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T O P S E C R E T PRETORIA 4211

NODIS CHEROKEE

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1, 2, 3
TAGS: FARM, SF
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAM

REF: (A) STATE 194980, (B) STATE 194976,

1. PIK BOTHA INITIALLY RECEIVED ME ALONE AT 1430. BEFORE GETTING INTO THE NUCLEAR QUESTION, HE REVIEWED HIS VISIT TO SALISBURY AND CUBAN ACTIVITIES IN ANGOLA. BOTH THESE POINTS ARE COVERED IN SEPARATE CABLES. AFTER I MADE THE POINTS CONTAINED REPTEL (A), WHICH HE TOOK DOWN VERBATIM, AND REGISTERED HIS INITIAL REACTION, HE CALLED IN BRAND FOURIE. MEETING ENDED AT 1600.

2. BOTHA'S INITIAL REACTION WAS ONE OF OUTRAGE. HE SAID HE WAS SHOCKED BY THE "ARROGANCE OF THE MESSAGE." HE DENOUNCED THE DEMARCHE AS ONE MORE INDICATION OF HOW THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION IS TRYING TO STRANGLE SOUTH AFRICA. HE ASKED RHETORICALLY WHAT OBLIGATION WAS THERE FOR SOUTH AFRICA TO SUBSCRIBE TO NPT; WHAT ASSISTANCE DOES THE WEST PROVIDE SOUTH AFRICA THAT WOULD BE DISCONTINUED; WHAT EVIDENCE DOES THE US HAVE TO SUPPORT THE ALLEGATION THAT THE SAG IS ON THE THRESHOLD OF EXPLODING A NUCLEAR DEVICE; WHY DOES THE US NOW PROVIDE NUCLEAR FUEL TO INDIA AFTER IT WENT AHEAD WITH WHAT SAG IS NOW BEING

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ACCUSED OF DOING? THIS OUTBURST CRESTED WITH THE STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD NOT CALL OWEN ABOUT HIS FORTHCOMING TRIP TO SOUTH AFRICA; HE WILL HAVE NOTHING FURTHER TO DO WITH THE RHODESIAN PROBLEM; WE WILL WITHSTAND ANY SANCTIONS IMPOSED AGAINST US. AT THIS JUNCTURE HE CALLED IN FOURIE.

3. THERE FOLLOWED IN A CALMER MOOD A DISCUSSION OF THE ALLEGATIONS THAT THE US WAS TRYING TO STRANGLE SOUTH AFRICA, IN WHICH I CAREFULLY REVIEWED THE CONSTRUCTIVE CHARACTER OF OUR POLICY AS OUTLINED BY VP MONDALE AT VIENNA AND THE SECRETARY IN THE JULY 1 SPEECH. I THEN TURNED THE CONVERSATION BACK TO THE NUCLEAR QUESTION. BOTHA CLAIMED THAT HE KNEW NOTHING ABOUT THE KALAMARI FACILITY OR PLANS TO DETONATE A NUCLEAR DEVICE. HE AFFIRMED THAT THE SAG NUCLEAR ACTIVITY WAS DESIGNED ONLY FOR PEACEFUL PURPOSES. FOURIE VOLUNTEERED HE WAS AWARE OF "A DEFENSE MINISTRY TESTING RANGE FOR MISSILES OR CANNONS OR THE LIKE," WITHOUT INDICATING ANY SPECIFIC LOCALE. HE ASKED WHETHER THIS WAS WHAT WE HAD IN MIND AND WHAT EVIDENCE WE HAD TO SUPPORT OUR CONCERNS. AT THIS POINT I ASKED SPECIFICALLY WHAT I MIGHT TELL MY GOVERNMENT ABOUT THE MATTER OF A POSSIBLE DETONATION OF A NUCLEAR DEVICE. FOURIE REPLIED--AND BOTHA CONCURRED-- AS FOLLOWS: "WE DENY AND OBJECT TO THE ALLEGATIONS CONTAINED IN YOUR PRESENTATION AND ASK FOR PROOF OF THE ASSERTION." THEY COUPLED THIS WITH AN INDICATION THAT THEY WISHED TO SPEAK TO THE PM AND "OTHERS" ABOUT THIS QUESTION, AGAIN EMPHASIZING THAT THE US SHOULD FURNISH WHAT EVIDENCE IT HAS.

4. AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE DISCUSSION OF THE NUCLEAR MATTER, I CONVEYED THE MESSAGE CONTAINED IN REFTEL (B). BOTHA TOOK CAREFUL NOTE BUT GAVE NO REACTION.

5. COMMENT: WHAT BOTHA AUTHORIZED ME TO CONVEY TO THE
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DEPARTMENT WOULD APPEAR TO CONSTITUTE A DENIAL THAT THE SAG IS PREPARING TO EXPLODE A NUCLEAR DEVICE. THE UMBRAGE DISPLAYED AT THE DEMARCHE MAY BE SINCERE, BUT WE NEED MORE EVIDENCE. I WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE REASSURED, FOR EXAMPLE, IF THEY HAD SPECIFICALLY IDENTIFIED THE KALAHARI SITE AS A CONVENTIONAL WEAPON TESTING AREA. CAN WE PROVIDE THE MORE SPECIFIC INFORMATION THEY REQUESTED AS A MEANS OF OBTAINING:

(A) REAFFIRMATION OF THE DENIAL AFTER THEY HAVE HAD A CHANCE TO CONSULT THE PM AND "OTHERS;"

(B) ACCESS TO THE KALAHARI SITE BY TECHNICALLY COMPETENT PEOPLE FROM THE IAEA IN WHOM WE HAVE CONFIDENCE (SAG IS PROBABLY MORE LIKELY TO ACCEPT INSPECTION BY NEUTRAL BODY THAN BY WHAT THEY REGARD AS THE ACCUSER).

6. I WILL BE SENDING TOMORROW MY VIEWS ON FURTHER NEXT STEPS AND LONGER RANGE STRATEGY.
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