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Visit to US Policy

Extract from Record of Meeting between P.M. and
President Carter, Washington 17. 12. 79 (Pt II)

Rhodesia

The Prime Minister asked the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary to explain to the President the position reached in the Lancaster House Conference. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the Conference had cleared all the major hurdles. But the final hurdle was proving the most difficult. The conference was sticking on the question of assembly areas between the time the ceasefire was declared and the holding of the election. Broadly speaking the areas controlled by the Patriotic Front, and consequently their assembly areas, were around the outside edge of the country. The Patriotic Front wanted assembly areas nearer the centre. Also they were anxious not to be surrounded by the Rhodesian Security Forces. We had thought it right to locate the Patriotic Front assembly areas in areas where they were already. The British assessment that there were

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17/18,000 members of the Patriotic Front in Rhodesia. This suggested that 15 assembly areas was about right. Moreover since the British Government would be responsible for feeding and housing them, it would be difficult to take on a greater number.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he had been surprised at the Patriotic Front's unwillingness to accept. The reason probably was that they saw political advantage in moving closer to the centre. The British compromise proposal consisted:-

- (a) of offering the Patriotic Front one additional assembly area nearer the centre of the country; and
- (b) taking advantage of the fact that the Patriotic Front's claim to have 35,000 guerrillas in the country was clearly unrealistic, of saying that if our assessment of the numbers was wrong, the Governor would reconsider the number of assembly areas.

There was a good chance that these offers would do the trick. President Michael had been extremely helpful and had told Mr. Mugabe that he could not continue the struggle from Mozambique territory. President Kaunda had told Mr Nkomo to sign and Mr. Nkomo clearly wished to do so. President Nyerere had been more equivocal. Mr. Mugabe did not wish to sign but was under great pressure. The situation looked promising but throughout the negotiations it had proved difficult to bring the Patriotic Front to the point of decision. It had frequently been necessary to issue ultimata while denying it. The sending of Lord Soames to Salisbury had been the final ultimatum: the Patriotic Front knew that they risked getting left behind in the preparations for the election. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he would be misleading the President if he gave the impression that even after a ceasefire the situation would be other than very uneasy. There was a strong risk that the Patriotic Front in the event would not assemble in their assigned areas. If so the

/Rhodesian

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Rhodesian Security Forces could not be expected to ignore the situation. It was for these reasons that it was so urgent to hold the election. The President asked whether Bishop Muzorewa was genuinely opposed to any extension in the number of assembly areas or whether he regarded that as bargaining cards. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that it was a bit of both. On the whole he thought that the amended British position was fair. The Prime Minister commented that Bishop Muzorewa and his colleagues had throughout the negotiations done whatever had been asked of them. He had given up the post of Prime Minister and agreed to hold a new election a few months after having won one. Mr. Vance asked whether there would be a problem over the infiltration of Patriotic Front guerrillas during the period between the ceasefire and the election. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that he hoped that it would be possible to persuade President Michel and Kaunda to stop it. It was true that even if they agreed to do so a good deal of infiltration would continue. None the less there was no case for an expansion of the number of areas at present.

The President asked whether the British Government had ever approached the Soviet Government for help. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that the Soviet Union had throughout been very unhelpful. He had discussed the problem with Gromyko whose attitude had been hostile. The Russians and the Romanians were both supplying arms to the Patriotic Front. Trouble in the area suited them very well. Mr. Brzezinski queried the reference to the Romanians. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary confirmed it. (News of the Romanian involvement clearly came as a surprise to Mr. Brzezinski.)

The Prime Minister said that throughout the conference the tension in the relation^{ship} between Mr Nkomo and Mr. Mugabe had been obvious. They had however decided not to break up the Patriotic Front at least while they were in London. It was difficult to predict what would happen when they returned to Rhodesia. In any case the British Government intended to go

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CONFIDENTIAL

-4-

ahead. She believed that they would get through. Lord Soames' task would not be easy. It had been essential to send someone with a powerful personality. The Governor would have little material support to fall back on.

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