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EVENING READING ITEM FOR THE PRESIDENT - October 27, 1979

South African Statement on Reported Nuclear Event

We were called by the South African Embassy shortly before noon today and informed of an official statement on the reported event, which noted that "the South African Navy was instructed to begin an investigation of the possibility that the alleged nuclear event monitored by the U.S. may have been caused by an accident aboard a Soviet (or other) nuclear submarine on station" in the area. The statement went on to note "surprise" that no news reports had focused on this possibility, and concluded: "it is a matter of common knowledge that there was during the period of September, for instance, a Soviet Echo-II class nuclear submarine in the vicinity of the strategic passage around the Cape."

An accident aboard a submarine was one of the first possibilities that occurred to the intelligence community after the signal was received; it was concluded that the signal observed was not consistent with a reactor accident aboard a nuclear vessel. We cannot rule out quite as categorically an accidental explosion of a nuclear warhead aboard a vessel, but we still consider this most unlikely. Moreover, such an explosion would destroy the vessel involved, and we know of none that is missing.

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After consultation with the Defense Department and the intelligence community, we believe that no nuclear submarine of any nation was in the area at the time of the recorded event on September 22.

AF/S:LRMac<sup>211</sup>Farlane:SPL

Clearances:AF:WCharrop *by the WCH*  
INR:W Bowdler *by the WCH*  
INR/STA:RDCowey *by the WCH*

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