

SUBJECT

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RECORD OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF CAMEROON ON WEDNESDAY, 21 APRIL, 1982, AT 1200 AT 10 DOWNING STREET

Present:- .

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| Prime Minister | HE M. Ahmadou Ahidjo GCMG |
| Mr Cranley Onslow, MP | M. Paul Dontsop |
| The Rt Hon Neil Marten MP | M. Bello Bouba Maigari |
| Mr Peter Rees QC MP | M. Joseph Charles Doumba |
| Sir Leonard Allinson KCVO CMG | M. Albert Ngome Kome |
| Mr Brian Sparrow | M. Joseph Ekedji Samnik |
| Mr Christopher MacRae | |
| Mr John Coles | |

The Prime Minister said that it was too long since the President had last visited London. We had been trying to increase the number of ministerial visits/^{recently} in order to strengthen bilateral relations. We were conscious of the respect in which the President was held as a statesman throughout Africa, not to mention his role as the architect of independent Cameroon. We also realised the importance which the Non-Aligned Movement attached to his views.

President Ahidjo thanked the Prime Minister for her welcome which reflected the excellent relations of friendship and co-operation binding the two countries. He wanted these links to be deepened and diversified. He was well aware of the growing interest shown by the UK in Cameroon, reflected in recent offers of aid and credit, and hoped that his visit would consolidate this trend. There were a certain number of projects to be discussed; he trusted that his Minister of Economy would be able to go over these in detail with the British Minister for Trade. Mr Rees stated that HMG had offered £10m as a capital aid grant, as well as £30m of ECGD-backed commercial credit. An agreed list of projects was being prepared and he hoped it would be possible for this to be signed shortly. The President remarked that although cultural co-operation with the UK was already quite intensive, he would like it to increase, not least since English was one of Cameroon's official languages. In the past, a Mixed Commission had existed to settle any bilateral problems but this had not met since 1975. He hoped it could be revived.

/The Prime Minister

The Prime Minister said that she would be interested to know the President's views on Cameroon's development and on African problems generally. President Ahidjo replied that Cameroon's development was along the lines of 'planned liberalism'. A 5th plan had just started; this was not rigid, but merely an indicative plan covering both development projects of priority, and public and private investment. Top priority was given to agriculture. His government aimed to improve the quantity and quality of Cameroon's agricultural output and were particularly interested in increasing the local transformation of agricultural products. The international economic crisis had hit Cameroon, as it had other African nations. But the fact that her agriculture was so strong had cushioned her from the worst effects of the recession. Now, the country aimed at complete agricultural self-sufficiency. (In answer to a question from the Prime Minister, he explained that there were still some products, particularly wheat, which had to be imported.) For some years, Cameroon had been a modest net oil exporter. Production was increasing. She also had as yet unexploited gas reserves. This was a boon to the development programme. But his government did not want to make too much of their oil prospects, since the reserves were not great and they did not want to encourage Cameroonians to turn away from the real and lasting basis of their economy: agriculture. The Prime Minister commented that Cameroon was evidently developing steadily and was politically stable; so we had no difficulty in recommending British businessmen to invest there. However, they sometimes asked about protection for their investment, so she was glad to hear that a text was under discussion on this subject, which should be helpful. The President replied that he hoped it could be signed during his visit. His side had accepted the text in English: only the translation into French remained to be cleared.

The Prime Minister said that Britain was glad about the general reduction in oil prices. Nevertheless, she thought that the world economy would be slow to climb out of recession. Agreeing, President Ahidjo said that the economic crisis afflicting the world was particularly damaging to young countries. He knew they could count on the UK, as a responsible major power, to help find solutions. He trusted that the UK would be able, in world forums, to bring more order and balance into the world economic scene, especially in relation to the Third World. The Prime Minister mentioned that Britain had hoped that all its contribution to the IDA could be used but had to date observed the convention that since the USA had not made its maximum contribution,

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ours could not be completely taken up. However, the Government had recently decided that Britain need not be bound by the agreement on proportionality and our maximum contribution was therefore being put at the disposition of the IDA. We hoped that others would follow our lead.

President Ahidjo expressed his satisfaction that the UK had contributed so impressively in the last few years to the liberation of Africa and paid particular tribute to Britain's defusing of the Zimbabwe situation. He hoped that the UK, as a leading member of the Western Contact Group, would also be able to help find an early solution over Namibia, as well as some eventual remedies to the scourge of apartheid.

The Prime Minister remarked that HMG followed events in Africa with great concern. Consequently, we were none too happy about what might happen to the OAU under the forthcoming Libyan Presidency. We had been deeply saddened by the recent military take-over in Ghana: for we thought that President Limann had been making real efforts to put his country back on its feet and had been trying to help through the IMF. Over Namibia, we had been most grateful for the help and understanding shown by Cameroon towards the efforts of the Western Contact Group in finding a solution. But this search seemed likely to take longer than we had all hoped. Mr Onslow explained that the current sticking point was over the exact voting arrangements. It was SWAPO who was holding this up. It would be tragic if the momentum towards a solution was lost because of difficulties over points of detail like this. Anything that Cameroon could do to persuade SWAPO to agree to a generally acceptable voting system, would be welcome. The Prime Minister added that we had all hoped that the UN Peace Plan could start to be implemented in 1982. It would be a step backwards if this proved impossible because of quibbling over such relatively minor details. Our American friends were, of course, keen that at the same time as the UN plan was implemented, the Cuban presence in Angola should be reduced. This would certainly make things much easier for the USA, as well as others. President Ahidjo replied that he greatly hoped that a final agreement could be reached soon. Much progress had been made; and the Contact Group had contributed greatly to this. A compromise must be found in just the same way as it had been in the case of Zimbabwe (for which Britain deserved great credit). Over the link with Angola and Cuba, he thought that we should not be too Manichean. There existed a vicious circle: South Africa attacked Angola,

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who then had need of the Cuban presence to defend itself, whereupon the South Africans justified their attacks because of the Cuban presence. Personally he, like many Africans thought that the solution of the Namibia problem would help considerably. Although he did not know the Angolan leaders personally, he did not believe they wanted a permanent Cuban presence. Once the Namibia problem was resolved, Angola would be glad to have the Cuban troops withdrawn; so perhaps the Americans saw this the wrong way round? The Prime Minister commented that what we hoped for was a reduction of the Cuban forces in parallel with, or simultaneously with, the process of independence for Namibia. At all events, Britain was doing all it could to promote a solution. Some people were impatient with the time this was taking, in comparison with the Zimbabwe negotiations. But there we had been in sole charge, although we had informed and consulted as many of our friends as possible about what we were doing, determined not only that Zimbabwe's independence should be total, but also that it would start its new life with as many friends as possible to help in its economic development.

Turning to the Falkland Islands crisis, the Prime Minister said that she knew that the African countries had an agreement that established boundaries (which might not always - as Cameroon knew all too well - be very clearly delimited) should not be changed by force. The Argentinians had just done precisely that, whilst negotiations were still going on about the matter. If this rule over boundaries, which was accepted the world over, were to be overturned, it would be a recipe for chaos. Many other countries and islands around the world would live in fear of invasion. There was an important matter of principle at stake; so we remained firm in our position. The President replied that as an African nation, Cameroon had not wished to take up a position on the substance of the dispute. But on the Argentine action, they disapproved strongly of the use of force to modify frontiers. Changes of this sort had to be carried out by peaceful bilateral negotiations. The Prime Minister replied that that was exactly what we were still trying to do. With that in view, the Foreign Secretary would be flying to the United States tomorrow for further talks.

She asked for the President's views on other African problems, such as Chad and the Western Sahara. The President replied that both were very complicated issues about which he was personally pessimistic. Chad had broken up as a country because its various factions had disagreed. Both the main sides must now come together to decide on the

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future of their country. He disapproved of the use of force: as usual, it would in the end solve nothing. Nor did Cameroon particularly support one side or another in the present quarrel; the latter simply had to talk together to overcome their differences. As to the Western Sahara, whilst he approved of the UN principles on self-determination, he did not agree with the seating of the SADR in the OAU: since the people had not been consulted, this was inconsistent with the notion of self-determination. Evidently, this problem was capable of bringing about a war between Morocco and Algeria, which would be a disaster for Africa. Once again, he was convinced that the matter had to be solved by patient negotiation. But there were difficulties. For example, on the proposed referendum, no one even knew the real size of the population. He thought it was now up to Morocco to offer a compromise solution. Personally, he wondered whether autonomy within a wider Morocco might not be the answer; however, he had not aired this idea formally inside the OAU.

The meeting finished at 1255, after which the Minister of State for Overseas Development and the Cameroonian Minister for Economy and Planning signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the use of the £10m capital aid credit.

A. J. C.

23 April, 1982

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