

September 22, 1977

Letter from H.M.S. Reid to Mr. Mallaby, 'South African Nuclear Intentions: the Kalahari Facility'

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Summary:

In response to Mallaby's letter, Reid dismisses the American explanation for the South African Kalahari nuclear testing facility. He believes that the South Africans "feel increasingly threatened and foresee a possible need to use nuclear weapons in their own defence if it should come to that."

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Mr Mallaby, ACDD

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SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR INTENTIONS: THE KALAHARI FACILITY

1. Thank you for your minute of yesterday's date.
2. I would be inclined to discount altogether the view which Mr Nye ascribed to "a few people in Washington" that the Kalahari facility was a dummy test site built by the South Africans in the belief that its discovery would frighten Western countries and deter them from putting too much pressure on South Africa over racial or other issues. I doubt very much if the South Africans would think like that.
3. I would see a simpler explanation. I think it is only too likely that the South Africans are taking steps to equip themselves with a nuclear weapon capability and that their reason for doing so is that they feel increasingly threatened and foresee a possible need to use nuclear weapons in their own defence if it should come to that. My guess, based not so much on direct evidence but rather on the way that the South Africans would be likely to be thinking, is that they have decided to do everything to prepare the way short of actually testing a nuclear weapon. In other words, what they may be doing is to shorten to the minimum the time which it would take to have an effective nuclear weapon once they had decided that they need no longer conceal their intention.

H M S Reid
Central & Southern African
Department

22 September 1977

cc: Mr Moberly
Mr Hannay, ES & SD
Mr Rhodes, Assessments Staff, Cabinet Office
Mr Hervey, FUSD

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