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FM CAPE TOWN EMBASSY
TO DESKBY 090830Z FCO
TELNO 76
OF 081600Z MARCH 1988

*Very interesting
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and does not have the
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MY TELNO 67 : MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BOTHA

1. PRESIDENT BOTHA ASKED ME TO SEE HIM THIS MORNING. THE MEETING WAS A TETE A TETE. THE DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER, WHO MADE AN UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPT TO JOIN IN, WAS SUMMARILY EJECTED.
2. PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT HE HAD REPLIED TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S LATEST LETTER. BUT THERE WERE SOME THINGS THAT COULD NOT SO READILY BE SAID IN CORRESPONDENCE. THE PRIME MINISTER HAD MADE A NUMBER OF POINTS TO MR KILLEN. HE WANTED TO TALK TO ME PRIVATELY ABOUT THEM AND FOR THIS TO BE CONVEYED TO THE PRIME MINISTER.
3. PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT HE HAD ENJOYED HIS MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AT CHEQUERS. THERE HAD BEEN PLENTY OF STRAIGHT TALKING. BUT IT HAD BEEN A GOOD MEETING. SINCE THEN THE MESSAGES THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SENT HIM HAD CONVINCED HIM THAT SHE WAS SINCERE IN HER EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS.
4. IN HER MEETING WITH MR KILLEN THE PRIME MINISTER RECALLED THAT HE HAD STATED AT ONE POINT THAT IF SHCHARANSKY, SAKHAROV AND CAPTAIN DU TOIT WERE RELEASED, HE WOULD CONSIDER RELEASING MANDELA. HE HAD BEEN PREPARED TO CONSIDER RELEASING MANDELA AS PART OF A PACKAGE DEAL INVOLVING OTHER COUNTRIES. THAT HAD NOT BEEN TAKEN UP. THE SOUTH AFRICANS EVENTUALLY HAD SUCCEEDED IN SECURING DU TOIT'S RELEASE IN RETURN FOR OVER ONE HUNDRED ANGOLAN PRISONERS HELD BY UNITA.
5. HE HAD ANNOUNCED IN PARLIAMENT LAST YEAR THAT HE WAS INITIATING A PROCEDURE CONCERNING LONG-TERM SECURITY PRISONERS. SUBSEQUENTLY HE HAD RELEASED GOVAN MBEKI. BUT, SINCE HIS RELEASE, MBEKI HAD ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE USED BY SUBVERSIVE ELEMENTS. THAT WAS THE PROBLEM IN RELATION TO MANDELA. HE HAD NO GUARANTEE THAT IF MANDELA WERE RELEASED, HE WOULD NOT FORCE THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVER-

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NMET TO ARREST HIM AGAIN THE NEXT DAY. THE SAG WOULD THEN BE WORSE OFF THAN BEFORE. THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SAID THAT MANDELA WAS AN ASSET TO THE ANC WHILE HE WAS IN JAIL. BUT MANDELA WAS KEEPING HIMSELF IN JAIL. IF HE RENOUNCED VIOLENCE, HE COULD BE RELEASED AT ANY TIME. WE WOULD NOT BE PREPARED TO CONSIDER RELEASING CONVICTED IRA PRISONERS. WHY SHOULD HE BE EXPECTED TO RELEASE MANDELA WITH NO ASSURANCES AS TO WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN THEREAFTER? HE ALSO FEARED THAT IF MANDELA WERE RELEASED WITHOUT BEING PREPARED TO INDICATE THAT HE WOULD STOP VIOLENCE, THERE COULD BE AN ATTEMPT ON HIS LIFE, FOR WHICH THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WOULD THEN BE BLAMED. HE WAS AWAITING A REPORT FROM THE COMMITTEE OF JUDGES LOOKING INTO THE CASES OF LONG TERM PRISONERS. WHEN HE RECEIVED THEIR REPORT, HE WOULD DEAL WITH THIS. BUT HE COULD NOT ACCEPT BEING PRESSURISED.

6. PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD ASKED WHEN THE NEXT ELECTION IN SOUTH AFRICA WAS GOING TO TAKE PLACE. SHE HAD REFERRED TO THE COMMONWEALTH MEETING NEXT YEAR. PRESIDENT BOTHA, OBVIOUSLY, WOULD HAVE TO DECIDE IN RELATION TO SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNAL POLITICS WHEN THE NEXT ELECTION WOULD TAKE PLACE.

7. THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SAID THAT THE EPG FORMULA STILL SEEMED TO HER THE BEST BASIS FOR PROGRESS. SO FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, THE ANC HAD TO BE CONVINCED TO LAY DOWN THEIR ARMS AND STOP VIOLENCE. THE PRIME MINISTER HAD SAID THAT SHE DID NOT EXPECT HIM TO NEGOTIATE WITH PEOPLE WHO WERE CONTINUING VIOLENCE. IF THEY STOPPED, HE WOULD NEGOTIATE, BUT HE WOULD NOT DO SO WHILE THEY WERE ORGANISING BOMB ATTACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA FROM OUTSIDE. HE DID NOT THINK IT LIKELY THAT WE WOULD NEGOTIATE WITH THE IRA.

8. PRESIDENT BOTHA CLAIMED THAT THE WAY THE WEST WAS ACTING VIS A VIS SOUTH AFRICA WAS A CAUSE OF THE UNWILLINGNESS OF SOME RADICAL LEADERS TO COME FORWARD AND NEGOTIATE. HE DID SPEAK TO BLACK LEADERS, INCLUDING AFRICAN LEADERS FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY. THE WAY THE US CONGRESS AND THE BLACK CAUCUS BEHAVED HAD DONE NOTHING TO HELP HIM FIGHT AGAINST HIS RIGHT WING OPPONENTS HERE. HE WAS CONCERNED AT THE LACK OF GOODWILL ON THE PART OF THE WEST. HE HOPED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD NOT JOIN THAT CAMP: THAT WE WOULD CONTINUE TO REFRAIN FROM ACTIONS THAT WOULD MAKE PROGRESS HARDER TO ACHIEVE HERE: AND THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WOULD CONTINUE TO USE HER INFLUENCE WITH OTHERS IN THAT SENSE.

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9. PRESIDENT BOTHA ADDED THAT HE WAS NOT AFRAID OF THE FAR RIGHT. HE WAS FIGHTING THEM IN THE TRANSVAAL. WE HAD SEEN THE RESULTS OF THE BYE-ELECTIONS. THE WEST WERE PLAYING INTO THEIR HANDS. THE RESULT WAS A LOSS OF INFLUENCE. THE UNITED STATES FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES HAD LOST ALL INFLUENCE HERE. HE CONTINUED TO HAVE A VERY HIGH REGARD FOR THE PRIME MINISTER. THE MAJORITY OF ENGLISH-SPEAKERS IN SOUTH AFRICA SUPPORTED HIM AND HE WOULD INDEED BE COUNTING ON THEIR VOTES VIS A VIS THE RIGHT WING.

10. FINALLY PRESIDENT BOTHA COMPLAINED ABOUT THE DEMAND OF THREE BRITISH MPS THAT THE UNION JACK SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM THE SOUTH AFRICAN FLAG. THIS TOO WAS DANGEROUS VIS A VIS HIS RIGHT WING OPPONENTS. THEY HAD ALWAYS WANTED TO SEE THE UNION JACK REMOVED FROM THE FLAG. THIS KIND OF THING HAD THE WORST POSSIBLE EFFECT ON THE AFRIKANERS. HE COULD NOT PUT ALL THIS IN A LETTER. HE HOPED THAT I WOULD CONVEY THE MESSAGE FOR HIM.

11. ON THE FLAG, I SAID THAT THE POSITION OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WAS THAT SOUTH AFRICA'S FLAG WAS ENTIRELY A MATTER FOR SOUTH AFRICANS TO DECIDE. I WAS WELL AWARE OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH SOUTH AFRICA HAD DECIDED ON ITS FLAG. IT REFLECTED A GREAT DEAL OF HISTORY. PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT HE WAS GLAD TO HEAR THIS.

12. I ADDED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD FOUGHT MANY BATTLES ON SOUTH AFRICA'S BEHALF. IN INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS ON MANY OCCASIONS SHE HAD PREVENTED FOOLISH AND DAMAGING DECISIONS BEING TAKEN. SHE DID NOT BELIEVE THAT THE OUTSIDE WORLD COULD SOLVE SOUTH AFRICA'S PROBLEMS. SHE DID BELIEVE THAT MANDELA'S DEATH IN PRISON WOULD DO ENORMOUS DAMAGE TO SOUTH AFRICA. I RECALLED PRESIDENT BOTHA'S OWN REMARKS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARLIAMENT LAST YEAR WHEN, CITING THE EXAMPLE OF GENERAL DE WET WHO WAS IMPRISONED AFTER THE BOER WAR, HE SAID THAT THE PROLONGED IMPRISONMENT OF FIGURES WHO WERE REGARDED AS LEADERS BY THEIR PEOPLE COULD UNLEASH GREAT EMOTIONAL FORCES. THAT WAS PRECISELY THE CASE WITH MANDELA. THERE WAS ALSO THE HUMANITARIAN CONSIDERATION: HE HAD BEEN IN PRISON FOR TWENTY-SIX YEARS. ONLY HE COULD DECIDE HOW TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM. BUT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS CONCERNED TO SEE MANDELA RELEASED. SINCE SHE FIRMLY BELIEVED THAT, IT WAS RIGHT FOR HER TO TELL HIM SO. SHE ALSO HOPED THAT THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE PROGRESS WITH BUTHELEZI. HE WAS OPPOSED TO VIOLENCE AND TO SANCTIONS AND DISINVESTMENT AND THE

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PRIME MINISTER HAD A HIGH REGARD FOR HIM. WE CONSISTENTLY HAD SUPPORTED THE CONCEPT OF NEGOTIATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF A SUSPENSION OF VIOLENCE.

13. I ADDED THAT THE LATEST MEASURES TAKEN AGAINST BLACK ORGANISATIONS HERE HAD CAUSED VIOLENT ATTACKS ON THE GOVERNMENT IN PARLIAMENT. WE WERE ACCUSED OF APPEASING APARTHEID. IN REPLY THE PRIME MINISTER HAD MADE CLEAR THAT SHE WOULD CONTINUE TO OPPOSE PUNITIVE SANCTIONS. SHE FELT THAT SHE HAD DONE A GREAT DEAL FOR SOUTH AFRICA AND THAT ACCOUNT SHOULD BE TAKEN OF HER VIEWS. SHE HAD SUPPORTED REFORM INITIATIVES HERE AND WOULD LIKE TO GO ON DOING SO.

14. PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT THE WEST GENERALLY HAD NOT DONE SO. THEY HAD LEFT HIM IN THE LURCH. WHEN HE HAD INTRODUCED REFORMS WHICH HAD SPLIT AFRIKANERDOM, HE HAD GOT LITTLE CREDIT FOR IT. I SAID WE HAD PAID TRIBUTE TO THE REFORMS HE HAD INTRODUCED. WHAT THE PRIME MINISTER WANTED WAS TO BE IN A POSITION TO SHOW THAT THE PROCESS WAS CONTINUING, NOT GOING BACKWARDS. IT WAS NOT IN SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERESTS TO HAVE A CONTRACTING ECONOMY. WE WERE CONCERNED INTER ALIA THAT THAT THE OIL COMPANIES SHOULD BE ABLE TO GO ON OPERATING HERE. THEY WERE UNDER INCREASING PRESSURE IN THE UNITED STATES. PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT US ACTIONS WERE TOTALLY UNPREDICTABLE. EVEN IF VICE PRESIDENT BUSH WERE ELECTED, IT WAS UNCLEAR WHETHER HE WOULD BE ABLE TO CONTROL CONGRESS.

15. AS THE DISCUSSION CONTINUED, I SAID THAT THE TOLERANCE OF MARCHES BY MEMBERS OF THE AWB CARRYING FIREARMS WAS CONTRASTED STARKLY IN THE WESTERN PRESS WITH THE WAY PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS BY THE CLERGY AND OTHERS WERE DEALT WITH. PRESIDENT BOTHA ARGUED RATHER HALF-HEARTEDLY THAT THE AWB WAS NOT BREAKING THE LAW. TERREBLANCHE WAS MAD. THERE WAS NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HIM AND HITLER. HE WAS ALSO DANGEROUS. THE SORT OF ATTITUDE HE REPRESENTED WAS FOSTERED BY ISOLATION BY THE WEST. IF THE WEST FORCED FURTHER ISOLATION ON SOUTH AFRICA, THEY WOULD CREATE A STATE OF SIEGE HERE AND THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE THE LAST THING WE WANTED.

16. I SAID THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAD FOUGHT LONG AND HARD AGAINST THAT AND IN MY BELIEF WOULD GO ON DOING SO. SOUTH AFRICA KEPT CONTRIBUTING TO ITS OWN ISOLATION. I WOULD REPORT EVERYTHING PRESIDENT BOTHA HAD SAID. PRESIDENT BOTHA SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THE PRIME MINISTER UNDERSTOOD SOUTH AFRICA'S PROBLEMS. HE WAS DETERMINED NOT TO LEAD THIS COUNTRY INTO CHAOS.

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17. THIS WAS A RATHER BETTER MEETING THAN EXPECTED. AN AGITATED PIK BOTHA ASKED ME BEFOREHAND IF I COULD NOT DO SOMETHING TO CALM PRESIDENT BOTHA DOWN. IN FACT HE DID NOT NEED CALMING DOWN AND CLEARLY DID WANT TO GET A MESSAGE ACROSS. THERE WAS PLENTY OF SELF-JUSTIFICATION AND THE USUAL ATTEMPT TO BLAME HALF SOUTH AFRICA'S ILLS ON WESTERN ''INTERFERENCE''. THE NEWS THAT MANDELA'S CASE IS BEING LOOKED AT BY THE JUDICIAL COMMISSION, WHICH SHOULD BE CAREFULLY PROTECTED, SHOULD NOT RAISE EXPECTATIONS. THE POINTS THE PRIME MINISTER AND STRAUSS HAVE BEEN MAKING ABOUT MANDELA HAVE MADE SOME IMPRESSION. IF THE COUNTRY REMAINS CALM IT IS JUST POSSIBLE THAT P W BOTHA MIGHT NERVE HIMSELF LATER TO CONSIDER HIS RELEASE, SUBJECT TO THE SAME KIND OF RESTRICTIONS AS THOSE IMPOSED ON GOVAN MBEKI. BUT HE MUST BE DEEPLY WORRIED THAT IF THAT EXPERIMENT WENT WRONG, IT COULD HAND THE NEXT ELECTION TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY. THE SECURITY CHIEFS WILL BE URGING HIM NOT TO TAKE THAT RISK. ON BUTHELEZI, WE HAVE BEEN TOLD PRIVATELY THAT HEUNIS IS DUE TO HAVE A MEETING WITH HIM AT THE END OF THE MONTH.

18. PRESIDENT BOTHA WAS NOT IN AS GOOD SHAPE AS WHEN I SAW HIM IN JANUARY. HIS RIGHT HAND WAS SHAKING (HE HAS A MILD FORM OF PARKINSON'S DISEASE). HIS WORRIES ABOUT THE RIGHT HAVE INCREASED SHARPLY WITH THE BYE-ELECTION RESULTS FROM THE TRANSVAAL AND UNDOUBTEDLY ARE GENUINE, THOUGH IT IS TYPICAL OF THE MAN TO BLAME THE WEST FOR THE PROGRESS OF HIS OPPONENTS.

19. I DOUBT IF PRESIDENT BOTHA'S LETTER WILL MERIT A FURTHER WRITTEN REPLY. THE PRIME MINISTER'S VIEWS HAVE BEEN MADE VERY CLEAR TO HIM. I RECOMMEND THAT WE SHOULD LEAVE THESE EXCHANGES AT THE POINT THEY HAVE NOW REACHED.

RENWICK

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