

**August 24, 1977**

**Telegram from South African Mission in New York to  
Department of Foreign Affairs on the New York  
Times Editorial 'Rumors, Not Bombs in South Africa'**

**Citation:**

"Telegram from South African Mission in New York to Department of Foreign Affairs on the New York Times Editorial 'Rumors, Not Bombs in South Africa'", August 24, 1977, Wilson Center Digital Archive, South African Foreign Affairs Archives. Obtained and contributed by Anna-Mart van Wyk.

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**Summary:**

Summary of New York Times editorial regarding Carter's press conference on South Africa's alleged development of nuclear weapons.

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NEW YORK 0033:24 AUGUSTUS 1977

IMMEDIATE

SECEXTERN PRETORIA

NR. 58

DOORHANDIG ASSEMBLIEF ONVERWYLD AFSKRIF AAN MINISTER EN AAN  
SEKRETARIS.

U SAL IN VOLGENDE HOOFARTIKEL ONDER OPSKRIF "RUMORS, NOT  
BOMBS IN SOUTH AFRICA" WAT VANDAG (24 AUGUSTUS) IN  
NEW YORK TIMES VERSKYN, BELANGSTEL. AANGESIEN KOERANT  
VROEER BY CNS AS IN WASHINGTON BESKIKBAAR IS, IS AMBASSADE  
MEEGEDEEL DAT HIERDIE ONDER U AANDAG GEBRING WORD IN LIG  
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FOR A WHILE, OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS, IT SEEMED AS IF  
THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WOULD ADD THE HEAT OF  
NUCLEAR THREATS TO THE RACIAL TINDERBOX IN ITS PART OF THE  
WORLD. SO IT WAS WELCOME NEWS INDEED THAT PRESIDENT  
CARTER BROUGHT TO HIS NEWS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY -  
SOUTH AFRICA HAD ASSURED HIM IT WOULD NOT DEVELOP NUCLEAR  
EXPLOSIVES FOR ANY PURPOSE.



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ON GROUNDS OF PLAIN RATIONALITY PRETORIA'S NEWS SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISING. EVEN ON A NARROW CALCULATION OF ITS OWN INTERESTS, THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT MUST HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THE COSTS OF DEVELOPING NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD BE VERY HIGH AND THE BENEFITS ALMOST NON-EXISTENT. WHAT, AFTER ALL, ARE THE THREATS IT IS LIKELY TO FACE OVER THE NEXT DECADE OR SO? THEY ARE LIKELY TO BE INCREASED MILITANCY FROM BLACKS AT HOME, A HEIGHTENED GUERRILLA STRUGGLE INCREASINGLY SUPPORTED BY NEIGHBORING BLACK STATES AND SEVERE ECONOMIC DISTRESS ACCENTUATED BY PRESSURE FROM THE INDUSTRIALIZED WEST. SOUTH AFRICA IS UNLIKELY EVER TO FACE THE KIND OF LARGE-SCALE MILITARY ATTACK AGAINST WHICH NUCLEAR WEAPONS MIGHT POSE A DETERRENT OR, IN THE LAST RESORT, SERVE AS AN EXTREMIS WEAPON.

IN FACT, ACQUIRING NUCLEAR WEAPONS WOULD ONLY INCREASE SOUTH AFRICA'S ISOLATION AS A PARIAS STATE. THEY WOULD CONVEY THE MESSAGE THAT PRETORIA'S STUBBORN LEADERS WOULD RATHER CONTEMPLATE MASS MURDER THAN GIVE UP THE POSITIONS OF PRIVILEGE FROM WHICH THEY NOW EXCLUDE THEIR COUNTRY'S BLACK MAJORITY.

PRETORIA'S DECLARATION IS WELCOME NOT ONLY IN AN AFRICAN BUT IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT. SOUTH AFRICA IS ONE OF A GROWING NUMBER OF NATIONS TECHNICALLY CAPABLE OF PRODUCING NUCLEAR WEAPONS. IN EACH INSTANCE, THE DECISION TO GO NUCLEAR IS MADE A BIT EASIER IF OTHERS HAVE MADE IT FIRST. SOUTH AFRICA'S ABSTENTION MAY HAVE A BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE ON THE DECISIONS OF OTHER GOVERNMENTS.



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IN THE WAKE OF THE SPECULATION ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA'S NUCLEAR INTENTIONS, THERE WILL SURELY BE APPEALS THAT OTHER NATIONS SHOULD CEASE ALL NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH PRETORIA. AND THERE WILL BE ALLEGATIONS THAT SOUTH AFRICA OWES ITS LATENT CAPABILITY TO PRODUCE NUCLEAR WEAPONS TO OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE -- FROM WEST GERMANY, FRANCE, ISRAEL, THE UNITED STATES, AND OTHERS. THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT THESE ALLEGATIONS ARE WELL FOUNDED, AND THE CONCLUSION THAT COOPERATION SHOULD CEASE WOULD BE WRONG.

THE HELP SOUTH AFRICA HAS RECEIVED HAS BEEN OF TWO KINDS -- GENERAL NUCLEAR KNOW-HOW WHICH COMES FROM OPEN INTERCHANGE WITH THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY, AND SPECIFIC HELP WITH SOME PROJECTS THAT HAVE NO MILITARY APPLICATIONS. SO LONG AS SOUTH AFRICA GIVES NO SIGNS OF PRODUCING NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND SO LONG AS OUTSIDERS CAN BE SURE THAT ANY PEACEFUL REACTORS THEY SELL TO SOUTH AFRICA ARE ADEQUATELY SAFEGUARDED, OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE SHOULD CONTINUE. SOME PEOPLE WILL CONDEMN THIS AS HELP FOR A RACIST REGIME. BUT THE SAD FACT IS THAT OUTSIDERS HAVE LITTLE LEVERAGE OVER PRETORIA'S NUCLEAR DECISION-MAKING. WHAT LEVERAGE THERE IS LIES IN THE PROSPECT OF FURTHER HELP."

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NEW YORK 0030:24 AUGUST 1977

IMMEDIATE

SECEXTERN PRETORIA

NO 58

PLEASE HAND OVER COPY WITHOUT DELAY TO MINISTER AND TO SECRETARY.

YOU WILL BE INTERESTED IN THE FOLLOWING MAIN ARTICLE UNDER HEADING "RUMORS, NOT BOMBS IN SOUTH AFRICA" WHICH APPEARED TODAY (24 AUGUST) IN THE NEW YORK TIMES. SINCE THE NEWSPAPER IS EARLIER AVAILABLE HERE, THE EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON WAS INFORMED, IN LIGHT OF YOUR B34 THAT THIS HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO YOUR ATTENTION.

START

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[In English] FOR A WHILE, OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DAYS, IT SEEMED AS IF THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT WOULD ADD THE HEAT OF NUCLEAR THREATS TO THE RACIAL TINDERBOX IN ITS PART OF THE WORLD. SO IT WAS WELCOME NEWS INDEED THAT PRESIDENT CARTER BROUGHT TO HIS NEWS CONFERENCE YESTERDAY - SOUTH AFRICA HAD ASSURED HIM IT WOULD NOT DEVELOP NUCLEAR EXPLOSIVES FOR ANY PURPOSE.

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