CHAPTER IV

THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION AND THE POLICY OF COMMUNICATION

When Richard Nixon assumed the Presidency of the United States in 1969, South Africa was not an issue for the Americans. The previous year the world had witnessed the Tet offensive in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. The former converted many Americans to the view that war could not be won. The foreign policy priorities being elsewhere, South Africa did not figure prominently on the American agenda.

Nixon who was known for his anticommunism was ready to recognise and exploit the opportunities offered by the changing international environment with policies that would serve the American interest in peace and his own ambition to create an image of a diplomatist.\(^1\) Henry Kissinger, his first National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State writes that Nixon wanted to be remembered as a peacemaker.\(^2\) The role of Kissinger himself in the conduct of American foreign

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policy during the next few years was second to none. He observes the situation in 1969:

When I came into office with the Nixon Administration, we were really at the end of a period of American foreign policy in which a redesign would have been necessary to do no matter who took over .... (O)ur problem was how to orient America in this world and how to do it in such a way that we could avoid the oscillations between excessive moralism and excessive pragmatism, with excessive concern with power and total rejection of power which have been fairly characteristic of American policy. This was the basic goal we set ourselves.[3]

The aim of the United States was to maintain the balance of power and seek to build upon it a more constructive future. The consequence of this thinking was the inauguration of detente or the relaxation of tension with the Soviet Union. What was envisaged was an order in which neither the United States nor the Soviet Union sought primacy, but sharing of responsibility with other nations for controlling violence and economic disruption in a fundamentally stable world.4

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To the United States detente arose from the recognition of two factors. The first was the popular desire to limit American involvement in world affairs because the country was tired of the Cold War, was affected by the oil crisis and was economically vulnerable. The second was the Soviet Union's achievement of strategic parity with the United States. "Detente was not so much a rejection of the Cold War but tactic, a continuation of the Cold War by other means until the pendulum would swing back and the United States could once more assert its power internationally".5

The Nixon Doctrine, revealing the new thinking asserted that the United States was unwilling to be dragged into future Vietnams. It would maintain its world role and some of its accumulated security commitments by assisting others in defending themselves through supply of arms and other forms of military aid, but no manpower.6 In short, it represented a reversal of the American method of the "do it ourselves" world peace. In practice Nixon was not prepared to base American policy decisions totally


on the assumption that the Soviet Union had ceased to be a revolutionary power. The Nixonian ground rules were designed "to assure not only the safety of the American interests in a still incomplete world but also the continued primacy of the United States". 7

It is in this global context of American foreign policy that the specific policy of the United States in the nineteen seventies towards South Africa has to be examined. For the United States the dominant issue was its conflict with the Soviet Union, one which extended to all parts of the world. Being a global conflict the success or failure of American performance even in remote regions of the world could affect the worldwide equilibrium. Therefore even conflict in a remote region like Southern Africa was to be a concern for the United States.

On its assumption of office neither Africa nor South Africa figured among the priorities of the Nixon administration. One observer characterised American policy towards Africa until then as one of "benign neglect". Several constraints had led the United States to adopt a low keyed approach towards Africa and as a consequence the

emphasis on stability and guided change could be seen as a consistent theme in American foreign policy from the Eisenhower days to the days of the Nixon administration. 8

Kissinger was familiar with South Africa and had visited it in the mid sixties. Although he thought that the situation was horrible, he believed that there was not much the United States could do about it. Like some foreign policy analysts he was reluctant to recommend moral crusades. His concerns had been more regarding fascism and communism, not racism. 9 Peace could be achieved, as he believed, not by either moral convictions or practical wisdom but by a combination of both. 10

If South Africa was accorded any importance at all by the administration, it was not because of the recognition of the fact that it was a volatile region with several


problems, but because it had the potential of becoming a region where the United States would have to confront the Soviet Union. For this reason there was the need for a review of the style and substance of American policy towards South Africa.

But before it had the time to chalk out a policy for South Africa, the administration had to encounter an issue involving that country early in 1969. This was on the Air Transport Agreement between the two countries. In 1947, before the National Party had come to power in South Africa, the United States had granted the South African Airways landing rights in New York with the exact routes to be determined later. In the late sixties South Africa came forward to claim its side of the bargain. The United States was faced with the choice either to honour the commitment or put to a risk, continued air service between the two countries. As Frank E. Loy, the United States Deputy Assistant Secretary for Transportation and Communication put it, the Administration concluded that the United States would gain nothing by reneging, and that in the absence of direct air service, the traffic between the two countries would be shifted to the carriers of other countries that served South Africa.
On the other hand, by honouring American commitments it would also safeguard its economic interests. 11

In January 1969, the Civil Aeronautics Board and President Nixon received letters from the American Committee on Africa requesting that the South African Airways case be reopened. Robert Ellsworth, Assistant to the President replied that it did not appear within the President's power to reopen the case at that moment. 12 This was by taking into account the fact that it was in keeping with the general rule that the grant to a foreign air carrier, of permits or certificates of public convenience and necessity could not be recalled after the time for reconsideration of the action had expired and the authorization had become effective. 13 The Civil Aeronautics Board also replied that it did not deem it


13. The South African Airways had by then started operating on the route and the period for reconsideration expired on November 29, 1968.
appropriate to take further action. Justifying the action, Frank E. Loy stated:

We do this because we believe it is important to keep open the lines of communication, in order to continue to bring to bear a constructive influence, and to keep in touch with the many people in South Africa, both white and non-white, who question the direction of apartheid policy. Moreover, we do not believe that the system of racial repression in South Africa would be changed for the better, if we were to follow a policy of economic quarantine or isolation.[14]

Thus, even before formulating any concrete policy towards South Africa, the administration thought that it could not afford to cut its economic links. Congressman Ogden B. Reid criticizing the move said that the permit was granted in 1947 before apartheid had become the national policy of the South African government and that no route had been defined. He saw no justification for granting any route especially the most direct one between New York and Johannesburg to an airline operated by a government intent on perpetuating injustice. He also expressed concern that the airline would extend its discriminatory policies towards United States citizens.[15]

15. Statement by Ogden B. Reid before the Subcommittee on Africa, Ibid., p.73.
At the same time statements emanating from the administration indicated that the United States was committed to certain American goals. William P. Rogers, the Secretary of State, in a statement before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations stated:

Progress in the southern part of Africa also remains a vital goal of the new African states and one with which we basically sympathise. Self-determination, majority rule with minority rights, and human equality are the product of our own practical experience and our practical idealism; it will be our policy to support them in Africa as well. Our dedication to these goals is the result of our history, a product of our search for basic answers to human aspirations.[16]

At the United Nations in July 1969 the United States opposed a Security Council resolution on Southern Rhodesia which called for the extension of economic sanctions to South Africa and Portugal. The American representative Charles Yost said that such an extension would not be productive in dealing with the situation. As he put it, sanctions on neighbouring countries simply because they had not been adequately or successfully adopted to Rhodesia itself would seem to the United States

as a dubious course introducing additional grave complications into a situation already complicated enough.\textsuperscript{17} These were the positions of the administration on South Africa.

It was only by April 1969 that Kissinger asked for an interdepartmental review of American policy towards Southern Africa. Accordingly, a National Security Council Group for Africa consisting of the representatives of the Departments of State and Defence, the Central Intelligence Agency and assisted by other Departments and agencies was constituted. All this did not mean that Southern Africa had moved to an important position in United States policy concerns. On the other hand, it was only one among the eighty five such reviews of American policy throughout the world ordered by Kissinger. His concern was managing the central relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union. Southern Africa concerned him primarily as an area where American policy was drifting unproductively under the influence of a client oriented State Department. Policy in the area had to be put in order and made more

realistic so that top decision makers could concentrate on important things without distraction.\textsuperscript{18}

Much about the inner workings of the Group comes from Roger Morris, Senior Staff Assistant to Kissinger on the National Security Council (NSC).\textsuperscript{19} He states that the instinctive response to Southern Africa in the administration had been to avoid as much as possible any thinking about the harsh questions it posed. Policy in the nineteen sixties had amounted to the shifting sum of contradictory bureaucratic instincts pursued on an ad hoc basis. As a result the Department of State soothened pressures in the United Nations and among its Black African clients by lauding the imposition of Rhodesian sanctions and by rhetorical ostracisms of the White regimes. On the other hand the CIA had very close professional ties with the anticommunist security services of the White minority governments, the Commerce Department encouraged profitable trade with those countries, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) ran a


space station which was closed to Blacks and the navy planned refuelling stops at Cape Town. Morris says that there was no policy, only policies. Presidents and their Secretaries of State declared American abhorrence of minority regimes. 20 What Kissinger wanted was to rectify this hypocrisy.

Morris states that two factors unfortunately limited realistic option. Firstly, no President, particularly a conservative like Nixon could be expected in 1969 to abandon material American interests in the region. Secondly, if the genuine (as well as public) purpose of policy were to be peaceful change towards majority rule, experience had shown that outside coercion had only hardened the unity and repressiveness of the White minorities. An acceptable policy therefore had to rest on the premises of accepting the expedient American stakes in the tyrannies by using that presence wherever possible to encourage racial progress. 21

While the initial working of the Group was going on, the Fifth Summit Conference of East and Central African states was being held in Lusaka, Zambia.

21. Ibid., p.110.
The summit attended by thirteen states issued a manifesto on Southern Africa better known as the Lusaka Manifesto.²² In a conciliatory tone it offered South Africa a reasonable timetable for majority rule, provided, it publicly committed itself to introducing it. There was a passionately reasoned condemnation of all aspects of racism and racial segregation. Perhaps the greatest significance of the document was its tone as a manifesto for peaceful and not violent change in Southern Africa. Since no response to it came from the administration, Senator Edward Kennedy called on it to make clear to the signatories that the United States supported their position and that it opposed racial discrimination in Southern Africa just as Americans opposed it in the United States.²³

Although originally scheduled for completion in two weeks, the NSC review was not forwarded to the Review Group until late November 1969.²⁴ The text of the National Security Study Memorandum 39 (NSSM 39) as it was known, opened with a brief review of American interests


²⁴. Roger Morris, n.19, p.111.

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and policy in Southern Africa, emphasizing specific measures initiated inside and outside the United States by previous administrations in response to the outbreak of the national liberation struggle in Southern Africa. Then it compared American policy towards Southern Africa with British and French policies in an attempt to show that the United States government took more steps against the White minority regimes than others. It mentioned the global realities the United States had to face while formulating policy including the strategic importance of Southern Africa, military facilities for the United States in the context of the Indochina war, significant investment and balance of trade advantages and South Africa's status as the major gold supplier.  

The study highlighted the dilemma arising out of the American desire to reconcile conflicting interests in the area. To keep the problem in perspective the NSSM elucidated the objectives of United States policy in Southern Africa. They included the effort to improve American standing in Black Africa and internationally on the racial issue, to minimize the likelihood of escalation of violence in the area and risk of American involvement.

minimize the opportunities for the Soviet Union and China to exploit the racial issue in Southern Africa for propaganda advantage and to gain political influence with Black governments and liberation movements, to encourage moderation of the current rigid racial and colonial policies of White regimes and to protect economic, scientific and strategic interests and opportunities in the region including the orderly marketing of South Africa's gold.26

The existence of areas of agreement and controversy within the administration prompted the NSC to define them and arrive at policy recommendations. It was argued that American interests in the area though economically and politically important were not vital to United States security. Nevertheless, the United States was interested in encouraging the conflicting parties to solve the racial problems of Southern Africa because they had become major issues with international repercussions. Moreover, the United States was concerned about the increasing Soviet and Chinese influence in the region and the possibility of superpower confrontation if the problem became critical.27

26. Ibid., pp.24-25.
27. Ibid., p.25.
On examination of prevailing American policy, the NSC insisted that "consultation" was preferable to "confrontation". Even previous administrations had maintained a strong view that force would not bring about constructive change. They had also opposed attempts to impose punitive economic sanctions against South Africa because they would have required American military involvement for their implementation. They thought that sanctions would not succeed because South Africa's major trading partners were unlikely to impose sanctions. Moreover, such action would result in the hardening of the positions of colonial and settler regimes thereby closing the avenues to any possible compromise.

After taking into consideration all these factors the NSC proceeded to classify policy alternatives for the administration. Five policy options were specified. After giving a premise for each option it outlined the general policy posture, illustrated by some operational examples and concluded with a list of pros and cons of adopting that specific option.

One must not expect to find in NSSM 39 a detailed description of the types of action which would be consistent with a specific scenario for operational action. They were satisfied with simply mentioning a few examples to clarify policy positions under consideration.[28]

At the final meeting of the NSC in December 1969 the five policy options were submitted for discussion.

Option 1: Closer association with the White regime in order to better protect the United States economic and strategic interests.

Option 2: Closer association with South Africa in an effort to persuade it to reform the political system.

Option 3: Strictly limited cooperation with South Africa in an attempt to safeguard American interests while at the same time adopting a posture acceptable to world opinion.

Option 4: Dissociation from South Africa and closer relations with the Black nationalists.

Option 5: Dissociation from both sides in an attempt to limit American involvement.

Since Option 3 was just a continuation of the policies inherited from the two previous Democratic administrations it appeared doubtful whether the Nixon administration would choose it. Option 3 was criticized for its precarious blend of moralistic public rhetoric and limited quiet diplomatic appeal. It did not entail giving up American material interests and was regarded both by African and White regimes as expedient and hypocritical. Options 1, 4 and 5 called for either total American disengagement or total American support of one party in
the conflict. But they had their limitations. Firstly, the Soviet Union and China were providing all kinds of support to the liberation movements and exploiting the Southern African situation to their advantage. Secondly, liberal and Afro-American leaders in the United States had without success urged previous administrations to cease doing business with White minority regimes. It was also inconceivable that the administration which had the support of industrialists, northern conservatives and Southern Democrats would side with the cause of the liberation movements. Such a policy would have done harm to the lucrative American trade and investment in South Africa and Angola as well as cut off access to the minerals of the region and to the Indian Ocean and the Azores. 29

It was the assumption of Option 1 that the United States could have no significant impact on events in South Africa and that the political costs of underwriting the status quo would not be excessive. Morris says that the option was based on a paper given to Nixon in the spring of 1969 by Dean Acheson, former Secretary of State who had argued that condemnation of the racist regimes was an example of excessive moralism in diplomacy. 30

But neither the State Department nor the NSC believed that the United States could morally remain uncommitted. It is a point to be underlined, for contrary to popular perception the Nixon administration took the ethical argument very seriously. 31 Morris reveals that Kissinger briefed Nixon with a special paper on "Domestic and Moral Factors in Southern Africa" which argued in philosophical terms that racial tyranny was the most odious for being inescapable at birth and that American policy towards White regimes could well become a volatile issue in American politics. 32

Options 4 and 5 were drafted to throw into greater relief the contending arguments of the first three, not to promote discussion of more radical alternatives. What remained were Options 2 and 3, and it was around them that the final discussion revolved. 33 As already mentioned Option 3 was more or less what was being followed by previous administrations and was the State Department's preferred option. The Nixon administration did not approve of punitive measures and had little enthusiasm for maintaining existing sanctions. Kissinger believed that


33. Christopher Coker, n.31, pp.21-22.
negative sanctions did not work as an instrument of political influence and had not succeeded in the South African case.\textsuperscript{34}

The elimination of the other options brought the focus on Option 2.\textsuperscript{35} Although the NSC staff did not fully endorse any specific policy option, the more detailed rationale and fuller outline given to Option 2 suggested that they were inclined to favour it. Option 2 proceeded from the following premise:

The whites are here to stay and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them. There is no hope for the blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence .... We can through selective relaxation of our stance toward the white regimes, encourage some modification of their current racial and colonial policies .... Our tangible interests form a basis of our contacts in the region, and these can be maintained at an acceptable political cost.[\textsuperscript{36}]

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p.23.

\textsuperscript{35} The nature of bureaucratic politics prevented the inclusion of a genuine set of options for consideration. This increasingly obscured the contradictions of Option 2 and eventually made its very inclusion the central issue. See Roger Morris, n.19, p.113.

\textsuperscript{36} Mohammed A. El-Khawas and Barry Cohen, eds., n.25, p.105.
The "Tar Baby Option" as the document came to be known, was subsequently leaked and published in full. It assumed that American interests in the region were "important" rather than "vital" and that the United States should not be seen publicly supportive of apartheid. It embodied the crucial "realpolitik" calculation.  

Towards the end of 1969, Kissinger sent Nixon the standard decision memorandum, the most important document of the eight month process which ran into hundreds of pages. It recommended that the United States maintain a lower profile at the United Nations, a less doctrinaire approach, no mutual problems with South Africa, reduced pressure on the Portuguese and increased aid of some $5 million to the Black states of the region. On the remaining operational issues inherited from the previous administration, Nixon took the decision to relax the arms embargo and extend trade promotion of American firms exporting to South Africa. Thus the Nixon administration subordinated political concerns like human rights to tangible interests like economic and strategic interests. Eventually the Department of State and outside liberal constituencies lost their primacy and position to the

Departments of Defence and Commerce as well as outside business interests. 38

The acceptance of Option 2 by the administration also rested on other things. Kissinger formulated his views from the prevailing situation in Southern Africa -- the happenings in Southern Rhodesia where the Black nationalist movement was divided, the slackening of guerilla activity and the flourishing economy. Moreover the affluent apartheid regime had militarized South Africa into an invulnerable fortress. 39 There was nothing in sight to show the end of White rule. Kissinger was also convinced from his encounter with the State Department that the current policy was unproductive. For his part Nixon approved the option because it was new, opposition to it was weak, and Kissinger recommended it. 40 There is ample evidence to prove that Kissinger undermined the established bureaucracies to his committee system. Scholars have pointed out to the demise of the State Department as an essential and vital policymaking unit in the foreign policy process by the emergence of agencies

40. Roger Morris, n.19, p.119-120.
which eroded its powers. Nixon ignored the established bureaucracy by making Kissinger a supersecretary of foreign affairs whose decisions were valued more than those of the former.

The United States wanted South Africa to be the dominant power in the region which would have closer relations with its Black neighbours. This was essential for the relaxation of tensions, the avoidance of violence and the protection of American interests. On its part the United States would provide the Black states with aid and encourage South Africa to do the same. The United States would have to accept political arrangements short of majority rule. As Edgar Lockwood, Director of the Washington Office on Africa saw it:

The Communist states would make hay out of the US position, but this position provides a chance to expand ... investments and trade while at least preserving ... strategic, economic and scientific interests.[43]

The belief that such an approach would induce "modification" stood in odd contrast with the document's later assertion that "the current thrust of South Africa's domestic policy does not involve any basic change in the racial segregation system".

But beneath this apparent double think what mattered was that Option 2 dictated a strategy ... of recognizing, dealing and discreetly supporting the established power holders in South Africa. Tar Baby was principally designed to serve American interests rather than preserve white rule as such, but in circumstances the latter was seen as a necessary corollary of the former.[44]

The Nixon administration believed that Option 2 was an improvement over previous policies. It rested on the appraisal that the Kennedy-Johnson policy with its precarious blend of moralistic public rhetoric and limited quiet appeal had been a complete failure.45 It revealed America's and Kissinger's real thinking, by showing total indifference to the legitimate aspirations of the African people. It also showed the cynical lack of concern in marked contrast to the public platitudes and rhetoric

44. D.J. Goldsworthy, n.37, p.224.
Roger Morris states that "in retrospect it was a disaster, naive in concept, practically impossible for the government to execute and thus a ready cover for pursuing the most reactionary and short sighted US interests in the region".  

Although NSSM 39 remained a secret document until it was eventually leaked, American policy towards Southern Africa was shaped and guided on the basis of it. What the administration declared publicly was the formulation of a new policy. This policy was to be based on the grounds that closer ties with South Africa would encourage moderation of its racial policies and that increased pressure on South Africa would not in any case change the policy there. The advocate of this new policy of "communication" was David Newsom, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs who stated:

We believe that appropriate channels of communication and dialogue must be kept open. We believe contact with the outside world will help the nonwhite majorities and will help bring the white rulers to an understanding of the need for a change in their policies.[48]


47. Roger Morris, n.19, p.111.

This rhetoric served as a cloak for the Pentagon, the Department of Commerce, the NASA, the CIA and hundreds of private interests to continue business as usual while racial confrontation continued as before. Sir Seretse Khama, the President of Botswana was critical of the new policy when he pointed out that peaceful change would not be secured if existing minority ruled situations were allowed to harden and South Africa's outward movement encouraged. Prescribing solutions he stated:

This involves restraining South Africa's outward expansion, eroding the outer edges of the white bastion developing in Southern Africa, driving wedges between its constituent parts, preventing its further consolidation, and maintaining contact and communication with all the forces for change throughout the region. Unless a positive overall strategy is developed along these lines, then communication will slip into acceptance and moral pressure will be reduced to mere rhetoric.[49]

In January 1970 President Nixon made a decision embodied in the NSC Memorandum to increase communication

and selective involvement with the White governments. Communication was intended to break away from the appearances of the previous policy and provide a constructive basis for the encouragement of liberalization, beginning with a clear acknowledgement of the persistence of the White government. The result was a South African tilt by the administration, not evident through any policy statement but from operational examples.

It had been United States policy to enforce the arms embargo of 1963 against South Africa. The Nixon administration diluted this with the liberal treatment of equipment which could be used either for military or civilian purposes. Since 1963 there were no known sales of equipment by American aircraft manufacturers to the South African military. However, there had been substantial engine replacement, repair, and other services provided for seven C-130s sold before 1963, averaging in value $3 million a year from 1968 to 1972. Aircraft that were sold to South African commerical consignees were


being used for military purposes. American
multinationals were permitted to sell defence related
equipment, like four IBM computers which were provided to
the South African Department of Defence. The Foxboro
Company of Massachusetts was permitted in 1973 to sell two
large computers to South Africa which were being used to
run a secret uranium enrichment plant near Pretoria.Am
American military aircraft made routine use of the South
African Air Force bases in Waterkloof and Ysterplant as
well as the civil airports of Jan Smuts and Rand in
Transvaal.

Changes were visible in the financial sphere too. In
1970 the United States Export-Import Bank (EXIMBANK)
extended the term of insurance available to finance
exports from South Africa from five to ten years. Medium
term insurance issued in 1970 and 1971 was more
than twice what had been written in the previous four
years. Trade and investment statistics show that they had
indeed been facilitated and encouraged.

52. Edgar Lockwood, n.43, p.65.
54. Edgar Lockwood, n.43, p.66.
55. EXIMBANK is a government agency set up to assist
foreign exports. It provides loans to foreign
borrowers who wish to buy US goods and services.
56. Edgar Lockwood, n.43, p.66.
It became the policy of the Nixon administration to conduct selected exchange programmes with South Africa in all spheres including military. Apart from those of moderate and coloured leaders from South Africa, the significant visits included those of top ranking political and military figures of the South African government. The policy of previous administrations to limit military contacts was broken when private visits by South African officials on military business was permitted. In January 1974 Dr. Cornelius Mulder, the South African Minister for Information met with Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence, Admiral Ray Peet and also Vice President Gerald Ford. In May 1974 the Chief of the South African Defence Force (SADF), Admiral Hugo Biermann met with Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and with J.W. Middendorf, Acting Secretary of Navy.\(^57\)

On the political and diplomatic front, in the United Nations, condemnation of apartheid and South African intransigence over Namibia was replaced by abstentions, and abstentions on resolutions requiring action were replaced by opposition.\(^58\) John G. Hurd, a conservative Texas oilman was appointed the ambassador to South Africa.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., p.67.  
\(^{58}\) South Africa: Time Running Out, n.18, p.352.
In the words of a State Department official he "could be expected to establish a rapport with the South African establishment that his predecessors deliberately avoided".59

Gold, the importance of which was highlighted in NSSM 39, became a factor advantageous to South Africa. Although not meant to help South Africa it turned out to be so. This was the American decision to allow the price of gold to float above $35 an ounce. The decision taken for the deficit financing of the Vietnam war turned out to be advantageous to South Africa because by 1974 the price of gold went up to about $200 an ounce.60 South Africa was also permitted to sell gold to the International Monetary Fund. The decisions gave South Africa substantial insulation against international recession and economic pressure and enabled it to earn some $307 million from gold sales to IMF in the first six months of 1970.61

Nixon and Kissinger believed that they were acting from a position of relative strength and believed in the positive outcome of their policy. The results were otherwise. Despite these measures South Africa did not

59. Willard R. Johnson, n.50, p.22.
60. South Africa: Time Running Out, n.18, p.353.
61. Willard R. Johnson, n.50, p.22.
obtain an important place in American military planning due to certain reasons. The preoccupation with Vietnam and the end of the war there meant that it was unlikely that political capital would be spent on publicly reversing the policy on South Africa. No active concept of a Southern African strategy was imposed and the fundamental strategic priorities of both countries were still no closer. Although Nixon and Kissinger, through some of their actions, suggested to South Africa that there was a change in policy, advantageous to the latter, the American stance in the United Nations where apartheid was being condemned, was disapproved by South Africa. Kissinger expected the South Africans to believe his deeds not his words. Even his broad hints that the position of the American ambassador to the United Nations was irrelevant to policy did not convince the South Africans. For them harsh words undermined whatever influence had been gained by the arms sales.\(^62\) To the South Africans the American bark was worse than the American bite.

The Nixon administration, without revealing actual policy, criticised apartheid through its public statements and called for closer contact to bring about change.

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It publicly stated that there was no threat of communism to the developing countries particularly in Africa because of the lack of unity in the communist world and because it had failed to prove itself to be appealing in the sphere of economic development.\textsuperscript{63} This was in contrast to its secret belief as evident in NSSM 39.

Many Congressmen were critical of American policy. Congressmen Charles Diggs and Lester L. Wolff in a report to the House of Representatives, after a special study mission to Southern Africa, called American policy "schizophrenic". On the one hand the United States was committed to freedom and equality and opposed to tyranny and injustice while on the other, had made an "immoral entangling alliance" with South Africa through its economic, space, aviation and other links. Their report stated:

\begin{quote}
US self-interest is dramatized by the presence in our midst of over 25 million black citizens who are increasingly identifying with their cultural heritage and who are on the threshold of linking up with the goals of the African liberation movement....
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{63} "The Altered Shape of World Power", Address by Elliot Richardson, Under Secretary, Department of State, Department of State Bulletin (Washington DC) 61: 1568, July 14, 1969, p.28.
If it is to be on the side of the vast majority of Africans, our present policies and plans should reflect an enlightened projection and drastic revisions are demanded.[64]

The schizophrenia they talked of was evident during the controversy surrounding the Afro-American tennis player Arthur Ashe who was denied permission to play in South Africa. The administration responded only by saying that it opposed racism and that it was in South Africa's deepest interest to foster foreign contacts and exchanges, not to shut itself off in a sterile isolation. 65

Senior officials in the administration also echoed the same views. William P. Rogers, the Secretary of State, on his visit to Africa said that the United States opposed systems based on racial discrimination in Africa because of America's own heritage and moral principles.


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He pointed out that while there was full agreement on the principle, there were different points of view on how to achieve the results. Following his visit Rogers submitted a statement to President Nixon in which he said that the problems of South Africa were "extremely stubborn, passions were high and no easy solutions" were to be seen. The United States did not believe in severing its relations with South Africa because it would not advance the course it pursued or help the majority of the people. He stated:

We will continue to make clear that our limited governmental activities in South Africa do not represent any acceptance or condoning of its discriminatory system .... At the same time we cannot accept the fatalistic view that only violence can ultimately resolve these issues. Rather we believe that solution lies in the constructive interplay of political, economic and social forces which will inevitably lead to changes.[67]


The new African policy, as Rogers announced, was along the following guidelines. Accordingly the United States emphasized (a) support for self determination rooted in American's own traditions of independence and racial equality, and (b) a desire for more active economic relations. Rogers continued to emphasize that in accordance with these principles the United States had been observing the arms embargo against South Africa and discouraged investments in Namibia so long as it continued to rule the territory. 68

The administration also made efforts to downgrade the importance of Southern African issues. Assistant Secretary Newsom said that they were not as primary as those of the Middle East but related to the problems of long range concern in the developing world. As he saw it, American credibility and attitudes on issues of importance were often more important for its friends than for its detractors. 69


69. "The United Nations, the United States and Africa", Statement by David Newsom, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, n.48, p.419.
In contrast to the administration's attitude, some American multinationals were one step ahead. They were taking steps to bring to public light the issue of employment practices and conditions in South Africa. The Polaroid Corporation sought to challenge the situation by raising the wages of its Black employees between 17% and 33%. It committed a portion of its profit earned in South Africa to education programmes for Blacks and to help create a Black managed company in one or more of the free Black African nations. It attempted to enlist other major American companies with investments in South Africa to take similar action and also decided to withdraw the sale of products which might be used directly or indirectly in enforcing apartheid. 70

Until the Polaroid "experiment" in 1970-71, no international corporation has sought to challenge either the separation or the discrimination and all profited by conforming to them .... The half-measures which Polaroid took were welcome and provided a lead, but are insufficient. And there can be no justification for continued engagement short of provision of full equality ...[71]


The experiment obscured rather than illuminated the role of the administration which had asserted the importance of foreign investment.\(^72\) The Nixon administration left to the corporations to decide for themselves what they should do in South Africa. It did not give its full support to such efforts and depended on the South African government to initiate change.\(^73\) David Newsom, commenting on the experiment said that it was a matter essentially between American business and its employees in the countries of Southern Africa. The Department of State, however, stood ready to counsel with American firms on things that could be done consistent with the laws of the foreign land in which they operated.\(^74\) In his report to Congress in February 1971, Nixon said that the United States would

... do what we can to encourage the white regimes to adopt more generous and more realistic policies toward the needs and aspirations of their black

\(^72\) Christopher Coker n.31, p.82.

\(^73\) The administration did not throw its full support behind the Polaroid experiment. There was no influence on South African labour legislation that finally in November 1977 the experiment had to be abandoned and Polaroid terminated its South African business.

citizens .... However, just as we will not condone the violence to human dignity implicit in apartheid, we cannot associate ourselves with those who call for violent solutions to these problems.... Violence would harden the resistance of the white revolutionaries to evolutionary change.[75]

The Sugar Quota issue featured prominently in American policy during 1971. The quota was a form of direct support or subsidy by the United States government to the South African government. In 1971 both the House and the Senate approved a bill that permitted South Africa to sell over 57,000 tons of sugar (about 6.5% of its crop) for three years in a protected American market at double the world price. The move was regarded as one which reflected American approval of the practice of indentured labour in the South African sugar sector. An attempt to cancel the quota was narrowly defeated in the Senate. Speaking before the House, Representative John Dow said that it was the most appropriate time to discuss the policy of continuing support by economic means to a government which practised apartheid, which was repugnant to the principles and ideals of all Americans.

He added that the racial policies of the South African government had been deplored by "our own officials", but no governmental act had followed these pronouncements. 76

The President was empowered to revoke the quota but the administration went only to the extent of promising that over the next four years it would review the allocation and arrangements. 77 The "hands off policy" advocated by the administration with respect to the issue was at least understandable as part of a general policy of indifference towards Africa. 78 The New York Times in an editorial wrote:

The United States officially condemns apartheid and enforces a United Nations embargo against South Africa -- and then hands South Africa an annual present of $4.8 million in the form of a sugar subsidy. This "foreign aid" ... to a highly advanced country with a booming economy, a country that practises a virulent brand of racial discrimination is only one of many disgraceful effects of the Sugar Act. 79

76. Speech by Representative John Dow, April 1, 1971, Congressional Record (Washington DC) April 1, 1971, pp.2414-2415.


78. Bruce Oudes, n.9, p.32.

The Nixon administration was using rewards instead of punishments to persuade the South African government to bring reforms. Robert S. Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs speaking on foreign investments in South Africa said that the ability of the United States government or the people of America to bring change in South Africa was limited. The object of the policy of communication was peaceful change, not retaliation, punishment or clearing their own consciences. On how the policy related to American private investment on South Africa, he said that it added to the economic pressure to bring more nonwhites into the labour force at increasingly higher levels, increased communication with the outside world through foreign businessmen and technicians, provided an opportunity to inject enlightened employment policies to improve the well-being of and opportunities for nonwhites and was a channel through which outside influence could be felt as was evident in the case of Polaroid. He reiterated that the United States neither encouraged nor discouraged new investment in South Africa and that the existing investment if properly managed could contribute to peaceful and constructive change in South Africa. 80

The administration's policy was being constantly attacked by several congressmen, prominent of whom was Charles Diggs. Responding on behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus to the President's report of May 18, 1971 he stated:

The Caucus does not find the Administration's advocacy of the use of communication to support peaceful change in South Africa persuasive since the reply lacks any evidence that the policy is being pursued to establish communication links with the majority Black South Africans or among those liberal elements working for peaceful change in South Africa. The Caucus finds it impossible to reconcile either our denunciation of the use of violence by the liberation movements or the President's statement (The United States will not condone the violence to human dignity implicit in apartheid) with the nation's continuing moral, economic and military support of South Africa...[81]

Charles Diggs had to resign from the United States delegation to the United Nations in December 1971 over the administration's attitude on Southern Africa. As a first hand witness he had found stifling, the hypocrisy of the United States government which while uttering its

abhorrence of apartheid, unflaggingly voted in opposition to any attempt to act, rather than orate, with respect to apartheid and minority regimes in Southern Africa. The American Mission at the United Nations as he claimed had lost to the European Bureau and the economic and military groups which had been dominating American policy towards Africa.82 The New York Times in an editorial wrote that he should not have taken the administration's rhetoric against apartheid seriously as well as its promises to consult members of the delegation in advance about the positions to be taken in the General Assembly.83 On the controversy revolving around the American attitude it wrote:

It is, in any event, part of an emerging pattern of far greater Washington concern for the sensibilities of white rulers of Southern Africa than for the struggle of the black majorities for justice and self-determination.[84]


84. Ibid.
The American hypocrisy was thus often reflected in the voting record at the United Nations. On several issues it sided with the White minority regimes against the interests of the Black majority populations. It consistently refused to label apartheid a crime against humanity. The Nixon administration failed to recognize the central importance of the explosive racial situation in South Africa and was satisfied with the status quo.85 Although there was much talk about neutrality, it all amounted to double talk because throughout South Africa, American officials were encouraging trade and investment, supplying information and "mixing with the Vorsters, Schoemans and Mulders" which all had led to a steady retrogression.86

Nixon won the presidential election of 1972 and this meant an assurance of four more years of continuation of the existing foreign policy. It appeared that the United States was entering four more years with an established Africa policy and it was predicted that the confrontation between Nixon and Diggs would grow into one of major proportions.87 One observer's words were

85. Willard R. Johnson, n.50, p.20.
86. Discussion on Bruce Oudes' article, n.9, pp.33-42.
87. Bruce Oudes, n.9, p.32.
prophetic when he stated in 1973 that it was high time to reconsider American policy. He wrote:

If this does not occur, there is no telling how loud the clamour may grow. At least some people in this country simply would not remain silent while an insensitive President with casual callousness inadvertently or intentionally heads this country back down another of those famous slippery slopes towards involvement on the wrong side of another series of wars of national liberation. [88]

Kissinger's appointment as the Secretary of State in 1973 reasserted if not changed his position vis a vis foreign policy decision making. At his confirmation hearings before the Senate in September 1973, Kissinger said that on Africa the United States had to allow Europe to play the leading role since it was occupied with other areas like South East Asia. Once these concerns were over it could shift to Africa South of the Sahara and that from then onwards one could see more energy devoted to those problems. [89] Two months later Kissinger chose Donald Easum as the new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

88. Ibid., p.33.

The Watergate scandal obscured almost everything else in 1974 and led to Nixon's resignation. By 1974 the administration was still preoccupied with the question whether foreign investment could act as a catalyst for economic growth and help reduce the income inequalities between Black and White labour. It had only just begun considering whether the Black labour force would be able to negotiate with the government directly without the interference of an external power.90

The Nixon administration was largely unaware of the developments in South Africa, let alone their significance. From the very beginning it believed in pursuing a policy of contact with the White minority regime. Within a year of its assumption of power, the Nixon administration embraced Option 2 of the National Security Study Memorandum 39 as the lodestar of its Southern Africa policy. As later events in the region would show, the analysis was faulty and the assumptions were not based on sound judgement. The administration failed in understanding the realities and could not do anything to influence South Africa. As a result it bequeathed to the subsequent Ford administration an unrealistic policy with disastrous implications, the brunt of which had to be borne by the latter.

90. Christopher Coker, n.31, p.86.