

October 17, 1977

Letter from H.M.S. Reid to C.L.G. Mallaby, 'South African Nuclear Intentions'

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Summary:

Reid of the UK's Central and Southern African Department describes a recent visit to Pretoria, South Africa, during which he heard supposedly non-nuclear explosions taking place at the Kalahari Desert facility.

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Mr Malleby, AGDD

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SOUTH AFRICAN NUCLEAR INTENTIONS

1. During my recent visit to Pretoria, Mr Fourie told Sir D Scott informally at a dinner party at the Residence that we might hear of two or three explosions taking place soon at the testing ground in the Kalahari Desert. The implication was of course that the explosions would be non-nuclear.

2. If such explosions do in fact take place the most likely explanation would seem to be that the South Africans will be seeking to demonstrate that the test ground was never intended for nuclear weapons. Without knowing it, they may therefore be providing an answer to the question we have asked ourselves, ie if the site is not for testing nuclear weapons, what is it for? Whether the testing of non-nuclear weapons will in fact convince us that they never had any intention of testing a nuclear device is another matter. Reports of any explosion at the site are liable to be misinterpreted in black Africa.

3. Speaking to me later Mr Summerhayes added the point that the test site is too close to centres of population in the Uprising area to make it safe as an underground nuclear test centre. I am not sure if that aspect has been fully assessed before.

HMS Reid

H M S Reid
Central & Southern
African Department

7 October 1977

cc: Mr Mansfield
Assessments Staff, Cabinet Office
PUSD
EESD
Mr Summerhayes, Pretoria

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