

April 15, 1981

Memorandum of Conversation Between R. F. Botha and Chester Crocker of the US Department of State

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Summary:

Leaked memorandum of conversation between "Pik" Botha and Chester Crocker. Botha questions how much South Africa can trust the United States to support the former in Namibia negotiations. He also raises concerns about the effects that a SWAPO victory in Namibia could have. Crocker reassures him on both subjects, based on the strength and resistance to pressure of the Reagan administration.

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Transcript - English

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants:

South Africa:

Foreign Minister - Pik Botha

Defence Minister - Magnus Malan

US:

Assistant Secretary - Designate Chester Crocker

Alan Keyes, SIP

Date & Place: April 15/16, 1981, Pretoria

Subject: Discussion with SAG

Copies to: AF, 10- McElhaney, SIP- Keys, AF/S

US-Africa Relations

Botha opened first day's discussion by expressing unhappiness over what SAG perceives as backsliding by Administration from view of South Africa taken during U.S. presidential campaign. Reagan campaign statements produced high expectations in South Africa. But, administration, in response to views of allies, such as UK and Germany, and to influence of State Department professionals, has disappointed SAG expectations. USG handling of visit by military officers example of this. Botha raised issue of trust, referring to earlier 'McHenry' duplicity on issue of SWAPO bases.

However, he affirmed that it means a great deal to SAG to have good relations with U.S. and that SAG understands U.S. problems in maintaining friendly relations with black African states. To begin second day's discussion, Crocker noted that, though he hadn't come to discuss South Africa's internal affairs, it was clear that positive movement domestically would make it easier for the U.S. to work with SAG. U.S. ability to develop full relations with SAG depends on success of Prime Minister Botha's programme and extent to which it is seen as broadening SAG's domestic support. 'Pik' Botha cautioned against making success of P.W. Botha's programme a condition of U.S./South African relations. Crocker responded with view that this is not a condition but reflects U.S. desire to support positive trends. In response, Pik Botha went more fully into reasons for deep SAG distrust of U.S. Botha reiterated view that, as result of pressure from African states in UN, and influence of State Department, USG has backed away from initial recognition of importance of its interests in southern Africa (read South Africa). He doubted whether, given domestic pressures and views of such African states as Nigeria, U.S. could continue any policy favorable to South Africa, which would not provoke constant criticism.

In response, Crocker replied that present Administration would have more backbone in face of pressure than previous one. U.S. has many diverse interests and responsibilities, but will stand up for what we think right. Our objective is to increase SAG confidence.

Toward end of discussion, in context of Angola issue, Botha again came back to question of trust. He said he is suspicious of U.S. because of way U.S. dropped SAG in Angola in 1975. He argued that SAG went into Angola with USG support, then U.S. voted to condemn in UN. Cited many examples of past USG decisions that didn't inspire confidence -Vietnam, Iran, USG failure to support moderate governments in Africa, while aiding those with leftist rhetoric. Alluding to Chad, Botha asserted that African leaders became so desperate for help against Qadafi that one even approached SAG privately, as last resort, to ask for help. Botha admitted that SAG can't yet pass judgment on present Administration. He pleaded for consistency, 'when we say something, let's stick to it'.

Crocker addressed trust issue, saying that new Administration is tired of double think and double talk. Despite rocky start in US/SAG relations, improvement is possible. Reagan election victory represents enormous change in US public opinion on foreign policy reversing trend of post-Vietnam years.

SAG View of Regional Situation

During first day's session Botha discussed at length situation in southern Africa and Africa at large. He cited economic, food and population problems to support view that Africa is a dying continent because Africans have made a mess of their independence. Botha asserted belief that cause isn't race, but fact that new nations lack experience, cultural background, technical training.

Referring to South African past experience in helping and training blacks in neighboring states, Botha discussed the need for peaceful co-existence between South Africa and its neighbors. Until they recognize they're making a mess of their independence, South Africa can't help them. South Africa is willing to help those who admit they need its help. On this basis Botha presented vision of southern Africa's future, in context of 'Constellation of States' concept. He appealed for USG support for South Africa's view of region's future, involving a confederation of states, each independent, but linked by a centralizing -secretariat. SAG doesn't expect U.S. support for apartheid, but it hopes there will be no repeat of Mondale's 'One Man, One Vote' statement. SAG goal is survival of white values, not white privileges.

Botha argued that central issue in southern Africa is subversion. Noting that what ANC does, South Africa can do better, Botha stressed need for agreement of non-use of force. If region starts to collapse, fire will spread, there will be no winners. This is not meant as a threat, but simply stating facts. Botha emphasized view that if you kill the part of Africa containing people who can do things, you kill whole of Africa.

Asked about U.S. view of the importance of southern Africa, Crocker summarized U.S. regional interests in context of its global responsibilities. He emphasized U.S. desire to deal with destabilization threat worldwide by going to their sources, using means tailored to each source and region involved. Crocker made clear that in Africa we distinguish between countries where Soviets and Cubans have a combat presence, and those whose governments espouse Marxism for their own practical purposes. He stressed that top U.S. priority is to stop Soviet encroachment in Africa. U.S. wants to work with SAG, but ability to deal with Soviet presence severely impeded by Namibia. Crocker alluded to black African view that South Africa contributes to instability in region. Said he agrees with this view to extent SAG goes beyond reprisal. Putting fear in minds of inferior powers makes them irrational.

Namibia/Angola Issue

Malan raised topic of Angola during first session. He asked about a supposed U.S.

plan for an all-African force to replace the Cubans in Angola. Crocker responded that he was aware of no such plan, except perhaps as a symbolic gesture. Views were exchanged on the character of the MPLA Government, with the South Africans firmly asserting its domination by Moscow, while Crocker suggested a more nuanced view, allowing for several factions within the MPLA varying in ideological commitment and character. Discussion touched briefly on the nature of SWAPO. Botha alluded to the view that Nujoma is a 'Bloody Thug'.

Malan flatly declared that the SAG can't accept prospects of a SWAPO victory which brings Soviet/Cuban forces to Walvis Bay. This would result from any election which left SWAPO in a dominant position. Therefore a SWAPO victory would be unacceptable in the context of a Westminster-type political system. Namibia needs a federal system. SAG does not rule out an internationally acceptable settlement, but could not live with a SWAPO victory that left SWAPO unchecked power. Botha asserted that Ovambo dominance after the election would lead to civil war.

Crocker addressed these concerns saying USG recognized need to build South African confidence and security. Malan interposed with the view that it is the local people in Namibia who need security, and SAG could accept SWAPO victory only if their security is provided for. Crocker remarked upon need to negotiate with governments, which ultimately means that parties can't have veto power. In response Botha gave eloquent rendition of SAG's problem in dealing with the internal parties. These parties fear secret plot to install SWAPO government. SAG doesn't wish to entrench white privileges but some confidence-building measures needed. South Africans asked who would write a constitution. Crocker alluded to idea of expert panel.

SAG sees Savimbi in Angola as buffer for Namibia. SAG believes Savimbi wants southern Angola. Having supported him this far, it would damage SAG honor if Savimbi is harmed.

Second round of discussions went into greater detail on Namibia/Angola questions. Malan declared SAG view that Angola/Namibia situation is number one problem in southern Africa. Angola is one place where U.S. can roll back Soviet/Cuban presence in Africa. Need to get rid of Cubans, and support UNITA. UNITA is going from strength to strength, while SWAPO grows military weaker.

In his response Crocker agreed on relation of Angola to Namibia. USG believes it would be possible to improve US/South African relations if Namibia were no longer an issue. We seek a settlement, but one in our interest, based on democratic principles. Our view is that South Africa is under no early military pressure to leave Namibia. The decision belongs to SAG, and ways must be found to address its concerns. USG assumes Soviet/Cuban presence is one of those concerns, and we are exploring ways to remove it in context of Namibia settlement. We agree that UNITA is an important factor in the Angola situation. We believe there can be no peace in Angola without reconciliation between UNITA and MPLA. We see no prospect of military victory for UNITA. Must achieve movement toward reconciliation by playing on divisions in MPLA. With regard to Namibia, USG assumes that constitution is an important issue, which must be resolved before elections. The constitution would include guarantees for minority rights and democratic processes. We have said we believe SCR435 is a basis for transition to independence for Namibia, but not for a full settlement. We wish to meet SAG concerns, while taking account of views on other side. We cannot scrap 435 without great difficulty. We wish to supplement rather than discard it.

Malan took up Namibian questions, observing that internationalization of the issue posed greatest difficulty. He alluded to tremendous distrust of UN in South Africa. He questioned inclusion of South Africa and Front Line States in the quest for a settlement, asserting that SWAPO and the internal parties should conclude it. He agreed on the need for a constitution. But 435 can't work. The longer it takes to solve

the Namibia question, the less South African pressure will be required there. We will reach a stage where internal forces in Namibia can militarily defeat SWAPO.

Malan's remarks set stage for Botha to discuss SAG view of SWAPO. Botha noted that SAG thought it was important to U.S. to stop Soviet gains. But if you say SWAPO not Marxist, you move in same direction as previous administration. SWAPO's people are indoctrinated in Marxism every day. Savimbi considers SWAPO universally Marxist. SAG's bottom line is no Moscow flag in Windhoek. If U.S. disagrees, let sanctions go on, and get out of the situation. South Africa can survive sanctions. Eventually South Africa can get support of moderate black African states. Better to start U.S./SAG relations with lower expectations, than to disagree angrily later. At moment, U.S. doesn't believe SAG view of SWAPO; you're soft on SWAPO. SAG appreciates U.S. firmness against Soviets, Botha continued. Even Africans now see you assuming leadership. But SAG worried that USG is moving toward Namibia plan SAG cannot understand. As with Kissinger attempt on Rhodesia, it will be difficult to get consensus, especially with so many parties involved. SAG tried one-to-one approach with Angolans, but Geneva meetings sidetracked effort. SAG has tried Angolans several times. Each time there is progress, but then something intervenes. We're convinced Moscow controls present government in Angola. We're convinced SWAPO is Marxist. Nujoma will nationalize the whole place, and cause upheaval and civil war, involving South Africa. We will have to invade Namibia, and other countries as well. We are pleading with you to see the dangers of a wrong solution in Namibia. It would be better to have a low-level conflict there indefinitely, than to have a civil war escalating to a general conflagration. If Nujoma governs as an Ovambo, the Hereros will fight. Also, Nujoma made promises to the Soviets. Defectors from SWAPO have revealed their plan to SAG—first Namibia, then Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, followed by the final attack on South Africa. SAG can't ignore this reality. We couldn't justify that to our people. South Africa is a democracy as far as white voters are concerned. Even black leaders can criticize the government. South Africa had freedom, and can have more, but survival is the pre-requisite. The BLS leaders agree with us. Even some Front Line leaders see the danger. We have twice saved Kaunda's life.

The situation is not what you think. You think in global terms; we're not a global power. We must safeguard our interests here. Not just white interests. We see the necessity of avoiding black-white polarization. But we see it as an ideological struggle. Developed moderate blacks are not communists. They will engage with us in common effort against communism. When whites see blacks as allies, whites will move away from discrimination. With more distribution of economic goods, more blacks will join us. But if we all come under Moscow's domination, that's the end.

Crocker addressed Botha's expressed fears and concerns by first accepting the premise that Soviet domination is the danger. But U.S. believes best way to avoid that danger is to get Namibia issue behind us. As long as issue subsists, we cannot reach a situation where U.S. can engage with South Africa in security, and include South Africa in our general security framework. If Namibia continues, it will open South/Central Africa to the Soviets. Simmering conflict in Namibia is not acceptable. The ideas U.S. has in mind don't include Soviets in Windhoek. We believe we can get the Soviets out of Angola, and provide a guarantee of security whether Nujoma wins or not.

Botha said this is the nitty-gritty. Without Soviet support, others won't accept Nujoma's rule. To satisfy others we need a political solution. Crocker agreed that a political solution is needed. Botha stressed the need to consult with leaders in Namibia. If U.S. can gain their confidence, and SWAPO's, and talk about minority rights, progress is possible. People in Namibia are concerned about property, an independent judiciary, freedom of religion, the preservation of their language and the quality of education under the present system, discrimination has been abolished by law, though it continues in practice. There is also the problem of the white ethnic

Legislature vs. the black majority Council of Ministers.

Crocker said that the U.S. understands concern with constitutional rights. U.S. has inherited a situation with many parties but we must build a consensus in Africa that we are serious and not just delaying. We believe a Lancaster type conference won't work. We see a panel of experts, consulting all parties, writing a constitution, and then selling it through the Contact Group. With SAG's help, we could sell it to internal parties. Botha referred to reports of a French constitutional plan. He said that he's against multiple plans. Botha stressed need for U.S. leadership and emphasized need for U.S. to consult with internal parties in Namibia. He discussed SAG relations with internal leaders, and need to avoid leaving them in lurch in order not to be discredited with other moderate leaders in Africa. He tied this to possibility of SAG co-operating with moderate African states to deal with economic development problems. Botha concluded by saying that SAG doesn't want to let Namibia go the wrong way; that's why South Africa is willing to pay the price of the war. We pray and hope for a government favorably disposed to us. The internal parties don't want us to let go until they have sufficient power to control the situation. We want an anti-Soviet black government.

Following the substantive discussion, Botha conveyed to Crocker written communications from the heads of Bophuthatswana and Venda. He explained that their ambassadors wanted to deliver the messages in person, but Botha decided to convey them to avoid appearance of trying to force U.S. hand. Then question of invitation to Botha to visit U.S. in May was discussed. Crocker stressed need for SAG to decide cooperation with U.S. was worth it before accepting invitation. Botha resisted setting any conditions for visit, and said he would prefer not to come if conditions are set. Crocker said there were no conditions, just a question of clarifying the spirit in which the visit would take place. Botha ended the discussion by noting that he would inform internal parties about discussion immediately. He said he would tell Prime Minister Botha that SAG should explore question of constitution before an election in Namibia. He noted that a referendum on the constitution rather than constituent assembly elections, would make matters easier.