



March 21, 1984

Letter from C.A. Crocker to R.F. Botha

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Summary:

Chester Crocker writes to R. F. "Pik" Botha about the importance of not responding to the recent Cuban/Angolan communique. Crocker warns against giving the Cubans an excuse to keep their troops stationed in Namibia, and points out that it is likely a distraction for concessions the Cubans and Angolans are about to make to South Africa and the United States.

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Transcript - English

The Honorable R. F. Botha

Minister of Foreign Affairs Republic of South Africa

Cape Town

Dear Pik:

We did not ever think that it would be easy to pull off a negotiated settlement including Cuban troop withdrawal. We quite agree with you that the treatment of the subject of the ANC and SWAPO in the March 19 Angola/Cuba communique is gratuitous and provocative, and we understand perfectly that you are under pressure to respond. We have made that clear to the MPLA as well in passing your message to them. We have also been in touch with Presidents Kaunda and Machel.

At the same time, I think it is important to consider whose ends it serves for the inclusion of those points to result in serious damage to the negotiations. That is the risk of the escalation of public statements that is occurring.

It remains very true that real analysis of what took place at Havana and its significance for the future of the negotiations will have to await our next meeting with the MPLA. It is not an unknown phenomenon that an organization under severe pressures like the MPLA kicks up a big cloud of dust just before it does something useful. It is thus not impossible that the MPLA and the Cubans have just fired off a large volley of face-saving words prior to making what could be a very major concession to us in private on Cuban troop withdrawal.

I want you to know that I, too, was disturbed to see that President Dos Santos signed a document with those points about SWAPO and the ANC. As I mentioned in our phone conversation, words are cheap and may be the one tool the MPLA has to fend off criticism of its diplomacy with you and us. At the same time, I do believe we would make a mistake to let the success of some Cuban drafter in putting that point in the communiqué lead us into taking action that would let the MPLA off the hook or give the Cubans and MPLA hardliners cause to make fresh trouble. We must find out exactly what was meant in the communiqué by the statement that "Cuba and Angola... by their own decision and in exercise of their sovereignty... will reinstate the implementation of the gradual withdrawal of the Cuban internationalist military contingent..." Despite all of the rigid and unreasonable positions surrounding that statement in the communiqué, it nonetheless opens up to us very interesting possibilities that it would be very unfortunate if we were unable to pursue with the MPLA.

The withdrawal of Cuban communist troops from your region remains at the very core of South African and American objectives in Southern Africa. We have had to repeat this to each other several times. We believe it; we believe that you believe it. I appreciated your decision not to withdraw South African participation from the Joint Monitoring Commission. I urge you and South Africa to bear with us as we... with the negotiations.

As we see it, Angola and Cuba had to meet if there was to be movement on the issue of Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola. It was perhaps inevitable that that meeting would result in a cloud of disagreeable words. Even if the Angolans did not want it that way, the Cubans and almost certainly the Soviets did. The trick for us now is not to let their malicious actions distract us from our pursuit of this main point. We ask your help in that endeavor.

Finally, I would underscore how much has recently been achieved through our joint diplomacy. Through fast, but careful effort, we have isolated the Soviets and Cubans on Southern Africa. Our allies and your friends in Europe are solidly supportive. Even the French are making warm noises about rejoining the work of the Contact Group. The Frontline States have held more or less solid with you and President Machel; despite the best efforts of Moscow, Havana and the ANC, the OAU Ministers did not pull the rug from under the participants in the peace process in Southern Africa. In sum, you (and we) have accumulated a solid store of diplomatic capital in the past two months. We have created a dynamic and seized the initiative. To capitalize on this, we must continue to create new facts and forward movement quicker than Moscow's agitpropaganda can poison the wells in Southern Africa. Only your Government and ours, by full coordination, can make this happen.

Sincerely,
Chester A. Crocker