
~~you to refuse to have anything to do with the Group.~~

~~I note that you say that your Government would be~~
~~prepared to consider the possibility of individual~~
~~emissaries visiting South Africa. At this stage it~~
~~is far from clear whether the Commonwealth Group would~~
~~want to visit South Africa as a group. It might be~~

/possible

The only guidance in the Commonwealth Accord is that it should be a process of dialogue. I encourage through all practicable ways the necessary evolution of a process of political dialogue. This does not seem to me too demanding a mandate.

At the very least I would urge to you to avoid any public statement of refusal to cooperate with the Commonwealth initiative. None of us yet know precisely what form it will take. The Group of Eminent Persons has not yet been completed, let alone held a first meeting to consider its course of action.

possible for your Government to meet individual members of it. ~~Let us wait and see. There is no need to take a decision on this now.~~

We ~~have been told about~~ ^{are aware of} the studies by the Foundation for International Conciliation to which you refer in your letter. While ~~we should not want to dismiss any well intentioned and helpful efforts,~~ ^{I would} I can see ~~no prospect~~ ^{But to be blunt, they will not bring} that this initiative could possibly become ^{a convincing} an alternative to the Commonwealth Group, or ~~play an important role.~~

So far Lord Barber, Malcolm Fraser and Swaran Singh (of India) have been nominated to the Group. Nyerere will not, I understand, now be a member but other nominations seem likely to come forward shortly. If all goes according to plan the Group should begin work in a few weeks' time.

If your Government ~~reject~~ the Group, ~~this is bound to be seen internationally as seriously undermining the case for any approach other than a punitive one.~~ Your enemies ~~will be delighted:~~ ^{they never wanted it anyway} We and others who had hoped for ~~better~~ ^{possess through dialogue} will be told that we should have known better. The international pressures for sanctions against South Africa will ^{gather} gather momentum again. ~~Support for the "armed struggle" against your Government and for violent solutions will increase.~~ Most of the value of my having held the line at Nassau will be lost. ^{My ability to help}

May I therefore ask you to look again at the matter, ~~to refrain from taking any public decisions on the Commonwealth Group, and to wait to see how the Group develops.~~ ^{At the least I would want} ^(the Group's) Its very existence will begin to focus attention on the complexities of the South African situation, to which you have always rightly drawn attention. It will

/give

The Foundation

a carry much credibility & irremediably

May I ask you to consider for a moment the full implications if your Govt does were to reject cooperation with

present ~~prospect~~ to ~~consider~~ conditions in which an ~~idea~~ ~~successful~~ ~~intellectual~~ ~~dialogue~~ ~~is~~ ~~a~~ ~~part~~ ~~of~~ the sort you are making has a ~~chance~~ ~~of~~ ~~success~~ will be ~~an~~ ~~artificially~~, perhaps ~~justified~~ ~~well~~ ~~deserved~~.

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 give you a fresh chance to put your case to important sections of international opinion in this country, in the United States, and elsewhere. I have no doubt that the attitudes of a number of governments whose views are important to you would become considerably less sympathetic were you to reject the Group out of hand.

~~I have to say to you that a public statement by you ~~rejecting~~ the Group risks being in effect. There is no need for such a decision now~~

~~I can see no need for you to make a decision about the Group now, let alone reject it publicly. If you value my continuing help, I urge you not to do so. I do not think I could be a pleasure.~~

