

December 28, 1979

Meeting of Prime Minister Botha and Bishop Muzorewa

Citation:

"Meeting of Prime Minister Botha and Bishop Muzorewa", December 28, 1979, Wilson Center Digital Archive, South African Archives, Department of Foreign Affairs, BTS 1/156/3. Included in "Southern Africa in the Cold War, Post-1974," edited by Sue Onslow and Anna-Mart Van Wyk.

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/118663>

Summary:

Discuss presence of South African forces and whether this issue could potential hurt Bishop Muzorewa in the upcoming election

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

Meeting of the Honourable the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister with Bishop

Muzorewa, Cape Town, 28 December 1979

Mr Flower: We have hard evidence that Mugabe was forced into acceptance of the cease-fire agreement by Machel. It was therefore not a genuine acceptance which he would feel obligated to uphold. The most that we can accept of him is lip service to the conditions (of the Lancaster House Settlement). Mugabe is expected to violate the agreement at will. Tongogara was the only individual in ZANLA with the capacity to make a cease-fire implementation effective. The personal relationship between Mugabe and Machel is most significant. We were told that the Security Council resolution repealing sanctions against Zimbabwe/Rhodesia was initially sponsored by Machel. There is every indication that Machel wants to normalize relations with Zimbabwe/Rhodesia in respect of border-posts, traffic and travel between the two countries, trade, etc. In our speculation as to the reason for Machel's position we have come up with two possibilities. He is perhaps assured that his protégé, Mugabe, will win the elections, or he had no option but to support peaceful resolution because of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia's effective raids into Mocambique, shortage of food, transport difficulties, irritation over ZANLA presence and the additional burden this places on the limited capacity of Mocambique—all this may have contributed to pressuring Mugabe into acceptance.

Bishop Muzorewa: We can win the elections with hard work and continued assistance from South Africa. We are called upon to double our efforts of the previous time. We need more funds to compete with the Patriotic Front which is receiving almost unlimited amounts from the Russians... Mugabe is my worst political threat. We do not have real concern for Nkomo. His reputation has faded over the years especially in Mashonaland where 80 per cent plus of the population live. He does not even command complete support of the Matabeles.

Mr Flower: The British have always wanted Nkomo as political leader of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, primarily because of the increased prospect of retaining President Kaunda's and other Commonwealth support. This stems from a longstanding personal relationship between Nkomo and Kaunda. The British are not really interested in Mugabe's leadership. Nkomo separately would be very much confined to his Matabele tribal base. Mugabe, on the other hand, if he campaigns on his own, will erode support from the Bishop's party...

The Prime Minister: Mugabe is reported as saying the presence of South African troops in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia is one of the stumbling blocks in the peace effort. I want you, Bishop Muzorewa, to tell me whether our presence is an embarrassment for you in the political campaign. If it is you must tell me in which case our men will be withdrawn.

Bishop Muzorewa: Definitely not. I have already dealt with the issue in public. I appeal to you Mr Prime Minister, to leave it to us to deal with the issue. We want you, we need you. It is a matter of life and death for us...

General Walls: The British are completely happy with the arrangement. Mrs Thatcher, Lord Carrington, Governor Soames and the deputy Governor (Sir Anthony Duff) are all aware of the South African presence and the extent of the presence. The British will continue to say that there are no South African troops in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia apart from those at Beit Bridge. It is not their purpose to purge our security forces to determine whether South Africans are among the Zimbabwe/Rhodesia forces. The British have asked me to convey to you their desire for the same kind of electoral help that South Africa gave in the previous election. They want to determine from you the manner in which they should direct the request. There will be partly monitoring [sic] but only from a distance. Some of the monitors know about the actual situation

and will tacitly condone our arrangement. There is no real danger that the British will yield to the pressures of our opponents on the understanding that we have reached and the assurances they have given us in this matter.

The Prime Minister: I have a country and an electorate to whom I have responsibilities.

General Walls: No Sir, we need you. We are not able to do the job without you. The British government has taken the decision to be open about the issue, namely that South Africa protects its own interests. The British accept that. They have actually asked me to clear the wording of a proposed statement on the issue with you. The suggested wording is:

'At the request of the Government of South Africa, the Governor agreed that a unit of the South African Defence Force should continue to be stationed on Rhodesian territory, uniquely for the purpose of defending Beit Bridge.'

Subsequently amended by the British government to read:

'South African forces are present, with the Governor's agreement, at Beit Bridge for the sole purpose of helping to ensure the protection of the bridge, which is the essential communications link between South Africa, Rhodesia and Zambia.'

The Prime Minister: I agree with the proposed statement. If there is any possibility that our presence may become a political embarrassment and an impediment in the peace agreement we should remove ourselves in a manner and in circumstances that can be determined by us. Would it not be better to withdraw some units to our side and maintain a readiness?