CHAPTER I

U.S. DIPLOMACY IN SOUTH AFRICA: A BACK DROP

Relations in the 1960s

Until 1960, the United States was able to stand on the sidelines as a dispassionate, if not disinterested observer. For most of the period, it refused to choose between its economic interests and moral responsibilities and for the most part was not required to do so. During the years that Malan and his successor J.G. Strijdom introduced the political and legislative infrastructure of apartheid, the West largely remained silent. In the first major United Nations debate on apartheid in 1952 the United States took a middle-of-the road position in the hope of avoiding "both excess of zeal and legalism". Its Ambassador reminded the General Assembly that the role of the United Nations was strictly limited. It could not intervene in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of states. It had "no power to impose standards, but only to proclaim them".

Moreover, if Washington's critics believed that the United States had the power to preempt the structuring

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1. Cited in Amy Vandenbosch; South Africa and the World: The Foreign Policy of Apartheid; (Lexington; University of Kentucky Press, 1970), p.235
of South African society, for much of the period, the cost of doing so appeared to be disproportionate to the political returns. In an era of containment South Africa's friendship was of more enduring concern than the policy of separate development, or apartheid. In Eisenhower's world picture and that of his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, South Africa was one more ally in the struggle against international communism. Shortly before the Sharpeville massacre, Joseph Satterthwaite, the first Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, asked the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, whether it was sensible for the United States to express its opposition to National Party policies when the government of South Africa offered such unqualified support in the overriding issue of the day: the containment of the Soviet Union.

For many years this was a perception shared by the white regime of South Africa. American behaviour in this period was so ambiguous and open to interpretation that even an adverse American vote in the United Nations in 1959 against South Africa was passed off with out any grudge. Eric Louw, passed off this event as if it did not represent

any fundamental change in American policy. He dismissed it as an unfortunate chance result. However the fact was that the leader of the U.S. delegation happened to be a prominent labour leader, well known for his dislike of racial segregation in all its forms.

It was the Sharpeville massacre, in which seventy blacks lost their lives which changed the terms of the debate overnight. In the days that followed, 120 of the country’s magistracies were placed under a state of emergency. Two main nationalist parties—the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan African Congress (PAC) — were banned and 1500 of their members were arrested. Those who were fortunate enough to escape went underground, turning to sabotage and subversion where constitutional opposition had failed.

For the first time Washington was haunted by the spectre of revolution. The climate of unrest that lasted for several months paralysed the public services as well as industry and produced a serious run on the country’s stock-exchange— which resulted in the flight of foreign capital. Later the South African writer Lewis Nkosi wrote that what had taken place in the spring and summer of 1960 was the

kind of crisis which all too often makes possible a transfer of power overnight.

Some what belatedly the United States came out in support of a rapid transfer of power. The threat of revolutionary unrest forced it to act quickly for fear that any undue delay might be fatal. If Sharpeville had any long term impact on American thinking, its impact was largely negative. The United States appeared to object less to the nature of the political system than the violence had provoked. In the months that followed American officials expressed particular concern that if the nationalist leaders, now in exile, turned to subversion, it would only be a matter of time before they succumbed to communism.

In short the United States intervened to contain the violence that had broken out, not to preempt it. It was no longer, possible to contend as Satterthwaite had done in the immediate run up to the crisis. That, the most, America could do was to set an example by pursuing civil rights legislation at home, in the hope of proving conclusively that a pluralistic society could exist once racial discrimination had been removed from the statute books.

After 1960, the tenor of American statements changed quite dramatically. Satterthwaite's successor questioned whether the United States could refrain from intervening if it wished to keep ahead of events and to be
swamped by them.

In April 1960, in keeping with this sense of urgency Washington agreed to place apartheid permanently on the Security Council's agenda. It followed up this initiative by dispatching an aide-memoire urging South Africa in the strongest terms to abandon a policy and a set of political principles which were so clearly in violation of the UN Charter. When Pretoria refused to comply with the request, President Kennedy felt compelled to apply a selective arms embargo, a year before the United Nations applied its own.

Towards the end of 1962, South Africa's Prime Minister Hendrick Verwoerd conceded that the Americans might consider international action against the Republic. Although he questioned whether it would be in their economic or strategic interest to do so. The very fact that he had been forced to deal publicly with such speculation revealed, how far along the road to diverse relations between the United States and South Africa had gone.

In any event the arms embargo proved to be a great embarrassment to Washington. By 1963 the crisis had passed. Almost the entire leadership of the ANC fell into


5. James Barber, "South Africa's Foreign Policy", op. cit. no. 3 p. 181.
police hands at a secret meeting in Rivonia. During the period that followed, which came to be known as the "post-Rivonia stalemate", the Kennedy Administration began to suspect that it had misread events completely. Far from being caught up in the "winds of change", that had swept through the continent in the 1950s, South Africa appeared, for the moment at least, to have successfully "ridden the whirlwind".

Two years earlier Kennedy's Under Secretary of State, Chester Bowles, had written: "there are few who doubt that the Republic of South Africa will blow up in due course. When this occurs, will we be able to say that we took every step or practical measure to prevent or temper the holocaust.

The problem with such forecasts, with their grim vision of the future was their timing. By the end of 1963 they appeared to be unrealistic and naive. Before leaving for South Africa as America's new Ambassador, Joseph Satterthwaite had been told by the State Department to prepare for a black government within eighteen months to five years.


When by contrast Satterthwaite, himself appeared before a Congressional Committee nine years later, he predicted that South Africa would have at least a decade to reform its political system, perhaps much longer. He declared: the fact is that the South African government is presently so strong politically and militarily and the economy of the country is so sound that it would be wishful thinking to expect that the long hoped breakthrough in racial relations will occur in the near or even foreseeable future in the absence of developments either internal or external that we can not now anticipate.

The main problem was not that the policy makers had been responsible for tendentious critiques. But since the situation had changed so radically that the hypotheses they had drawn from the critique, had lost much of their relevance, No. policy maker can escape from his own age. Policy makers exist to make hypotheses of the future by interpreting future trends in the pattern of their own. But in 1960 the pattern had proved deceptive. By the mid-1960s the situation had stabilised. The whites were once again

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firmly in control. Writing some years later the South African historian Cornelis de Kiewiet remarked that South Africa provided a bizarre example of "a revolution that had disappeared".

The Johnson Administration had already come to that conclusion some years before. During a long official review of American policy initiated in 1961, the state department had recommended that the United States should concentrate on the encouragement of achievable economic and social change in the fields of black labour and education. Since the ANC appeared to be a spent force after the Rivonia trials, the CIA had also asked whether it would not be sensible to encourage change from within by denying support to those groups based outside the country.

In the years that followed the U.S. Government began to look at some of the ways of dismantling the obstacles to political reform, while minimising the dangers of internal rebellion. It was a highly elitist response based


on Russell's premise that a rebellion or revolution can succeed only if the regime or elite is disintegrating or disunited or loses confidence in itself or stops believing it has the right to keep power. Since Washington wished to preempt a revolution, and since the South African government could hardly be accused of lacking confidence or faith in the future by persuading or pressuring it to lift some of the obstacles to a political dialogue between the races, that is to reform itself out of a revolution while it still had time.

If the Johnson Administration made remarkably little progress this was largely because it never resolved in its own mind whether to influence the process through concessions or sanctions. Clearly the Americans were trapped by the ambiguities of their own position. They had no wish to see the blacks challenge white supremacy. As it would have clearly invited further repression and render their own non-interventionist posture even more contentious. At the same time Johnson's Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, G. Mennen Williams, publicly conceded that non-intervention on the part of the international community was impossible to defend when the state allowed so little scope for internal discussion of its future.

"It is frequently said that in the last analysis the people of South Africa must work out their own destiny. But how is this to take place when the internal forces
for change are so effectively repressed? It is also pointed out that in South Africa economic forces are breaking down segregationist practices and isolationist patterns of thought. But how are such changes to be translated into the political and social fields? How long will it take? And what can outside forces do to accelerate the process?"

William's predecessors had tended to hold apartheid as a social and economic monstrosity which they felt would be bound to collapse, sooner or later, under the weight of its own internal contradictions. Williams transcended such glib analyses by questioning whether any improvement in the economic status of black workers would have any political significance as long as the obstacles to change, especially in the form of legal statutes, remained so severe.

In the past the source of a good deal of false optimism had been argument by analogy. William saw no reason to maintain that America's own progress on the civil rights front had demonstrated beyond dispute that fundamental attitudes to race were susceptible to change. He recognised that the analogy was, in fact, the main weakness of the argument. For in South Africa the legislative machinery of apartheid ruled out any real

possibility of constitutional opposition. If political change turned on what the law allowed, there were few lessons to be learned from American’s own civil rights campaign. The black community in the United States had resorted to civil disobedience during 1950’s but they had done so only after testing legality of each form of protest in the courts. It was precisely because they had been accepted by the state as legitimate acts of civil disobedience rather than illegal or illegitimate acts of public disorder.

Denied this possibility in South Africa, had the black community any alternative except violence? If the options were not available in South Africa, they definitely needed external support. Some pressure would have to be applied on the South African government to moderate its response. After 1966, the debate largely centered on the form of such pressure.

In the closing days of the Johnson Administration American officials began to question whether negative sanctions were a very useful approach. Indecision and indecisiveness tend to generate spontaneous hypocrisy. American policy in South Africa was no exception. The arms

embargo of 1962 had proved to be a broken reed. American equipment continued to be exported to the republic throughout the 1960s, with or without the Department of Commerce's knowledge.

It appears that these measures were intended to meet the aspirations of the new African states without setting a precedent of sanctions against other states in the future. Thus the action could not long satisfy the African demand for stronger measures against apartheid. According to the text of memorandum between Julius Nyerere, and the State Department the White House had examined the extent of U.S. arms shipments to South Africa only to find that they totalled less than $2 million. "These quantities", the memorandum concluded, "are not significant to produce a change in South Africa's racial polices".

It is important to note that another memorandum had been penned at about the same time by a junior State Department official, Waldemar Campbell. It had followed quite a different tack. It had asked if American arms sales were so small, would it not be more sensible to boost their

sale in return for political concessions at home? Would it not be more sensible to continue selling arms to South Africa to offset its fears about external aggression, and thus bolster any resolve, it might one day have toward repealing the pass laws, eliminating petty apartheid and allowing black workers the right to form trade unions?"

Nothing was heard of these arguments until 1969.

If this was indeed the case, if in all honesty U.S. felt disinclined to support the forces of radical change, it might have been better to have dropped its call for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. To argue that violence was inevitable, was to admit that the United States could do nothing itself to prevail upon the whites to make concessions. To argue, otherwise seemed to many, hypocrisy. As the President of Botswana told an American audience several years later, "It had once been customary to describe American policy as disillusioned; perhaps, however, with the passage of time it is more accurate to characterise it as policy which, beginning with no illusions, has degenerated in the course of time into one of general indifference".


It was clear by 1968 that this posture could not be continued for long.

There were people like Mennen Williams who had begun to question the wisdom of the sanctions approach campaigned by the democrats. During his appearance before the House Committee on Foreign Relations, he questioned whether political influence was not contingent upon those very commercial and political links democrats wished to severe. Williams remained convinced that the web of interests that bound the United States and South Africa, in particular South Africa's reliance on the West for most of its capital equipment, made comprehensive economic sanctions both unnecessary and inappropriate.

For one reason or another the Johnson Administration had begun to rethink its position on various issues even before Nixon came to office. Whether or not this analysis was realistic, is less important than the fact that part of "conservative", case against the Johnson Administration could not be faulted. American policy in these years had indeed, reflected "their sense of guilt at home, their desire not to affront civil rights sentiment and their interest in securing the approbation of the nations of black Africa, particularly by the attitudes they

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18. William's Statement, "United States and South African Relations", op. cit. no. 13 p.4
had stricken in the U.N.

Kennedy’s methods had failed because they had been designed to meet a crisis which had never materialised. Johnson had been content to mark time during the war in Vietnam. Sanctions had been implemented half heartedly or not at all. It was on this understanding that Richard Nixon based his own policy.

THE KISSINGER YEARS

In the circumstances that prevailed when the Nixon Administration came into office in 1969, Southern Africa was one of the first foreign policy issues to come under the scrutiny of Henry Kissinger’s revamped National Security Council (NSC). They maintained that the policy makers in 1962 had little idea of what they wanted to achieve. The Republicans were not alone in their acute disquiet. Many Democrats believed that the State Department had paid too much regard to bureaucratic constituencies and too little to the proper overview of security matters.

Almost immediately entering office in February 1969, Kissinger ordered his staff to draw up a series of Country programme evaluations. He was addressing many of the long-term policy objectives, which for

one reason on another had been ignored by other administrations.

During the Administration's first six months in office, National Security Study Memoranda emerged at the rate of eleven a month. The Study Memorandum on Southern Africa was the thirty ninth. It was one of sixty-one comprehensive studies that met Nixon's promise to review all the important foreign policy questions that fell within the area broadly defined as national security. Each was intended to replace policies that Kissinger believed to have been mere trade-offs between competing bureaucratic interests.

He was convinced that the validity of a policy should depend on whether it conformed to the facts, not whether it was consistent with past actions. He did not wish to be faced with "agreed papers" for ratification drawn up by the bureaucratic agencies. He was more concerned with whether the policy worked for them than whether it worked for the administration as a whole. He did not believe that the different agencies in the government were capable of defining the national interest without regard to their own administrative preoccupations. From the outset he wanted policy decisions to reflect "a well understood national purpose" rather than "the accommodation of differ-

ent" approaches by semi-autonomous departments".

The report (Memo-39 of 1969) concluded that though there were no U.S. vital interest in the region, apartheid could not be ignored because of international concern. So far U.S. policy had tried to balance economic and strategic interests by keeping a political distance from the white regimes and their repressive racial policies. However, as there were different views about how this was best achieved the memo started by identifying U.S. objectives.

These were: to minimise the likelihood of conflict, to counter U.S.S.R. and Chinese influence; to moderate racial policies to improve the U.S. posture on racial issues, and to protect economic and strategic interests. The memo concluded that U.S. policy makers shared a number of assumptions including the belief that black nationalism had been contained and that the U.S. could best stimulate change by contact with both black and white states. Based on these objectives and assumptions the report offered five policy options ranging from closer cooperation with the whites states to dissociation.

Kissinger recommended acceptance of the second option. The option assumed that as "the whites are here to stay", constructive change can only come about through

them; that black political rights could not be gained by
violence; that the liberation movements were incapable of a
serious challenge to South Africa, that violence would only
produce chaos and opportunities for communists; and that all
states would be ready to cooperate with the U.S."

President Nixon endorsed the policy in speeches to
Congress in which he reaffirmed the arms embargo and oppo-
sition to apartheid but opposed isolating South Africa. He
considered the maintenance of contact and communication
essential if the United States was to exert a constructive
influence on South Africa. He spoke that economic develop-
ment would undermine apartheid and that American companies
would play a reforming role within this. Future progress,
he said, depended on the U.S. making her views known and
communication between the races possible.

Once constructive engagement had been agreed upon,
it was left to the State Department to draw up an agenda of
change, to identify the areas in which progress was most
likely to which the United States could make a significant
contribution. In the Administration's second year in office
David Newsom visited South Africa on a fact finding

22. National Security Study Memorandum 39, (Washington,

23. Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee
on Africa, House of Representatives, 91st Congress, 1st
mission. He returned to Washington with a list of four areas in which he expected some progress over the next ten years:

"There are really four areas to look for to determine whether the present leadership is really going to permit change or not....The first...is what is referred to as petty apartheid...all the frequently absurd division of facilities-into white and non-white areas.

The second is the whole attitude of the government toward the rule of law and the courts, something that many among the white South Africans dislike and oppose.

The third...is the whole question of the Urban African and the Coloureds and the Indians. I was struck by the degree to which these groups in a sense represent the heart of the problem. In that they are more educated, they are more sensitive to what they can not do, than perhaps the rural African. Perhaps it is in this area that some ultimate accommodation is going to be most necessary.

The fourth.....is even if one accepts that they go ahead with the so-called development philosophy, then it is what they do with the so-called Bantustans.

...These are the four areas where it seems to me one must watch to see whether there is any general movement.

What happens in ten years, I think will depend in part on what happens in these areas.

Since Newsom never communicated his conclusions to South Africa directly, and positive sanctions were never applied to overcome some of the hurdles to progress in any of the four areas mentioned, it is not altogether surprising that by 1974 there were few examples, if any, of substantial change in any of them.

The rights of the urban black (particularly those relating to security of tenure) were not discussed, at all. In agreeing to introduce a lease-hold system to benefit those with ten years or more residence, Vorster merely agreed to restore to what had been withdrawn arbitrarily eight years earlier.

In the law, progress was even slower. The first non-white senior counsel (an Indian) was not appointed until 1974. The blacks had to be content with their own law courts in the homelands. And even here, progress was painfully slow. The first black high court was established in Transkei in 1973. The law continued to offer no redress against government repression.

In the sphere of petty apartheid, progress seemed to be most apparent, but was in fact less significant. As of April 1974 South Africa could point to the desegregation of sixteen hotels and most public libraries and parks, limited multiracialism in sports and the first attempt to open skilled positions to black workers. It is also worth pointing out that the initiative for desegregating public facilities came from the municipal authorities in the
cities, not from the central government. Thus United States could not claim any credit.

It is worth remembering that South Africa did not publicly condemn discrimination on the grounds of colour until September 1974—four months after the collapse of the Caetano government in Lisbon, which precipitated the collapse of the Portuguese empire in Southern Africa. The most important comment came from Julius Nyerere. He undoubtedly spoke for many Africans when he criticised these and other measures for being twelfth-hour reforms. To the outside world the reform of petty apartheid meant nothing at all.

In December 1970, Newsom had contended that engagement might ensure that each side knows better what the other was talking about. It could mean that greater hope could be given to both whites and blacks in South Africa who seek another way. Three years later he took up this theme again in a speech in London. He declared "Constructive engagement has to be seen not in terms of answers it has to the problem, but the questions it raises about the dynamics of internal change". The influence of any nation,


however, powerful, in the internal affairs of another is severely limited. The idea that the United States could bring about fundamental change in another society is without foundation. We certainly can not do it in Southern Africa. If change comes it must come primarily from within."  

Later that year he admitted that the administration had discovered that its influence "whether through exhortation or diplomatic efforts or economic pressure" was far more limited than it had originally thought:

"History would suggest that, while outside pressures may have played a part, the ultimate decisions in the case of each of the colonial powers to relinquish the territories were, decisions that they made on the basis of their internal determination that this was the thing to do". 

The problem with the administration's analysis was that it presupposed that a dialogue could be conducted while the machinery of repression was still in place. It did not took notice that the machinery itself prevented a dialogue from being conducted. The United States failed to


recognise that participation in the political system required not only that the government respond to black demands at a variety of political levels but also that it dismantle many of the institutional constraints which prevented it from responding at all. Very few administration officials appreciated the importance of changes in the law. However the problem of these institutional barriers was critically important.

Thus, from 1969 to 1974, frustrated Africans remained, for broad U.S. policy, in a condition of benign neglect. Kissinger, working on behalf of Nixon and later Ford was almost wholly concerned with Indo-China, the SALT-2 negotiations, the breakthrough to China and the Middle-East. He was equally burdened by the Indo-Pakistan war, while the Watergate scandal, with all its implications, constantly haunted him.

One of the great attributes of political leadership and statesmanship is the ability to delegate. However Kissinger found it hard to do so, especially when a personally sponsored policy was involved. Kissinger often argued that the United States had few, if any, vital national interests to defend in black Africa and this was yet another factor contributing to his apparent lack of concern.

The truth seemed to be that Africa, as a platform, had little appeal to a man who enjoyed strutting from one great world crisis to another. Africa indeed, was not yet ready for a latter-day Metternich, even though shades of Bismark hung memorably over the continent. Besides, he knew little of African history or the contemporary conditions of the continent beyond the fact that they were sad and inequitable. Andy Young put it into words: Kissinger just like John Foster Dulles, did not know much about Africa. And on a later occasion, Young added: 'The Senate does not give a damn about Africa and it does not know a damn about Africa'.

However, the turning point in the U.S. policy towards South Africa came with the Portuguese revolution of April 1974. This event followed (and in large measure arose) nearly thirteen years of bitter armed struggle in Angola and Mozambique between Guerrilla liberation armies and Portugal's mainly conscripted armed forces. It led within months to the installation of the Soviet-leaning FRELIMO regime in Mozambique and the emergence of the Marxist MPLA (Movements popular de Libertacao de Angola) in Luanda. This changing scenario of Southern African regional politics impelled an American reappraisal: the Russian arrival on the scene.

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The events in Angola and Mozambique posed direct challenge to the central tenet of constructive engagement: that the whites would maintain themselves in power for years and that they would be only marginally threatened by the tide of nationalist feeling.

With the emergence of marxist regimes in the Southern African, entire administration was apprehensive of increasing Soviet influence in the region. It was perceived as a net gain for the Soviet Union to get a foothold in the region which had been under the Western influence.

Kissinger's diplomacy, as he himself liked to proclaim, was essentially Metternichian. He did have a grand design and it was conceived in a classic balance-of-power terms. The basic objective was to secure peace and defend Western interests by preventing any unregulated change in the extant balance between the major powers (meaning the superpowers plus Western Europe, Japan and China).

In general his efforts were directed towards achieving detente between the powers and ensuring that they sought neither to annex each other's established spheres of influence nor to contest for control of the Third World. If 


for most of his term in office he took no great interest in Southern Africa, it was because he regarded it as a region where the balance did not seem greatly threatened. It was an area of established Western influence which needed only to be maintained as such.

To Kissinger, the Soviet intervention in Angola, represented a direct and shocking violation of the rules. The Soviets ensuing success, posed a high threat to the Metternichian order and of course, to the Western interests which it had secured. Thus it had became necessary to move very fast. Southern Africa became the prime focus of Kissinger's attention during 1976, his last year in office.

Ever resilient, the great improviser, Kissinger after Angolan experience, felt the necessity to revise his tactics in Africa without altering his overall objectives in the east-west contest. His most fundamental aim was to ensure the security of South Africa where the West's deeper interests were concentrated.

To do that he had to restore stability in the region. Developing this new policy after the Angola fiasco, involved three steps: making peace with the black Africans angry about U.S. collusion with South Africa in Angola;

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getting the Frontline black states to accept some general terms for a peace process in Rhodesia and South West Africa/Namibia and then selling the terms to South Africa which would force a diplomatic settlement with South West Africa/Namibia territory.

Kissinger was even careful to his domestic track. Senator Charles Percy took a fact-finding trip to Southern Africa. Key democrat such as Senator George McGovern was sufficiently closely informed to give public support to Kissinger's early moves.

Kissinger's first major move was a speech in Lusaka, Zambia on 27 April 1976. In this speech he offered a ten point programme as starting point for a new, coherent, more progressive African policy. It centred on the future of Zimbabwe, because Americans and British alike feared that neighbouring Angola would become a platform for Cuban intervention and sanctuary for Soviet-armed Zimbabwe guerrillas. He went on to challenge South Africa to show its good faith by using its influence in Salisbury to promote a rapid negotiated settlement for majority rule in Rhodesia.

In September 1976, he shuttled through Southern Africa in an effort to produce a settlement. With the help of the then Prime Minister Vorster in South Africa, he

34. Ibid.

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talked Ian-Smith into accepting the inevitability of black majority rule by the end of 1978. But this blueprint for a transitional administration left-control of the police, with law and order generally, in white hands. Given the hostility between the Zimbabwe Patriotic Front and most blacks towards their white rulers, African leaders could not accept the blueprint so easily. Hence subsequent negotiations in Geneva fell apart. The two sides were more distant than before. As the war intensified, Kissinger with classic deviances had chalked up another failure.

It was plain that Kissinger, under President Gerald R. Ford’s instructions, tried to revive the fortunes of the administration in an election year during which opposition Democrats were making hay of Washington’s problems in Africa. His declaration in Lusaka, his safari to South Africa, his support for black majority rule etc, were nothing more than eyewash.

Some double talk was quite evident. Kissinger called for peaceful end to institutionalised inequality in South Africa. He stressed in Lusaka that U.S. policy was "based upon the premise that within a reasonable time we shall see a clear evolution towards equality of opportunity"

and basic human rights for all South Africans”. At the same time American multinationals and banks were investing heavily in South Africa’s money-spinning mines, industries and other enterprises-reinforcing the barricades of apartheid.

In a year black white tensions reached flash points in Soweto, Lange and Alexandra. Now it was hard to believe that Kissinger had really seriously imagined that South Africa’s white rulers could be encouraged or persuaded peacefully to eliminate racial inequality or to introduce equality of opportunity and basic human rights and ‘with in reasonable time’ too.

‘Equality of opportunity’ implied the chance for blacks to be elected in parliament as well as all discrimination enshrined in the statute books to be removed. A ‘reasonable time’, implied, say five or ten years. No South African considered that there was the remotest chance of this happening peacefully in the foreseeable future. Thus, it was clear that Kissinger had indulged in electoral rhetoric, if he was not demonstrating his absolute ignorance of the subject.

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Kissinger's effort amply illustrated the limited scope of U.S. influence in the region. As Roger Morris, an eminent American journalist noted "U.S. policy is still largely rhetorical. Our diplomacy lacking both the will and the ability to take measures that would genuinely affect the current descent of the region into violence or truly change our position there."

Kissinger also lacked the kind of back up staff to manoeuvre among the multiple hazards of a negotiation on Southern African issues. The Bureau of African Affairs of the State Department was said to have virtually no expertise on white Africa, owing to its "clientist approach" to Black Africa.

The experience of the abortive 1976 negotiations highlighted the need for a more sophisticated approach to South Africa. But the time was not ripe. South Africa was badly wounded politically by the Soweto riots. It had turned inward, less interested in responding to initiatives from the outside world. Even though Kissinger had negotiated a package deal of reasonable satisfaction to the South Africa the departure of the Ford Administration and the internal problems of South Africa ensured the cancelling of

Toward the end of his term in office Kissinger came to recognise that American influence was strictly limited: "Our strength has become less predominant; our margin of error has narrowed, our choices more difficult and ambiguous".

CARTER'S HUMAN RIGHT APPROACH

President Carter and his key men entered the White House seemingly determined to remove the ambiguities that had marked American policies towards Southern Africa region. They wanted specifically to approach issues as they arose in a mood of enthusiasm and idealism rather than for their impact on American-Soviet relations. In his inaugural address President Carter affirmed his commitment to making human rights the cornerstone of American diplomacy. He declared: "Because we are free, we can never be indifferent to the fate of freedom elsewhere". It was a message that marked a radical shift from the post war programme of containment.


The new administration brought Policy Review Memorandum 4 (PRM-4) as successor to NSSM-39. It was prepared under Brzezinski's supervision immediately after Carter's inauguration as President in the White House. The central argument among PRM-4's drafters was whether to maintain Kissinger's emphasis on pursuing settlements in Rhodesia and Namibia with South Africa's cooperation before directing attention to South Africa itself or to confront South Africa immediately without waiting for solutions elsewhere. President Carter was persuaded by the liberals led by Andrew Young to adopt the second view. In March 1977 he signed a confidential presidential directive to guide policy on Southern Africa.

This directive emphasised that Southern African problems should be regarded as urgent. U.S. should remain committed to peaceful solutions. Since guerrilla warfare could be exploited by the Soviet Union, in its own interests, the U.S. should work cooperatively with European and African states to find solutions. With regard to South Africa, the directive stressed that the U.S. must take a more critical line against apartheid or risk jeopardising its relations with the Third World. Further it would have to take visible steps to scale down its relations with South Africa if the whites persisted in refusing to contemplate any sharing of power with the blacks. In a phrase,
"selective relation" was out; "selective hardening" was in.

These guidelines found expression in policy in several ways. The first significant indication of the administration's attitude came within days of Carters directive, in the form of heavy and successful lobbying of the new Congress to repeal the Byrd amendment. At about the same time, the Administration sponsored a 'statement of principles', in relation to the operations of U.S. firms in South Africa. It stressed, for example, the desirability of moving away from discriminating employment practices. Several major corporations fairly promptly announced their acceptance of these principles. Moreover the symbolism in appointing Andrew Young as an Ambassador to the U.N. was quite clear. The United States had a black man in charge of its policy in Africa.

The new Administration thus took a major new tack in style if not in substance in formulating a new foreign policy for South Africa. However, given the priority ascribed to human rights, was it possible to effect a revolution in American diplomacy? The record shows, that in practice, U.S. diplomacy under Carter was not so different from the Kissinger years. Hence it could not achieve any


On entering office, Carter looked forward to immediate progress on the political front. Perhaps, because he was guided by the Soweto disturbances, into thinking that progress could no longer be delayed. The meeting in Vienna between Vice-President Mondale and John Vorster promised as much. At a meeting in May 1977, just three months after the President's inauguration, the two men had a frank discussion of South Africa's domestic policies. Mondale soon discovered how impolitic it is, in diplomatic negotiations to ask for too much at the negotiating table. During the meeting, however, he made it clear that the U.S. would not reduce pressure against apartheid in return for help on Rhodesia or Namibia. He demanded for majority rule and free election in South Africa, soon discovered that its demands were not to be so easily accepted.

However, the State Department demands for "majority rule" and free election", if they had any meaning, were not modest goals. Vorster responded immediately saying that, although South Africa wanted good relations with the U.S., the whites were not prepared to share political power in their own territory. For to share would be to lose it. He said he had the right to expect others to appreciate the complex issues involved and his government's efforts to do justice to all.

At home Pik Botha was more blunt. He asserted that 'neither Mr. Carter nor Mr. Mondale has a monopoly on morality.' He described Mondale's behaviour as 'superficial and noisy'. After noting that South Africa had fought alongside the U.S. and had never relied on her economically, he accused Washington of misunderstanding southern Africa. If South Africa was to avoid confrontation with the U.S. it was best to be blunt to bring it to its senses.

Thus it seems State Department's demands for "majority rule" and "free elections", if they had any meaning were not modest goals. That is why the Viena meeting broke up without agreement and plunged relations between the two countries into greater crisis than at any time in the previous ten years.

In fairness to Mondale, the Americans did not ask for immediate majority rule but instead stressed the need for equal social and political participation. While not specifying a blueprint or time table for this "progressive transformation" of society, they did issue an ultimatum: if South Africa were not to take immediate steps toward the ultimate goal of a democratic multiracial state, it could expect no support from the United States. An angry Vorster

had asked Mondale if his interpretation of democracy meant "one man, one vote"? Mondale responded that the American ideal included the equal right of every individual to vote in the understanding that all votes carried equal weight. Later in a press conference he insisted that "one man, one vote and equal participation" by all citizens irrespective of race meant the same thing.

Unfortunately, the US Administration never really addressed the thorny question of black participation. If Nixon had been rather vague about the form that political change might take, Carter's mistake was to be too specific. American policy seemed to totally ignore the growing debate on whether equal participation could successfully transform men into responsible citizens; or whether it be taken no more than a ritual genuflection to majority rule.

For many critics of the Administration including George Ball, the United States would have been better advised to have pressed for separate but equal privileges for better educational opportunities and the speedy abolition of petty apartheid—and to have looked not for "the ultimate goal of a democratic social order" but at the process of getting there.

45. "Vice President Mondale visits Europe Department of State Bulletin and Meets with South African Prime Minister Vorster", 76: 1997, June 20, 1977, p. 68.

The constitution proposed by the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) had actually envisaged a federal government in which each race would have a minority veto under a system of proportional representation and in which government by consensus rather than the majority would be the norm. But the Carter Administration remained, largely indifferent to such arguments. In an interview with the Rand Daily Mail Andrew Young criticised South Africa's human rights record for being worse than the Soviet Union's, where at least every citizen whether Russian Uzbek, or Jew, was considered equal under the law.

Young's comments highlighted a predicament that was unique to South Africa's black population. However, Carter Administration found itself out of step with the black thinking. For most of the 1970s, the blacks demanded a political dialogue, not the trappings of political responsibility. Steve Biko, the leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, admitted as much, "The simplest thing that needs to be done is to make negotiation possible. . . . meaningful dialogues could begin an evolutionary bargaining process".  


By refusing to vote in the elections for the government sponsored community councils, that had been introduced to replace the long-discredited Urban Bantu Councils, the Blacks insisted on their right to be consulted. For many, this was precisely what participation meant. In the Soweto elections of 1977, only 2 per cent of the township's thirty wards were actually contested. Only 6 per cent of the voters, actually bothered to turn out. At this stage most blacks wished only to be treated as equal citizens rather than equal voters. The vote, itself did not necessarily mean very much to the blacks. If it conceded merely formal rather than real. Indeed this had been the main message of these events.

Nevertheless, Carter Administration failed to grasp the significance of these events. The Declaration on South Africa, which Washington drafted shortly afterward, still considered participation as the end rather than the means:

"Full and equal partnership of all individuals must find its expression through majority rule, which means that all regardless of race, are entitled to participate in all phases of national life and to join in freely determining the political economic and social character of their society".

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These aims suffered a serious setback in Vorster's security clampdown of 1977. It seemed to deny the blacks any chance of participation. Under Sections 2 and 6 of the Internal Security Act, eighteen organisations and three publications were banned. Under Section 10 (1) forty-seven black leaders were placed in preventive detention. Andrew Young's advice to the black community to boycott white businesses that were known to discriminate against black workers would have brought them into immediate conflict with Section 2 (1) of the Terrorism Act. It made any attempt to cripple industry, a criminal offense carrying a maximum sentence of five years in detention.

Certainly, the Carter Administration identified the 1977 clampdown as the most serious setback to black participation seen since the post-Sharpeville repression. As Richard Moose concluded: that in South Africa there was no prospect of a dialogue between ruler and ruled, we did not lay a threat to the South African government, we posed a choice. Unfortunately it chose to ignore it".

In calling for the greater black participation in the political system, the State Department seemed largely oblivious to the decreasing participation of the white community. For a time the United states appeared to be

demanding an end to discrimination without offering any guarantee of survival for the white community. Some years earlier Verwoerd had asked whether survival itself was not a human right, a question that came to be asked in the years that followed. Before leaving for Vienna the South African Foreign Minister told the press that the Carter Administration appeared to be intent on forcing a liberal democratic system on his country in which the minority would be outvoted and destroyed. Later Vorster insisted that his people would never commit racial suicide by conceding black majority rule.

It was in this sphere, Washington lost contact with popular fears. Hence Carter's diplomacy was not really going to make any significant impact on the situation in South Africa. Such principles, while no doubt, worthy were decidedly unhelpful if the main objective of Carter Administration was to work with the South African government in order to promote peaceful change. On reflection, even the South Africans admitted that if the defense of apartheid ever threatened the survival of the white

community, they had to look at it again with meticulous honesty". Unfortunately Carter made little of these thoughts because he gave so little thought to the outcome.

On another front—that of means rather than ends—the Carter years marked much less of a break with constructive engagement. Although this was not apparent for some time. In its public censure of South Africa's October crackdown the Administration again conveyed its conviction that rapid and substantial change in the republic's racial policies was not only desirable in itself, but necessary for true peace and stability in the region. Yet it was not clear as to what effective action Washington was prepared to take, or to what lengths was it prepared to go to achieve its stated aims.

Two weeks after the bannings and arrests of October, Young supported a Security Council resolution that called for mandatory arms embargo, the first of its kind ever applied by the United Nations. This action, like Carter's decision to send a senior State Department official to Steve Biko's funeral and to withdraw (temporarily) the U.S. Ambassador, a commercial officer and a senior naval attache, was largely symbolic. As Young himself

admitted, "All we are trying to do in sanctions is say that we are prepared to help the more creative, conscientious, moderate leadership to develop immediately.... An arms embargo is more effective than a total economic blockade because it makes it uncomfortable for South Africans without forcing them to become completely independent".

For the rest of the period the United States sought to move with greater caution. American participation in a multilateral sanctions efforts was still out of the question, even though three separate resolutions sponsored by African States confronted the American Ambassador at the UN that autumn. Zbigniew Brzezinski pointed out that a major constraint which kept American policy from acceding to the logic of the sanctions argument lay in the reliance on Pretoria for assistance in procuring a Rhodesian settlement.

Such an assertion tended to contradict Vance's own position that the United States should seek progress on the Namibian and Rhodesian questions while simultaneously pressing the South African government to concede some ground on apartheid.

However the need for South African diplomatic


support, did not entirely override the more profound goals of Carter's policy. All it did was to further enable the President and his senior advisers to understand that concerns other than human rights might dictate either a less intense pursuit of the policy; or at least a more prudent choice of means adopted on its behalf. Policy makers simply began to think of blending pragmatism with principle. With limited means they had to settle what they could. Brzezinski's caveat signified only a change of emphasis, not a change of policy. His position revealed that the United States had decided by the end of 1977 to confront the region's problems seriatim. That is to say, to bring about an internationally acceptable solution in Rhodesia, and then Namibia before pressing ahead with the more intractable problem of persuading South Africa to dismantle apartheid.

Nevertheless, the Administration paid a high price for its pragmatic option. Because the United States and its Western allies had always refused to resort to comprehensive economic sanctions against the Republic under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Brzezingki's stance seemed a feeble excuse to most of its African member states. Delegates from the African states, as well as from other developing countries had been raising their voices in various international forums for more than a decade on the subject of economic sanctions. But the United States found itself in a
greater dilemma than usual. On this demand public interest in the human rights initiative had given rise to increasing domestic pressures as well as international demands for more positive actions. It was maintained that this act not only express American disapproval but also effect significant changes in South African society.

For example, the Congressional black Caucus issued a twelve-point plan that urged legislative action for economic sanctions. A plan its members later discussed with President Carter. The Black Caucus also sponsored a resolution denouncing the bannings and arrests. It gathered enough bipartisan support to breeze through the House of Representatives by a significant majority. Although the resolution called for effective measures against South Africa only in general terms, and although it met with fairly lukewarm support in the Senate, it was the first resolution critical of apartheid to be adopted by either house.

As the congressional Black caucus lobbied congressional leaders, university students across the country held campus demonstrations for disinvestment. Franklin Williams, a former Ambassador to Ghana, and other prominent black leaders formed a coalition for Human Rights in South Africa.


58. Ibid.
It presented Cyrus Vance with its own eleven-point programme including various proposals for disengagement, an oil embargo, and a requirement that American corporations based in South Africa rigorously apply the Sullivan code.

Senator Dick Clark, the Chairman of the Senate Sub-Committee on Africa, produced a report. While rejecting the more extreme measures of disengagement and disinvestment, it advocated a three fold strategy to discourage future American investment in the Republic. It proposed first, that the U.S. government should withdraw all facilities which promoted the flow of capital and credit to South Africa. Secondly, it proposed that it should deny tax credits to any American firm that was found to be responsible for "unfair labour practices". And finally that it should "withhold official endorsement of private interest groups which organise in defence of U.S. corporate investment in South Africa unless they satisfactorily support the corporate guidelines and fair employment principles laid down by the U.S. government".

Notwithstanding this abundance of advice, the Carter Administration remained excessively tentative on further substantive steps. In fact, contrary to popular

59. Ibid.

expectations, White House revoked many of the positive sanctions that had been adopted by the previous administrations. Positive sanctions were dismantled, even if negative sanctions were not applied.

One example was that of Eximbank loans. In memorandum to the Congressional Black Caucus, Brzezinski reported that the Bank's board of directors had become more circumspect about extending guarantees for long term loans. New procedures required that all Eximbanks should give careful consideration to human rights. This fact alone ensured close scrutiny of new Eximbank proposals affecting South Africa.

Early in 1978 the Administration extended the embargo to include such items as computers and fuel tanks. However, even before the November embargo, Carter had begun moving toward a total ban on the sale of arms. During Congressional hearing in July Maurice Marcuss, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Commerce, had intimated that NSDM 81 was under review. In the end, the White House agreed to prohibit the sale, or lease of all dual purpose aircraft to the South African government or its agents. The embassy in South Africa was entrusted with the task of vetting all


future buyers. For their part, the latter had to certify that the aircraft in question would not be used in paramilitary activities. The embassy was given the job of monitoring these measures by random spot checks.

These measures were significant but in themselves, they achieved little. Even the repeal of NSDM 81 was not as great a blow as Washington had imagined. ARMSCOR acknowledged that although it had been forced on occasions to pay more for American equipment, American arms were still managed to slip through the embargo quite apart from the fact that South Africa had become much less dependent on the United States as a supplier.

By 1979, none of this seemed to matter. By then the post war goal of containing the Soviet Union had already emerged as a priority on the African continent. In its first two years in office the Carter Administration had cultivated a liberal tone and image. He claimed that revolutionary transformations in the third world should no longer be perceived as necessarily originating in the Kremlin. In his address in the university of Notre Dame, Carter had declared, "we are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear".

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Nevertheless, as that fear reaffirmed itself, Washington moved increasingly toward a cold war stance. For Brzezinski, Soviet-Cuban support for Ethiopia in the conflict with neighbouring Somalia, suggested an ominous sign. During the war between Ethiopia and Somalia, Brzezinski said," the problem is not the war, the problem is the Soviet and Cuban presence". This attitude then pervaded every Carter Administration policy, strategy and programme for Africa, especially Southern Africa. Brzezinski could easily claim that the problem in Southern Africa, was not apartheid or white-minority rule, but rather the Cuban and Russian presence in Angola, Soviet assistance to SWAPO in Namibia, or the ANC in South Africa.

Whether or not the Soviet leadership harboured ambitions to seek and exploit further opportunities for influence in Southern Africa, the United States acted as if those ambitions were undeniable and real. It was a perception that enhanced its need to work more closely with South Africa in Rhodesia and Namibia. It conveniently found signs of progress in South Africa itself. Thus, Brzezinski announced that political change may be beginning to occur within South Africa," a fact that seemed to confirm him in

66. Ibid.
his suspicion that the imposition of sanctions would be hasty and certainly foolhardy”. Even the more liberal Cyrus Vance expressed the hope that the beginning of basic progress would soon be seen.

Whereas earlier in 1977 Carter Administration had seemed to view South Africa as a Western outcast, now it came more and more to view it as a Western outpost. Logically, the Administration’s new cold-war stance drew South Africa and the Western Nations into close military cooperation with each other. Despite the U.S. vote for the U.N. mandatory arms embargo against South Africa on 4th November 1977, it began to appear that the United States was a strong ally of South Africa in its fight against Soviet and Cuban influence in Southern Africa. Brzezinski’s predecessor in the White House, Henry Kissinger, had used the same argument to encourage and fund a CIA paramilitary operation in Angola between 1975 and 1976.

In addition to these external restrictions on the actions of Carter’s strident anti-apartheid rhetoric, some observers detected an even greater internal constrain: the


68. Ibid.

belief that American corporations might serve as a useful political force for change instead of a bulwark for the status-quo. If the external constraints prompted American caution, this internal one marked persistence of wishful thinking. Liberal and Conservative administrations since Eisenhower had adhered to the neutral policy of neither encouraging nor discouraging investment and trade.

Carter merely steered the same course. The President's faith in economic engagement was demonstrated by his campaign remark to the Financial Mail, that "economic development, investment commitment, and economic leverage seems to be the only way to achieve racial justice". Together with Andrew Young, Carter continued to maintain that enlightened capitalism would bring interracial harmony and contribute to the eventual demise of apartheid in the same way that it had allegedly undermined entrenched racism in the American South.

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70. Thomas Karis op. cit. p. 354.


Accordingly, Washington encouraged "the application of employment practices" by American companies and continued its full support to the Sullivan code. Ironically however it refused to make the code mandatory. It also refused to tie Eximbank credits to formal observance of the main Sullivan Principles. Therefore, at the end of Carter era, the Administration had little to show for its endeavours.