

August 19, 1977

Letter, US Secretary of State Vance to South African Foreign Minister Botha

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Summary:

US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance explains the evidence which lead the US to suspect that South Africa was developing nuclear weapons and developing a testing site in the Kalahari Desert.

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The Honorable
R. F. Botha
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Pretoria

Dear Mr. Minister:

President Carter and I have been closely following the dialogue between our governments concerning allegations of a nuclear weapons program in South Africa. Ambassador Bowdler has already conveyed to you the nature of our concerns.

In your conversation with him, you asked to be provided with the evidence that had led us to express doubts about the purposes of the Kalahari facility. Our experts have concluded, on the basis of experience with analogous installations, that the most likely purpose of a facility--like the one in the Kalahari--is to conduct underground tests of nuclear explosive devices.

The facility that concerns us is located in the southern part of the Kalahari Desert, about 100 km. south of Botswana and 145 km. east of Namibia at approximately 27-45 S, 21-27 E. It consists of:

- (a) A drill rig and associated facilities;
- (b) A square lattice tower in a cleared area enclosed by a wall, about 1 km. from the drill rig;
- (c) An area, about 3 km. from the square tower, containing a pad; this area is connected to the tower area by power or communications lines;

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- (d) A secured housing area 15 km. from the tower area, containing approximately ten buildings;
- (e) A hard-surface airstrip approximately 1,600 meters long and 3 km. from the housing area. In addition, the entire area is surrounded by an outer patrol road.

We are prepared to show you photographs from which this data is derived.

I believe the only way to resolve existing doubts is to permit a prompt visit by a small U. S. technical team to inspect the location in the Kalahari Desert, which we have identified as a possible nuclear test site. I believe that it is in both of our governments' interest that this visit take place no later than Sunday, August 21, before the start of the Lagos conference, where some will seek to exploit politically, to our mutual disadvantage, the uncertainties raised publicly by South Africa's nuclear activities. Our experts are prepared to leave for South Africa at a very short notice.

I hope that with your government's cooperation we can quickly put this matter to rest.

Sincerely,

Cyrus Vance

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