

August 23, 1977

**Telegram from South African Embassy in the US on
President Carter's Press Conference on the Kalahari
Nuclear Test Site**

Citation:

"Telegram from South African Embassy in the US on President Carter's Press Conference on the Kalahari Nuclear Test Site", August 23, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, South African Foreign Affairs Archives, Brand Fourie, Atomic Energy, File 2/5/2/1 Vol. 1, Vol. 2. Obtained and contributed by Anna-Mart van Wyk.

<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/116609>

Summary:

The South African Embassy in the US reports to the South African Foreign Ministry on President Carter's press conference on the Kalahari nuclear test site and related US media coverage. Carter called on the South African government to place their nuclear programs under international safeguards and monitoring and cease attempts to develop and explosive device.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

IMMEDIATE

DESPATCHED 24/8/77 (0925)

NO 262.

MY NO 259.



FOLLOWING IS RELEVANT TEXT OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S OPENING STATEMENT AT HIS PRESS CONFERENCE OF 23 AUGUST.

"FIRST OF ALL, IN RESPONSE TO OUR OWN DIRECT INQUIRY AND THAT OF OTHER NATIONS, SOUTH AFRICA HAS INFORMED US THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE AND DO NOT INTEND TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE DEVICES FOR ANY PURPOSE, EITHER PEACEFUL OR AS A WEAPON, THAT THE KALAHARI TEST SITE WHICH HAS BEEN IN QUESTION IS NOT DESIGNED FOR USE TO TEST NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES AND THAT NO NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE TESTS WILL BE TAKEN IN SOUTH AFRICA NOW OR IN THE FUTURE.

WE APPRECIATE THIS COMMITMENT FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS INFORMATION. WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION VERY CLOSELY. WE WILL ALSO RENEW OUR EFFORT TO ENCOURAGE SOUTH AFRICA TO PLACE ALL THEIR NUCLEAR POWER PRODUCTION CAPABILITIES UNDER INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS AND INSTRUCTIONS AND ENCOURAGE THEM, ALONG WITH OTHER NATIONS, TO SIGN A NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION TREATY."

STATEMENT PROVOKED NO FURTHER QUESTIONS. SAFDEL HAS ALREADY CABLED TEXT OF POSITIVE EDITORIAL IN NEW YORK TIMES. WASHINGTON POST TAKES SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT VIEW IMPLYING THAT THERE WAS "STRONG REASON TO SUSPECT SOUTH AFRICA" THUS CREATING IMPRESSION THAT GOVERNMENT HAS YIELDED TO STRONG INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE.

BELOW:

PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH TONIGHT, TEXT IS QUOTED

"SOMETHING OF ENORMOUS POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCE - AND EQUAL DELICACY - HAS BEEN GOING ON IN THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS CONCERNING THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT'S NUCLEAR INTENTIONS. IT WAS AN INTERNATIONAL BOMB SCARE OF THE FIRST ORDER, AND PRESIDENT CARTER'S CAREFULLY MEASURED ANNOUNCEMENT YESTERDAY SEEMED TO REFLECT BOTH THE INITIAL RELIEF AND THE CONTINUING WARINESS THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION FEELS ABOUT THE OUTCOME. SOUTH AFRICA, THE PRESIDENT SAID, "HAS INFORMED US THAT THEY DO NOT HAVE AND DO NOT INTEND TO DEVELOP NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE DEVICES FOR ANY PURPOSE, EITHER PEACEFUL OR AS A WEAPON ... THAT NO NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE TEST WILL BE TAKEN IN SOUTH AFRICA NOW OR IN THE FUTURE." HE ADDED HIS APPRECIATION OF THIS "COMMITMENT" AND MADE A POINT OF NOTING "WE WILL, OF COURSE, CONTINUE TO MONITOR THE SITUATION THERE VERY CLOSELY."

WHAT HAS BEEN GOING ON IS THIS: THE U.S. GOVERNMENT - IN CONCERT WITH THE BRITISH, FRENCH, WEST GERMANS AND RUSSIANS - HAS BEEN PUTTING TERRIFIC HEAT ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT BECAUSE THERE WAS STRONG REASON TO SUSPECT THAT THE SOUTH AFRICANS WERE IN FACT PREPARING A NUCLEAR EXPLOSION FOR SOMETIME SOON, AN EXPLOSION OF UNIMAGINABLE POLITICAL IMPACT, WHATEVER ITS ACTUAL NUCLEAR TONNAGE. THE FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER, LOUIS DE GUIRINGAUD, WHOSE HARSH WARNING TO THE SOUTH AFRICANS MADE NEWS EARLIER IN THE WEEK, LED THE OPEN, PUBLIC PROTEST. THE OTHER COUNTRIES, ALONG WITH FRANCE, PUSHED VERY HARD IN PRIVATE. THE UPSHOT HAS BEEN THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT'S STATEMENT CITED BY MR CARTER. EITHER THEY NEVER WERE GOING TO DEVELOP A NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVE DEVICE OR THEY ARE NOT GOING TO DO SO NOW. WHICHEVER IS THE CASE, IT IS WELCOME NEWS - THOUGH HARDLY ENOUGH TO WARRANT A RELAXED RETURN TO OTHER BUSINESS.

THERE WERE TWO VERY POSITIVE, UPBEAT ASPECTS TO THE DRAMA THAT LED TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN ASSURANCES. ONE IS THAT A GROUP OF NATIONS WHO OTHERWISE COMPETE ON A WIDE RANGE OF MATTERS, INCLUDING NUCLEAR ONES, WERE ABLE TO GET TOGETHER AND ACT FORCEFULLY AND FAST TO INDICATE TO A PROSPECTIVE NEW NUCLEAR POWER WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE IF IT WENT AHEAD. NOTHING LIKE THAT, YOU WILL RECALL, OCCURRED AT THE TIME OF INDIA'S NUCLEAR EXPLOSION IN 1974. THE OTHER PROMISING SIGN IS THAT SO-CALLED PEACEFUL NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS SEEM FINALLY AND APPROPRIATELY TO BE LOSING THEIR MYSTIQUE. MR GUIRINGAUD HAD IT JUST RIGHT. HE DECLARED THAT "NO DISTINCTION COULD BE MADE BETWEEN AN ATOMIC EXPLOSION FOR PACIFIC PURPOSES AND ONE FOR MILITARY NUCLEAR EXPERIMENTATION." THAT IS THE CASE AND THE "PEACEFUL EXPLOSION" DODGE HAS LONG SINCE DESERVED THE CONTEMPT IN WHICH IT IS INCREASINGLY WIDELY HELD.

WHY WOULD SOUTH AFRICA WANT NUCLEAR WEAPONS? PRESUMABLY, IF IT DID, FOR THE SAME SCARE AND SYMBOLISM REASONS THAT MANY OTHER NON-NUCLEAR NATIONS WITH BIG TROUBLES WANT THEM. THE GRIM FACT IS THAT OVER THE LONG HAUL SOUTH AFRICA COULD PROBABLY ACQUIRE NUCLEAR INDEPENDENCE. IT HAS GREAT SUPPLIES OF URANIUM AND COULD IN TIME DEVELOP THE TECHNOLOGY TO DO WITH IT AS IT PLEASED. FOR THE PRESENT, HOWEVER, THE SOUTH AFRICANS DEPEND ON OTHER COUNTRIES SUCH AS THE UNITED STATES AND FRANCE TO PROVIDE IT ENRICHED URANIUM FUEL. THAT MEANS WE STILL HAVE SOME LEVERAGE AND SOME TIME TO ACT.

MR CARTER WAS RIGHT IN TAKING THE INCIDENT AS CAUSE TO "RENEW OUR EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE SOUTH AFRICA TO PLACE ALL THEIR NUCLEAR POWER PRODUCTION CAPABILITIES UNDER INTERNATIONAL SAFEGUARDS AND INSPECTIONS" AND TO SIGN THE NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION TREATY. BUT THE CASE IS BIGGER THAN THE SOUTH AFRICAN EPISODE--BLOODCHILLING AS

THAT HAS BEEN. IT ILLUSTRATES AGAIN, THE URGENCY OF TRYING TO WORK
OUT SOME INTERNATIONAL DISCIPLINE IN THE FIELD OF NUCLEAR-WEAPONS
AND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT. PARTIAL AND AD HOC AS IT WAS, THE INTER-
NATIONAL EFFORT OF THOSE WHO LEANED ON SOUTH AFRICA SHOWS THAT
IT CAN BE DONE.

SALES

RECEIVED OK?

E

7-690 SA

248364 SALE URM