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cc Martin Set

cc Home Office

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

22 September, 1980

Dear George,

South Africa and Sanctions

When the Prime Minister met the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence yesterday evening about another matter, Lord Carrington took the opportunity to raise the question of the line we should take in the UN on the proposal of the UN Arms Embargo Committee for tightening up the existing arms embargo against South Africa.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that it was clear that, for electoral reasons, the Americans were going to go as far as they possibly could towards agreeing with the proposal. The position of the French was uncertain. M. Francois-Poncet was being robust in private, and the Embargo Committee's proposal contained clauses on which the French might continue to place reservations. But there were others on which they might give way, and the fact was that hitherto they had tended to follow the Americans' line. We would go on trying to get the Americans and French to resist the proposal, but we had to recognise that we might not succeed and then we should have to take the very difficult decision whether to veto alone or not. He knew, for example, that the Secretaries of State for Industry and Trade were very concerned about any extension of the arms embargo to embrace the supply of computers and four-wheel drive vehicles to the South African police, as was recommended in paragraph 6 of the Embargo Committee's proposal. But if the UK vetoed alone on these relatively limited issues which the present proposal raised, we might well wreck our whole strategy for dealing with the much bigger and much more important question of general economic sanctions against South Africa. If we vetoed alone any resolution based on the Embargo Committee's proposal, this might well be taken by the Americans and French as a signal that they could shelter behind us and let us veto alone a resolution introducing general economic sanctions. It was very doubtful whether we should let ourselves be singled out in responding to the present proposal for tightening the arms embargo. We should certainly not veto all the recommendations in the proposal, and even to veto a single clause could wreck our broader strategy. Above all we must prevent the introduction of general economic sanctions against South Africa.

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After a brief discussion the Prime Minister said that she agreed that we should not veto alone on the relatively limited matter of the proposal to tighten the arms embargo and we should do all we could to prevent a situation coming about where we were isolated. The most recent telegrams which she had seen over the weekend gave slight cause for greater optimism.

I am sending copies of this letter to John Wiggins (HM Treasury), Ian Ellison (Department of Industry), Richard Dykes (Department of Employment), Brian Norbury (Ministry of Defence) Stuart Hampson (Department of Trade), Julian West (Department of Energy) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

Yours  
love,

Alfred Whittam

G G H Walden, Esq  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

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