

August 31, 1977

**Cable from South African Embassy in the US to the
South African Secretary for Foreign Affairs on South
Africa and the Bomb**

Citation:

"Cable from South African Embassy in the US to the South African Secretary for Foreign Affairs on South Africa and the Bomb", August 31, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Obtained and contributed by Anna-Mart van Wyk, Monash South Africa
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114181>

Summary:

Telegram from the South African embassy in Washington to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Pretoria in response to a Washington Post article which alleged that South African had developed an untested nuclear weapon and became "the seventh nuclear power even though it will not be recognized as such." The conclusion drawn is that the article will lead to a watershed moment in South Africa's international relations.

Credits:

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

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

Received Office : 1/9/1977

TELEGRAM

FROM : S.A. EMBASSY WASHINGTON
TO : Secretary for Foreign Affairs, PRETORIA
DESPATCHED : 31/8/1977

NO. 273.

TOP SECRET.

SOUTH AFRICA AND THE BOMB.

- 1(1). WE ARE SENDING YOU BY BAS DETAILED PRESS REPORTS ON THE ABOVE COVERING ALSO THE FLURRY OCCASIONED BY SENATOR HORNWOOD'S STATEMENT BUT WOULD DRAW SPECIAL ATTENTION TO FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE IN SUNDAY'S WASHINGTON POST (WHICH WILL HAVE BEEN SUMMARISED IN SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS) SINCE IT FLOWS FROM A DIRECT WHITE HOUSE/STATE DEPARTMENT BRIEFING.
- 2(2). WHETHER OR NOT SOUTH AFRICA DOES IN FACT HAVE THE BOMB THE OVERALL EFFECT OF THE CARTER ANNOUNCEMENT AS ELUCIDATED IN THE WASHINGTON POST ARTICLE HAS BEEN TO MAKE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY BELIEVE THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAS MANUFACTURED A NUCLEAR DEVICE, WHICH REMAINS UNTESTED. THIS UNDOUBTEDLY IMPLIES A NEW WATERSHED IN SOUTH AFRICA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. NOTHING CAN BE THE SAME AGAIN, SOUTH AFRICA HAS BECOME THE SEVENTH NUCLEAR POWER EVEN THOUGH IT WILL NOT BE RECOGNISED AS SUCH. CARTER'S STATEMENT IS REGARDED AS TACIT CONFIRMATION OF THIS. ALTHOUGH ISRAEL HAS LONG BEEN SUSPECTED OF HAVING THE BOMB AT NO TIME HAS THERE BEEN ANY CONFIRMATION OF THIS FROM WESTERN SOURCES COMPARABLE TO THE EFFECT OF CARTER'S STATEMENT IN THE CASE OF SOUTH AFRICA. MOREOVER, THE COMMENT BY MINISTER HORNWOOD, IN SPITE OF THE

-2-

LETTERS GENERAL
TOP SECRET

SUBSEQUENT DEMENTI, IS VIEWED AS CONFIRMATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S NUCLEAR CAPACITY FROM THE HIGHEST POSSIBLE FINANCIAL SOURCE WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN CONCERNED WITH THE FUNDING OF THE PROJECT.

3(C). IT IS TOO SOON TO ASSESS ALL THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS WATERSHED IN OUR FOREIGN RELATIONS BUT AS SEEN FROM WASHINGTON OUR INITIAL COMMENTS ARE AS FOLLOWS -

A(C). THE THESIS THAT SOUTH AFRICA POSES A THREAT TO WORLD PEACE IS IMMENSELY RE-INFORCED AND WILL BE EXPLOITED TO THE FULL IN THE U.N. AND ELSEWHERE BY OUR OPPONENTS WHO CAN BE EXPECTED TO MAKE EVERY USE OF THE EMOTIONAL FACTORS INVOLVED IN THE ALLEGED POSSESSION OF THE BOMB BY A GOVERNMENT WHOSE POLICIES ARE THE SUBJECT OF WORLD WIDE CONDEMNATION. THE PROSPECT OF A CHAPTER VII SANCTIONS RESOLUTION IS THUS BROUGHT MEASURABLE NEARER.

B(C). SINCE THE BOMB CAN BE USED TO DEAL NEITHER WITH GUERRILLA ATTACKS FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY NOR TERRORISM WITHIN THE COUNTRY POSSESSION OF THE BOMB IS SEEN TO BE NO DETERRENT WHATSOEVER IN DEALING WITH PRESSURES TO SUBORN OR OVERTHROW WHITE RULE - ON THE CONTRARY IT IS SEEN AS AN INCENTIVE TO STEP UP THOSE PRESSURES -

C(C). THE RESPONSE OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT TO THE REPRESENTATIONS FROM THE WESTERN POWERS, AND FROM THE U.S. IN PARTICULAR, NOT TO PROCEED WITH THE TESTING OF A NUCLEAR DEVICE IS ONCE MORE BEING INTERPRETED AS FURTHER SUBSTANTIATION OF THE THESIS OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION THAT PRESSURE ON SOUTH AFRICA IS MORE

-3-

PRODUCTIVE OF RESULTS THAN THE KISSINGER POLICY OF ATTEMPTING TO WORK WITH SOUTH AFRICA. THIS AGAIN IS AN INCENTIVE TO STEP UP THE PRESSURES -

D.C.D. THE EVIDENCE THAT THE U.S.S.R. AND U.S.A. WITH SUPPORT FROM WESTERN EUROPE CAN SUCCESSFULLY WORK IN CONCERT TO PRESSURISE SOUTH AFRICA IS VIEWED AS FURTHER PROOF OF THE EXTENT OF SOUTH AFRICA'S ISOLATION, FROM WHICH THE CONCLUSION CAN BE DRAWN THAT SOUTH AFRICA'S FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS (IN WESTERN EUROPE FOR EXAMPLE) WILL BE ABLE IN FUTURE TO OFFER LESS EFFECTIVE RESISTENCE TO PROPOSALS FOR ECONOMIC SANCTIONS -

E.C.E. UNITED STATES POLICY VIS-A-VIS BLACK AFRICA IN GENERAL AND VIS-A-VIS WHITE RULED SOUTHERN AFRICA IN PARTICULAR HAS DEVELOPED A MOMENTUM OF ITS OWN TO WHICH IT WOULD NOW BE DIFFICULT TO APPLY A BRAKE, EVEN IN THE UNLIKELY EVENT OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION UNDERGOING A CHANGE OF HEART -

F.C.F. THE WHOLE PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENTS HAS THUS PRODUCED A SITUATION WHERE SOUTH AFRICA IS FAR MORE EXPOSED THAN EVER BEFORE IN HER HISTORY TO POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURES -

G.C.G. THE CIRCUMSTANCE THAT THESE PRESSURES ARE BEING EXERCISED, IN PARTICULAR BY THE WESTERN POWERS, WITHOUT ANY PROPER APPRECIATION OF WHAT COULD BE THEIR END-RESULT AND WHAT HARM THIS COULD DO TO THEIR OWN INTERESTS IS A FACT OF LIFE WHICH WE HAVE TO FACE UP TO, HOWEVER MUCH WE MAY DEPLORE OR CONDEMN IT -

H.C.H. WE SHOULD ACCELERATE TO THE EXTENT NECESSARY THE TEMPO OF OUR CONTINGENCY PLANNING AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF SANCTIONS -

-4-

101. THE SITUATION COULD CONCEIVABLY BE DEFUSED TO A CERTAIN EXTENT IF WE COULD SHOW TO THE WORLD THAT THE FACILITY NEAR UPINGTON REPORTEDLY IDENTIFIED AS A NUCLEAR DEVICE TESTING GROUND IS NOT IN FACT ANYTHING OF THE KIND. HOWEVER, WE ARE OBVIOUSLY IN NO POSITION TO OFFER COMMENT ON THE PROS AND CONS OF SUCH A COURSE

170

UNCLASSIFIED
TOP SECRET