

**August 22, 1977**

**World Conference for Action Against Apartheid,  
Lagos, 22-26 August 1977, Supplement to Brief No.  
A7 (Nuclear Questions): Soviet Allegations About  
South African Nuclear Weapons Development**

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**Summary:**

Memorandum on UK position at Lagos Conference on Apartheid about Soviet allegations of South African nuclear weapons development.

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*Mr. Taylor 8/16*

*Neither I nor Reed have ever seen this, which appears to amount to asking King questions by us. It is not marked as coming from any department. CI. How do you see these sheets where to belong? CSAD? COM? CIA*

WORLD CONFERENCE FOR ACTION AGAINST APARTHEID  
IAGOS 22-26 AUGUST 1977

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SUPPLEMENT TO BRIEF NO A7 (NUCLEAR QUESTIONS): SOVIET ALLEGATIONS ABOUT SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

1. In a message to the Prime Minister on 8 August President Brezhnev claimed that he had information that the South Africans were completing work on the production of nuclear weapons and preparing for a test explosion. He called on the Prime Minister to take "all the corresponding effective measures" to prevent these developments.
2. President Brezhnev sent parallel messages to the Heads of Government of the United States, France and Germany. TASS issued a public statement containing the essence of the messages but without referring to the messages.
3. Coming just two weeks before the Lagos Conference the Soviet intention may well be to make an impact at the Conference on this important and emotive issue.

Line to take

4. If the Soviet statement about South African intentions is correct that is an extremely grave matter.
5. We urge the South African Government to dispel international anxiety by adhering to the Non Proliferation Treaty without delay. We have always attached great importance to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. [Note - delete last sentence of paragraph 1 of Brief A7.]

Background (not for use)

6. The main brief contains as annexes to A7 the texts of the TASS statement and of President Brezhnev's "oral" message to the Prime Minister delivered to No 10 Downing Street by the Soviet

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Chargé d'Affaires on 8 August.

7. Mr Semenov said when delivering the message that similar messages were being delivered to other Western leaders and members of the Security Council. We believe that the only other recipients were the United States, France and Germany (the Soviet Ambassador said this to the Germans): but it is possible that there may have been others. We have not seen texts of the other messages. The one addressed to us concentrates on the long-standing Anglo-Soviet community of interest in preventing nuclear proliferation. The message calls on us to take "all corresponding effective measures" and asks for a reply: it contains no direct allegations of British collaboration with South Africa in the nuclear field.

8. The French Government issued a statement on 9 August commenting on the TASS statement. It said: "Should the information in the TASS report be confirmed, the French Government could only condemn such an initiative which would gravely hinder the efforts of all those who reject apartheid and racial discrimination and who are engaged in the search for a peaceful solution to the problems of southern Africa, based on respect for the legitimate interests and rights of all". Other recipients have so far made no official comments.

A "The Observer" had a speculative piece on 14 August (text attached) linking the TASS statement with the theft of secret documents from the South African Embassy in Germany. It quotes official sources as confirming that the Prime Minister had received a message from President Brezhnev.

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Dr Owen discussed the subject on 12 August with Mr Vance who made it clear that the Americans gave some credence to the TASS statement. They agreed to co-ordinate their responses, possibly in the form of an actual joint response. Mr Vance said he would be seeing the Soviet Ambassador in the following week to discuss the matter. On 14 August President Carter

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raised this among other subjects with the Prime Minister on the telephone: again it was agreed that the US and UK would co-ordinate their responses. But we have also heard from the Americans that the Prime Minister and Mr Vance had a discussion on 14 August from which Mr Vance seems to have gained the impression that the UK would be making their own response, and that we had our own reasons for handling it differently.

10. This may explain why, without any further consultation with us, President Carter's reply to President Brezhnev's message was delivered to the Soviet Chargé d'Affaires in Washington on 15 August. Drafted in forthcoming terms, it implies that there is some ground for believing the Soviet allegation and says that the American Ambassador was being instructed to bring home to the South Africans that the testing of a nuclear device would have the gravest consequences.

11. Mr Bowdler accordingly called on Mr 'Pik' Botha on 18 August and told him that, "on the basis of our independent investigations", the US Government had substantial evidence which appeared to be contrary to previous South African assurances that their nuclear programme was devoted exclusively to peaceful purposes. Mr Bowdler said that he had been instructed to make clear that the detonation of a nuclear device, or any further steps to acquire or develop a nuclear explosive capability, would have the most serious consequences for US/South African relations and would be considered a serious threat to the peace. He added that South Africa would not be able to count on help from the Western Powers, and the issue might arise in the Security Council at short notice with unforeseeable results.

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Bowdler asked that the South African Government "should find ways to prove, in a publicly persuasive way, that you are not developing a Kalahari facility as a nuclear test site, and that your pilot enrichment plant is not and will not be used to produce enriched uranium for any explosive purpose".

12. The meeting was stormy and the South Africans (Mr Botha

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and Mr Fourie) in effect denied the allegations, but added that they would be speaking to Mr Vorster "and others".

Mr Bowdler has since been instructed to deliver a letter from Mr Vance to Mr Botha which sets out certain evidence about a possible test site in the Kalahari Desert and goes on to say that the only way to resolve existing doubts would be to permit a visit by a small US technical team to inspect the suspect location in the Kalahari Desert; and this visit ought to take place before the start of the Lagos Conference.

[Paras 11 and 12 should of course be treated with very great care for the time being.]

13. The Americans have kept in close touch with the French, but not, apparently, with the Germans.

14. We are instructing Sir D Scott to make parallel representations to Mr Botha; these will concentrate on the grave political consequences if the South Africans produce, and still more, if they test a nuclear weapon; that we urge them not to do so and to give convincing proof that they have no such plans; and that the best means of doing so would be to accede to the NPT.

15. A draft reply (text at B) has been submitted for the Prime Minister's reply to President Brezhnev. At the time of writing this has not yet been approved.

#### General

16. The department will keep the delegation informed of developments by telegram.

17. A Guidance is being issued as soon as possible.

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