

September 21, 1977

**Letter from C.L.G. Mallaby of the UK Arms Control
and Disarmament Department to H.M.S. Reid,
'South African Nuclear Intentions: the Kalahari
Facility'**

Citation:

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Summary:

Mallaby reports on a conversation at the Nuclear Suppliers Meeting with the US Deputy Under-Secretary for Security Assistance, Nye, on whether the US would raise the issue of South Africa's Kalahari nuclear testing facility. The US assumption was that the South Africans intended to "be on the brink of having a nuclear weapons capability" in order to "moderate Western diplomatic pressure on her about racial and other issues."

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Mr Reid
CSAD

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SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR INTENTIONS: THE KALAHARI FACILITY

Having in mind the Prime Minister's interest in establishing the nature of the Kalahari facility, I took an opportunity in the margins of the Nuclear Suppliers Meeting of asking Mr Nye, Deputy to the Under-Secretary for Security Assistance at the State Department, whether the USA would raise this question again with South Africa and what was the present US assessment of the nature of the facility.

2. Mr Nye said that the Americans had no plans at present to question the South Africans further. He implied that he thought less could be learned in that way than by satellite observation. The South Africans had told the Americans that the facility was not for nuclear testing but was military in nature. But the US intelligence experts were convinced, after examining the satellite photographs, that the facility could have no military purpose other than nuclear testing. For example the holes in the ground were too deep for missile testing. A few people in Washington thought that the facility might be a dummy test site, built by the South Africans in the belief that its discovery would frighten the West and deter it from putting too much pressure on South Africa over racial and other issues. But the overwhelming majority of those concerned in Washington were convinced that the Kalahari facility was a proper nuclear testing facility. Work on constructing it was still continuing, despite the publicity launched by the Russians and the Western representatives to South Africa. The State Department deduction was that the South Africans intended to manufacture a certain amount of highly enriched uranium of weapons grade at the Valindaba pilot enrichment plant and complete the testing facility: but not to carry out a test. South Africa would then be on the brink of having a nuclear weapons capability and could hope that this factor would moderate Western diplomatic pressure on her about racial and other issues. It is because of their wish to frustrate any such plan that the Americans attach so much importance to interim inspection at Valindaba.

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3. It seems to me that part of the above would provide an adequate answer to the Prime Minister's point. But I should first be grateful to know whether you have any comments on the US assessment of the Kalahari facility and of possible South African intentions.

C L G Mallaby
Arms Control and
Disarmament Department

21 September 1977

cc.

Mr Moberly

Mr Hannay, ES & SD

Mr Rhodes, Assessments Staff, Cabinet Office

Mr Hervey, PUSD

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