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Letter from South African Prime Minister Vorster to US President Carter on US-South Africa Relations

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Summary:

South African Prime Minister Vorster denies the existence of a South African nuclear program and lists hostile steps taken by the United States to exclude South Africa from international nuclear and atomic energy groups. He concludes that "it would seem... the United States officially holds the view that stability in Southern Africa and the future of our country is to be sacrificed in the hope of stopping Soviet expansionism."

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Dear Mr President,

1. I have received the message conveyed through my Foreign Minister by Secretary of State Vance on the 15th September 1977 regarding South Africa's nuclear programme.

2. You will recall that pursuant to representations made by the United States Government, we formally advised it in August that South Africa did not have, nor did it intend to develop, a nuclear explosive device for any purpose, peaceful or otherwise; that the so-called Kalahari facility was not a testing ground for nuclear explosions; and that there would not be any nuclear explosive testing of any kind in South Africa.

3. Furthermore, on the 24th August 1977, I reiterated these assurances in a public statement. At the same time I focussed attention on the need for goodwill, trust, co-operation and the necessity of honouring commitments and obligations by all states with an interest in the peaceful development of nuclear energy.

In this connection I drew attention to a series of discriminatory steps against South Africa, e.g. -

- (1) Unwillingness on the part of the United States over the last two years to supply South Africa with the contracted fuel elements for the research reactor Safari I, thus seriously affecting our research and development programme;
- (2) Ignoring of commitments by the nuclear powers to facilitate the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy as provided for under Article IV(2) of the NPT;

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- 2 -

(3) The ousting of South Africa from the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency in flagrant violation of the Agency's statute;

Some efforts were made to justify this discriminatory step on the pretext that South Africa had not adhered to the Non-proliferation Treaty, conveniently forgetting that, for example, no less than 13 of the 34 members of the Board of Governors have either not ratified or acceded to the NPT - including Egypt, who replaced South Africa on the Board.

You will also be aware that in spite of India's non-adherence to the NPT and her explosion of a nuclear device, she was supplied by the United States with enriched fuel for her Tarapur reactor;

(4) The extreme pressure which is exerted on South Africa to accede to the NPT as against the apparent lack of pressure on non-NPT members of the Board of Governors of the IAEA to adhere to the treaty;

(5) From the latest U.S. démarche (that of 15 September 1977) it is clear that in spite of a firm contract with ERDA, the United States will not supply low enriched fuel for the two Koeberg power stations unless South Africa accedes to the NPT;

(6) It has not passed unnoticed that South Africa, one of the most important suppliers of uranium, and a potential exporter of enrichment equipment, is excluded from every group formed for considering matters relating to non-proliferation. One cannot escape the feeling that a systematic attempt is being made to exclude South Africa from all deliberations in the atomic energy field. The latest example is the exclusion of South Africa from the International Nuclear Fuel Cycle Evaluation, which evaluation is the subject of consultation with 36 of the Agency's member states.

4. Nevertheless, in my statement of 24 August 1977, I made it clear that South Africa would be prepared to discuss with the United States the question of our accession to the NPT, but added that discriminatory steps, including those mentioned by me, would actually be raised and would have to be sorted out at the same time. I was sincerely hoping that this would lead to a frank discussion between our Governments in an effort to facilitate our accession to the NPT.

(This, incidentally, is the other sentence in your letter, dated August 24, as well as those contained by the South African authorities.)

- 2 -

5. However, the United States démarche of 15 September seems to imply that we must first adhere to the Treaty, and pursuant thereto some, I repeat some of the points raised by me can thereafter be discussed. It therefore appears to us that the United States wishes to concentrate only on the NPT, ignoring the rest. Such an approach would not be practicable.

I note that the United States Government's anxiety over the Valindaba pilot plant persists. There is nothing sinister about the plant, and we have often stated its purpose, and I personally offered to share with other countries the knowledge and technology acquired.

I honestly believe that if official United States spokesmen were to refrain from questioning South Africa's good faith, and instead were to agree to an in-depth discussion by our officials on these matters, a major step could be taken towards opening the way for South Africa's adherence to the NPT.

South West Africa and Rhodesia

6. We recently concluded the latest round of discussions with the five Western members of the Security Council on the question of South West Africa, and we put forward a set of constructive proposals concerning the attainment of independence for the Territory in a peaceful manner. These suggestions, particularly that relating to security and South African forces, of which you will no doubt be apprised by Ambassador McHenry, supplement the following principles to which South Africa has already committed herself in regard to South West Africa:

- (a) the granting of independence to South West Africa as soon as possible, in any case before the end of 1978;
- (b) independence to be granted to the Territory as a whole;
- (c) elections on the basis of one-man-one-vote country-wide for a Constituent Assembly;
- (d) removal of discrimination on basis of colour;
- (e) the representative of the Secretary-General satisfying himself on the fairness of the elections;
- (f) the release of detainees and political prisoners, if any, inside and outside the Territory; (i.e. those held by SWAPO and other entities in Tanzania, Zambia, Angola etc. as well as those detained by the South African authorities.)

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- 4 -

(g) the return of all South West Africans to participate peacefully in the political process;

(h) the appointment by the Secretary-General of a panel of jurists to decide upon disputes, for example on fairness of electioneering, status of convicted prisoners, etc.

In conclusion, I value this opportunity to speak to you.

7. Also in the case of Rhodesia, Secretary of State Vance and Ambassador Young would have informed you of the responsible role South Africa has tried to play in order to facilitate a settlement.

We never asked for a quid pro quo for our co-operation and efforts in seeking solutions for the South West African and Rhodesian questions. This did not, however, mean that in spite of our unceasing efforts to play a constructive role - efforts acknowledged by you yourself - South Africa would face increasing hostility from those very countries with whom it is endeavouring to resolve these problems.

8. We cannot escape the impression that the United States as well as certain of the other Western states concerned, while expecting our further active co-operation in the search for peace, nevertheless continue to take steps which we cannot interpret as otherwise than hostile and which endanger our continued co-operation. This was my clear impression in Vienna during the talks with Vice-President Mondale and it is regularly being confirmed by reports from Washington, as for example on the extension of the so-called "grey areas" in trade between our two countries, the holding of special hearings and other deliberately discriminatory and even vindictive actions against South Africa. In line with these measures, and encouraged, it seems, by the United States, the member countries of the European Economic Community are now considering steps to curtail our traditional trading ties with Western Europe.

9. It would seem, therefore, that the United States officially hold the view that stability in Southern Africa and the future of our country is to be sacrificed in the hope of stopping Soviet expansionism. This is a vain hope. On the contrary, by simplistically insisting on majority rule in South Africa, the United States will cut the ground from under moderate Black and White leaders and pave the way for confrontation and eventual conflict on a catastrophic scale.

You will appreciate that such an approach and the type of action referred to are making it extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, for my country to continue the

- 5 -

constructive role it has accepted. It would therefore be a major contribution to our peace efforts if an assurance could be given that this campaign against us will cease.

In conclusion, Mr President, I wish to assure you that I value this further opportunity of sharing my thoughts with you.

Yours sincerely,

The President
The White House

- (14) Ignoring of commitments by the nuclear powers to facilitate the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and scientific and technological information for the peaceful uses of nuclear