

Foreign and Commonwealth Office 6

London SW1A 2AH

22 May 1986

*Dear Charles,*South African Raids

State President Botha has written to the Prime Minister about the South African Defence Force (SADF) raids on Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe. We understand that this is a round robin addressed to the Summit Heads of Government, which may explain the peculiar complaint that he has had no answer from Mrs Thatcher to two of the points raised in pre-Tokyo correspondence.

Even so, the Foreign Secretary finds P W Botha's letter quite inadequate. His justification for the raids is flimsy and perfunctory; his statement that "terrorist forces remain adamant that they are not interested in a negotiating process" takes no account of the fact that the Commonwealth Group had at the time of the raids just returned from the talks with the ANC in Lusaka; and there is no direct mention in the State President's letter of the Commonwealth Group. Above all, the Foreign Secretary notes that President Botha's letter shows no glimmer of appreciation for the risks taken by the Prime Minister on his behalf; for the efforts made by her to promote and rally widespread international support for COMGEP and to stave off pressure for sanctions; or of the embarrassment caused by the raids to those who have been prepared to give South Africa the benefit of the doubt.

Sir Geoffrey Howe recommends that the Prime Minister should reply to President Botha as soon as possible making clear to him the very damaging impact which the South African raids on three neighbouring Commonwealth countries (two of whom - Zambia and Zimbabwe - will of course be at the Commonwealth Review Meeting) are likely to have, especially as regards COMGEP and further international pressure for sanctions. The White House has issued a strongly worded statement about the raids; further US measures against South Africa are not to be excluded. The Front Line States have already called for economic sanctions. If COMGEP collapses, the pressure for action of that kind will be such that if nothing is done to accommodate it there is a real risk that some countries will take action to break up the Commonwealth and in other ways (as they see it) to disadvantage Britain. Sir Geoffrey Howe is also worried at the domestic

/political



political implications of a breakdown: public opinion in this country could quickly move against the government if COMGEP collapsed and the UK were seen to be the main, if not the only, defenders of an intransigent South Africa: as he told the Prime Minister on Tuesday, he is already concerned that opposition to sanctions is increasingly equated with support for apartheid.

There is clear evidence that the raids were approved by President Botha and that Pik Botha was consulted. The fact that the Commonwealth Group were in Southern Africa at the time can hardly have been coincidental. But COMGEP - extraordinary as it may seem - does not seem to have been a factor in the President's calculations (this is perhaps borne out by the terms of his latest letter). This reflects the familiar South African lack of international perspective. Yet just as it may have been no coincidence that the Cabinda incident and the earlier raid on Gaborone occurred when, from the hard line South African point of view, there was a risk that the South African Government might be drawn into serious negotiations leading to Namibian independence, so too on this occasion.

The Commonwealth Group itself has not reacted formally to the raids. Those members who have spoken publicly have for the most part shown a commendable unwillingness to write it off prematurely. But we know that there is considerable anger within the Group at the raids, and not just over their timing. General Obasanjo for one feels particularly outraged by an attack, while he was in South Africa, on the two countries (Zambia and Zimbabwe) who nominated him to the Group. The Foreign Secretary has argued strongly, through Lord Barber whom he saw yesterday evening, that the Group should not allow itself to be deflected from its task. Lord Barber himself believes that all is not necessarily lost. If the Group's mood when they reached London survives the pressures on them from their parent governments (and this is by no means to be taken for granted) and if the South African Government come up with a positive response, he does not exclude the possibility that they may be willing to soldier on for a little longer. But Lord Barber is certain that a major step forward by the South African Government is required if the initiative is not to founder.

In this connection, Ramphal has told Sir Antony Acland that if there is to be any chance of the Group (whom he expects will meet in London on 4-6 June to draft their report) continuing, the South Africans will have to come up with a really convincing response. This would consist of a clear cut acceptance by the South African Government of their "negotiating concept" and specific undertakings on how they intend to implement this.

/We



SECRET

We have evidence that the South African Government are due to formulate their response to the Group this weekend. Hence the importance, in the Foreign Secretary's view, of an early letter from the Prime Minister to President Botha leaving him in no doubt of our position, of the fact that time is running out, and of the consequences of failure. I attach a draft letter from Mrs Thatcher accordingly.

Yours ever,

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Private Secretary

C D Powell Esq
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SECRET

DSR 11 (Revised)

DRAFT: minute/letter/teleletter/despach/note

TYPE: Draft/Final 1+

FROM:
Prime Minister

Reference

DEPARTMENT:

TEL. NO:

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION

TO:

Your Reference

- Top Secret
- Secret
- Confidential
- Restricted
- Unclassified

The Hon P W BOTHA DMS

Copies to:

SLHARZY

PRIVACY MARKING

SUBJECT:

.....In Confidence

Thank you for your letter of 19 May (which does not appear to take account of mine of 9 May). It arrived as I was on the point of writing to let you know of my ~~shock and dismay~~ *vehatim ad indid nger* at the raids on 19 May by the South African Defence Forces on alleged ANC targets in Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

absolutely

I find this action by the South African Government impossible to understand. The raid on Botswana is particularly inexplicable given that your own officials had only recently been holding discussions on security co-operation with their Botswanan counterparts and that a meeting of the Joint Commission had been proposed for 23 May. I have condemned the raids just as I condemn all cross-border violations in either direction.

CAVEAT.....

I have looked in vain in your letter for any convincing justification of the attacks. They do not appear to have brought you any ~~significant~~ military advantage. Nor can I see what possible advantage to South Africa could outweigh the immense damage done to your

/ international

Enclosures—flag(s).....

international position and in particular to the Commonwealth initiative of which you make no mention but which I have supported so strongly, believing it to be in your interest. I frankly find this omission astonishing. I was also puzzled by your statement that "terrorist forces remain adamant that they are not interested in a negotiating process", given that at the time of the raids the Commonwealth Group had just returned from Lusaka where they had been exploring this very point with the ANC.

You will know from our frank exchanges since the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Nassau last October how much importance my colleagues and I have attached to the success of the Commonwealth initiative. The Group's efforts have become the vehicle for the hopes of many within and outside South Africa who saw it as a unique opportunity to help break the cycle of violence and ~~make~~^{promote} a start on dialogue. With so much pinned on the Commonwealth Group by ^{and by governments in} the European Community, and the Seven Summit leaders as well as ^{by} the Commonwealth itself, the reaction if the initiative founders as a result of South African policy will be that much harsher. I simply do not understand why the South African Government should have mounted such attacks while the Commonwealth Group were in Southern Africa trying to make progress towards achieving dialogue. Given the timing of the raids, it will inevitably be said that they were a deliberate attempt by your Government to torpedo an initiative which was developing too well. I myself find them hard to reconcile with the relationship of trust and confidence which I had thought ~~we~~^{we} had established.

//We

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/Even

Even so, I believe we still need to consider whether the COMGEP process can be salvaged. I take it that you want it to succeed. ~~But the task, always difficult, has been made yet more difficult by these raids on your neighbours.~~ It may still not be too late to get the process going again, though I know that there is much anger and resentment^{ne} in the Group at the raids. (~~General Obasanjo, for example, is mindful of the fact that he was actually nominated for the Group by Zambia and Zimbabwe.~~) I believe that the Group may yet respond to a genuine and unequivocal step forward on your part; but they will not allow themselves to become involved in a debate on semantics, which they will see as just an attempt to string them along. ~~I am sure that~~ ^{What} is needed is an early and clear cut acceptance of their negotiating concept, together with specific indications of the way in which the South African Government intend to implement it.

(No more than in the past do I)

~~I do not~~ underestimate the difficulties for you, nor ~~do I overlook~~ ^{we} the political problems you face with those who are adamantly opposed to change. But I urge you most strongly to consider what is at stake. We are at a watershed. Failure of the Commonwealth initiative would have the most serious consequences. It would hugely increase the already considerable international pressure for further measures against South Africa. You know what my attitude has been, but there must be a limit to how far we can put our own interests at risk by standing alone. On present form, the Group are likely to meet in early June to draft their report. Once that is done, I fear that the die will be cast. ~~It is~~ ^{The way in}

^{which your government responds in the next few days will be decisive}

I do not think I need to send you a detailed response on the other points you raise in your latest letter, since I have already commented on them in my letter of 18 April.