

## ABSTRACT

ZAVELO, KELSEY LYNN. *In Transition: The United States and South Africa, 1976-1977*. (Under the direction of Dr. Nancy Mitchell.)

The South African government's 19 October 1977 crackdown on dissent sent shockwaves throughout the country. The "October crackdown" also convinced many members of the United Nations Security Council that it was time to impose mandatory sanctions on South Africa. Jimmy Carter, however, ordered the USUN ambassador to veto sanctions banning trade, investment and nuclear cooperation with Pretoria. A few days later, facing increased African pressure, Carter supported a mandatory arms embargo. Although this was the first time the Security Council had imposed mandatory sanctions on a UN member state, the action did not represent a major departure from America's past position on South Africa; the United States had been observing a voluntary arms embargo since 1963.

This thesis seeks to illuminate why Carter—a president who campaigned on infusing morality into American foreign policy—responded mildly to the October crackdown. Using documents from the Carter Library and online repositories such as the National Archives, this thesis argues that the Carter administration developed its South African policy under severe constraints, which limited its flexibility in pressing Pretoria to abolish apartheid. As much as Carter wanted to encourage racial justice in South Africa, his more immediate need was to convince Pretoria to help resolve the crisis in Rhodesia. Additionally, in August 1977, the Soviets informed Washington that they had discovered a South African nuclear weapons test site in the Kalahari Desert. When Carter challenged the South Africans about it, they denied everything. Pretoria's shrewd handling of its secretive nuclear weapons capability trapped the Carter administration: if Washington cut nuclear ties, it risked losing its ability to persuade Pretoria to sign the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

Documents from the South African Department of Foreign Affairs Archive reveal that a previously unstudied constraint on the Carter administration came from the South African government itself. Despite Carter's demands on Pretoria being measured, the South African government launched a public relations campaign that alleged that Carter had demanded an immediate end to apartheid. It argued that this imperiled the stability of South Africa. Pretoria painted Carter as a naïve and therefore dangerous president who did not understand US strategic interests in the anticommunist nation. Pretoria's strategy hamstrung Carter: if Washington denied the South African interpretation of events, it would look as though it supported apartheid; and if it used any of its sticks to prod Pretoria to change, it would give the Pretoria more ammunition for its campaign. Thus by the time of the "October crackdown," Pretoria had curtailed Carter's ability to impose tougher sanctions.

This thesis shows that, because of the constraints it faced, the Carter administration never constructed a hardline policy toward apartheid; it crafted a flexible, carrot and stick approach to encourage Pretoria to implement small steps toward racial equality. Carter himself never promised dramatic changes in South Africa and—more to the point—no members of the US Congress and no black African leaders expected apartheid to end in the near future. Scholars who express surprise that Carter did not react more harshly to the October crackdown are, to a certain extent, victims of Pretoria's public relations campaign. If scholars recalibrate their own expectations to reflect the historic record more accurately, and then look at the constraints on Carter—including Pretoria's successful propaganda campaign—then Carter's reaction to the crackdown would be seen as consistent with the moderate carrot and stick policy he articulated in the early days of his administration.

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In Transition: The United States and South Africa, 1976-1977

by  
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DEDICATION

In memory of Jonathan K. Ocko

## BIOGRAPHY

Kelsey Zavelo received her B.A. in History at North Carolina State University in 2010. She intended to pursue a career in law but changed paths because of her love of conducting historical research and teaching. She decided to attend NC State for her graduate studies because she wanted to work with Professor Nancy Mitchell, who encouraged Kelsey to be a historian even while she wrote letters of recommendation for Kelsey's law school applications. Kelsey received her M.A. in History in 2015. Her research interests include modern American history, US diplomatic history, the Cold War, sub-Saharan African history, and South African history. Kelsey is married to Alex Zavelo, her high school sweetheart. They live in Raleigh with their two cats, Jaclyn and Sparta.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| LIST OF FIGURES.....  | vii  |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....  | viii |
| INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE.....                                    | 1    |
| CHAPTER ONE: THE INHERITANCE.....                                       | 17   |
| “Kissinger Has Discovered Africa”.....                                  | 22   |
| “‘The days of ‘Nixon Shocks’ and ‘Kissinger Surprises’ must end”.....   | 31   |
| From Plains to Pretoria.....  | 41   |
| CHAPTER TWO: THE BALANCING ACT.....                                     | 48   |
| Broad Policy.....   | 54   |
| Specific Policy: The Balancing Act.....                                 | 69   |
| CHAPTER THREE: FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF SOUTH AFRICAN<br>POLICYMAKERS..... | 81   |
| Total Strategy against Total Onslaught.....                             | 87   |
| The ‘Swart Gevaar’ and US War on South Africa.....                      | 91   |
| The United States Reviews Policy.....                                   | 110  |
| CHAPTER FOUR: PRESSURE MATTERS.....                                     | 122  |
| Back to the Basics.....   | 127  |
| Nuclear Matters.....  | 135  |
| Winds of Change?.....   | 150  |
| Pressure Matters.....   | 166  |
| CONCLUSION: TRANSITIONS.....  | 172  |
| REFERENCES.....   | 185  |

LIST OF FIGURES

Map of Southern Africa.....ix

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| AAA   | African Activist Archive, Michigan State University |
| AAD   | Access to Archival Databases, National Archives     |
| ACAO  | American Committee on Africa                        |
| ANC   | African National Congress                           |
| ARC   | Archival Research Catalog                           |
| BCM   | Black Consciousness Movement                        |
| CIA   | Central Intelligence Agency                         |
| DDRS  | Declassified Documents Reference System             |
| DFA   | Department of Foreign Affairs, South Africa         |
| DNSA  | Digital National Security Archive                   |
| DOE   | Department of Energy                                |
| EX-IM | Export-Import Bank                                  |
| FNLA  | Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola             |
| GRFL  | Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library                 |
| HEU   | Highly Enriched Uranium                             |
| HIRC  | House International Relations Committee             |
| IAEA  | International Atomic Energy Agency                  |
| JCL   | Jimmy Carter Presidential Library                   |
| KGB   | Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union    |
| LEU   | Low Enriched Uranium                                |
| MPLA  | Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola           |
| NPT   | Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons  |
| NRC   | Nuclear Regulatory Commission                       |
| NSA   | National Security Advisor                           |
| NSC   | National Security Council                           |
| NSSM  | National Security Study Memorandum                  |
| PAC   | Pan Africanist Congress                             |
| PRC   | Policy Review Committee                             |
| RSA   | Republic of South Africa                            |
| SAG   | South African Government                            |
| SWAPO | South West Africa People's Organization             |
| UNITA | União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola |
| UNGA  | United Nations General Assembly                     |
| UNSC  | United Nations Security Council                     |

### MAP SOUTHERN AFRICA



Figure 1: Map of Southern Africa<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Southern Africa Map, <http://people.eku.edu/davisb/Africa/SouthernAfricaMap.jpg>.

## INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE

The election of President Jimmy Carter in 1976 raised black African hopes that the United States would use its influence to expedite the end of apartheid rule in South Africa. Carter—a southern Democrat indebted to the African American community for his electoral victory—campaigning on reinvigorating attention to morality and human rights in US foreign policy. He appointed charismatic Congressman and civil rights activist Andrew Young as US Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Young, Carter's point-man on African affairs during the campaign, was the first African American appointed to a cabinet-level position in US history. As historian Andrew DeRoche shows in his book *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, Young's position as ambassador to the United Nations enabled him to exercise civil rights activism on an international stage.<sup>1</sup> During the first half of 1977, the Carter administration worked diligently to formulate a policy that would encourage “a progressive transformation of the South African society.”<sup>2</sup>

At the same time that Carter's 1976 promises of hope and restoration ushered him into the White House, the South African government faced fear and desperation on its home front. A fierce revival of the antiapartheid liberation struggle inside South Africa had just begun. On 16 June 1976, 10,000 black school children marched to protest state-sanctioned racial oppression. The Soweto uprising marked the recommencement of the active fight against apartheid in South Africa, silenced since the mid-1960s. Inspired by the ideas of Black Consciousness and coming on the heels of Mozambican and Angolan independence which brought radical black majority governments to power, the Soweto uprising shook the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew DeRoche, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 2003).

<sup>2</sup> NSC Meeting on South Africa (PRM-4) “Summary of Conclusions,” 3 March 1977, NLC-17-1-5-8-9, Archival Research Catalog (hereafter ARC), Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta Georgia (hereafter JCL).

nerves of the South African government. Internal and international pressure for change had already begun mounting on Pretoria as Carter walked to the White House in January 1977.<sup>3</sup>

The story of US-South African relations during the Carter administration was one of theater. The main setting was the southern African region below the Zambezi River (see map pg. ix). While the backdrops cycled between Washington, New York, Soweto, and Pretoria, the plot developed in an atmosphere influenced by the collision of the Cold War and decolonization in southern Africa. The battle for black majority rule raged in Rhodesia, and turmoil mounted in Namibia—South Africa’s last two buffer states separating it from the radical, black north.<sup>4</sup> The South African government, led by Prime Minister John Vorster played the antagonist. In a story focused on the bilateral relations between the United States and South Africa, many in the audience—black Africa and some liberals in the United States—assumed the Carter administration would play the role of the protagonist. Armed with human rights rhetoric, a desire to support black majority rule in all of southern Africa, and a desire to improve relations with black Africa, this audience expected Carter to press South Africa for change.

But the character of the Carter administration lent itself to a different interpretation as well. While half the audience saw it as the protagonist fighting for what is right, the other half—some American businesses, some in the US Congress, and the South African government—saw it as the precipitator of drama. They questioned why the Carter

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<sup>3</sup> Jimmy Carter walked with his family from the Capitol to the White House on his inauguration day. In his book he explains that he “thought it would be a good demonstration of confidence by the new president in the people of our country as far as security was concerned, and also would be a tangible indication of some reduction in the imperial status of the president and his family.” See Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Botswana, South Africa’s other major northern neighbor, was independent but beholden to South Africa. As a landlocked country with an export economy and no defense force before 1977, Botswana depended on South Africa’s railroads and markets for labor.

administration set policies designed to encourage upheaval in South Africa and provoke the government in Pretoria, an anticommunist regime in need of US support during the Cold War. They viewed Carter as naïve and his pressures on Pretoria to be ignorant and harmful. How Carter and his contemporaries interpreted the administration's efforts to promote change in South Africa in 1977 depended on which side of the audience one associated.

From a historical standpoint, this dual characterization of the Carter administration has also posed a challenge to conducting secondary research on the topic. With hindsight, was the Carter administration a protagonist, anti-hero, or naïve precipitator of trouble led by good intentions and ignorance? What were its policy objectives in the first place, and how successful was it in executing them? Like the division between Carter's contemporaries, in the secondary literature it depends on who you ask.

There is surprisingly little scholarship available on Jimmy Carter's foreign policy toward apartheid South Africa. In the existing literature, however, there are two main schools of thought on the subject, which reflect two wider trends in diplomatic history—the traditionalist and post-revisionist. The traditionalist school, in turn, houses two camps, the realist and revisionist.

The realist camp, which emphasizes national security, national interest, balances of power, grand strategy, and elite policymakers over public opinion, partisan politics and idealism in American foreign policy, is best represented by George F. Kennan's *American Diplomacy, 1900-1950*.<sup>5</sup> Scholars of this camp argue that while the Carter administration talked about opposing apartheid, its actions differed little from previous administrations'. They assert that the administration failed to live up to its own ambitions because of

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<sup>5</sup> George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

competing strategic interests.<sup>6</sup> The revisionist camp, which emphasizes the economic interests of the United States in foreign policy formation, is represented by William Appleman Williams's *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*.<sup>7</sup> Most analysts in this group claim that the Carter administration, like other American administrations, prioritized American business interests over liberal public opinion in the United States and the welfare of blacks in South Africa.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, whether due to writing before the declassification of documents or choice of methodology, few scholars in the traditionalist school—realist or revisionist—used administration documents to construct their analyses.<sup>9</sup> This has been changing slowly in the recent past, however, as scholars now have access to a plethora of documents held at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia, and online document repositories such as the Declassified Document Reserve System, and the Central Foreign Policy Files in the National Archives Access to Archival Database.

The cultural turn in diplomatic history accompanied this growth in source availability and helped produce a post-revisionist school of thought on US-South African relations during

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Coker, *The United States and South Africa, 1969-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986); Princeton N. Lyman, *Partner to History: The US Role in South Africa's Transition to Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002); A.M. Thomas, *The American Predicament: Apartheid and United States Foreign Policy* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997); Alex Thomson, *Incomplete Engagement: US Foreign Policy towards the Republic of South Africa, 1981-1988* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1996); Alex Thomson, *US Foreign Policy towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Pauline Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years* (The Ford Foundation and the Foreign Policy Association, 1989); Richard E. Bissell, *South Africa and the United States: The Erosion of an Influence Relationship* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982); Kevin Danaher, *In Whose Interest? A Guide to US-South African Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1984); Kema Irogbe, *The Roots of United States Foreign Policy toward Apartheid South Africa* (Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997); Ann Seidman, *The Roots of Crisis in Southern Africa* (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> The notable exception to this is Thomson, *Conflict of Interests* (2008).



the Carter period. Michael Hunt's *Ideology and Foreign Policy*, which roused scholarly interest in identifying the ideological undertones of American foreign policy, best represents the cultural turn in diplomatic history.<sup>10</sup> Scholars of this post-revisionist school analyzing Carter's policy toward South Africa use White House documents to argue that the Carter administration had a deep-seated desire to see the advance of racial justice in South Africa. They point to Carter and Andrew Young's Southern experiences during the American Civil Rights Movement as the prominent lens through which the administration crafted its policy toward apartheid South Africa.<sup>11</sup>

My interest in US-South African relations during the Carter period evolved into a fascination as I tried to sort out the conflicting evaluations of Carter's policies in the secondary literature for a senior capstone class in 2010; but the core of my interest grew from an earlier passion. Andy Young got it right: "South Africa is sort of like quicksand—you stick your foot in it and it sucks you on in; you can't get away from it."<sup>12</sup> I first stepped into the quicksand in 2008 when I took a course on the history of South Africa. South Africa had been a mystery to me. I do not mean a "dark continent" kind of mysteriousness; I'm talking about a complete ignorance that could come only from having grown up with a small-town apathy for questioning the world. As a sophomore in college, my interest in education began to change, and I registered for the course to alleviate my embarrassment at knowing nothing

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<sup>10</sup> Michael Hunt, *Ideology and US Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); DeRoche, *Andrew Young Civil Rights Ambassador*; John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1993); Simon Stevens, "'From the Viewpoint of a Southern Governor': The Carter Administration and Apartheid, 1977-81," *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 5 (2012): 843-880; For a look at Carter's "Southerner" approach to the broader southern African region, see Nancy Mitchell, "Tropes of the Cold War: Jimmy Carter and Rhodesia," *Cold War History* 7, no. 2 (May 2007): 263-283.

<sup>12</sup> Young in Kirby, Johann 01307, "Transcript of Amb Young's Statements at USIS, May 22," 24 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives Access to Archival Database (hereafter AAD).

about South Africa. I was hooked. The peoples, cultures, languages, landscapes, and politics fascinated me. I craved more. For the first time, I began questioning things: structures of power based on economics and race, the intersections between history and memory, the power of ideas and mass-collective action, and both the rapidity and sluggishness of change over time. The quicksand of South Africa sucked me in, and it opened within me a passion for knowledge and love of history.

The puzzle of Carter's policy toward the complicated nation of South Africa, made little clearer by the small number of conflicting secondary sources, led me in search of answers. What was Carter's policy toward South Africa? After having reviewed the literature, this basic question still did not have a satisfying answer. I had other narrow questions as well: how did the Carter administration define and articulate its South African strategy, and—by contrast—how was it interpreted by the American public, black African leaders, and the South African government? What influenced the policy's development and implementation? How much and what kind of leverage did the United States have to press South Africa to change? How did South Africa respond to Carter's policy, and why did that matter? I also had broad questions: how did events in South Africa itself and the southern African region shape America's ability to influence change; that is to say, how did the intersection of the Cold War and decolonization in southern Africa affect Carter's approach to Pretoria? What, if anything, does the story of US-South African relations during the Carter period say about the relationship between a "superpowers" and "regional powers" during this late phase of the Cold War?

The research for this thesis has been a labor of love—but a labor nonetheless. It is first and foremost based on hundreds of primary documents collected from the Jimmy Carter

Presidential Library and the Department of Foreign Affairs archives in Pretoria, South Africa.<sup>13</sup> The Carter Library provided me with State Department, NSA, and CIA intelligence and analysis documents on US-South African relations. Policy review memoranda and committee meeting minutes were particularly helpful in illuminating the objectives of the Carter administration in its approach to South Africa. The Department of Foreign Affairs Archive provided me with embassy cables sent from the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. to Pretoria for review. These cables included American and South African newspaper clippings, White House policy speeches, and analyses of American policy toward South Africa, selected and reviewed by the South African ambassador to the United States. These cables helped me understand the South African government's perception of the Carter administration and its policy. They also provided me with the bones of an unexpected narrative about South Africa's strategy for rebuffing Carter's policy. My original thesis project included my first, second and fourth chapters. Chapter three was added after the South African documents convinced me how important the South African side of the story was to an American administration's ability to establish and implement foreign policy.

Online archives were also invaluable to my research. The two digital collections I found most useful were the Foreign Affairs and National Security Files held in the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Digital Library, and the Central Foreign Policy Files held in the National Archives Access to Archival Databases.<sup>14</sup> The first of collection provided me with national security documents, White House memoranda, and presidential meeting minutes of the Ford

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<sup>13</sup> In 2011 the South African government changed the name of the Department of Foreign Affairs (hereafter DFA) to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation. I use the old name in this thesis to lessen confusion about my sources.

<sup>14</sup> Foreign Affairs and National Security Collection, Gerald R Ford Presidential Library (hereafter GRFL), Digital Library, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov>; Central Foreign Policy Files, National Archives AAD, <http://aad.archives.gov/aad>.

administration. The latter, which holds over 12,000 records covering US-South African relations between 1976 and 1977, provided me with State Department cables sent to and from the White House. I made wide use of the 1977 collection, which was released in early 2014, to flesh out my arguments and provide as many voices to the story as possible. The African Activist Archive Project (AAA) at Michigan State University provided me American antiapartheid organizations' voices and helped me contextualize US-South African diplomatic relations from a grassroots level.<sup>15</sup>

Other sources I used include government officials' memoirs, speeches, press statements, newspaper articles, and published interviews. The US House of Representatives, Committee on House Administration's collection of 1976 presidential campaign documents was particularly useful in uncovering President Carter's formative views on South Africa. American public opinion surveys conducted in 1978 and 1979 helped me understand domestic pressures on the Carter administration to formulate and implement a policy toward South Africa.

My examination of the Carter administration's policy toward apartheid South Africa draws upon the realist camp's balance-of-interests approach and the post-revisionist school's emphasis on Carter's usage of his Southern experience in interpreting the South African situation and designing policy. I disagree with the revisionist's prioritization of American business interests in South Africa as a main driver of US foreign policy during the Carter period. Carter consistently rejected black African appeals for economic sanctions against South Africa, and he did so for several reasons: the administration did not believe economic sanctions could be made effective because other Security Council members—most notably

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<sup>15</sup> African Activist Archive (hereafter AAA), Michigan State University, <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/>.

the United Kingdom—would veto them; economic sanctions, the administration thought, could push Pretoria further into an uncooperative stance on apartheid as well as on the issues of Rhodesia and Namibia; and Carter and Young’s Southern experiences taught them that the American business community in South Africa could be a productive force in dismantling apartheid by reducing racial discrimination and building a black middle class. The administration believed that the threat of economic sanctions could be a more effective tool in wheedling South African cooperation than a vote for them at the Security Council. Thus, American business interests did not trump strategic or human rights concerns, but were considered a useful aid for the administration’s goal of promoting a progressive transformation of the South African society.

The two most influential secondary works for my thesis are Alex Thomson’s *Conflict of Interests* and Simon Steven’s “From the Viewpoint of a Southern Governor.” Like most scholars writing about the Carter administration’s strategy toward South Africa, Thomson and Stevens pay almost exclusive attention to 1977. As explained in chapter two of this thesis, the administration devoted considerable energy to formulating a policy toward South Africa that factored in a myriad of political, economic, strategic, and humanitarian considerations in the first half of 1977. In May of that year, Carter sent Vice President Walter Mondale to meet with South African Prime Minister John Vorster to relay the new policy. As Thomson described of the meeting, “genuine change, based on the will of the majority, was now in demand, and punitive sanctions would be deployed to support this requirement. An ultimatum...had been issued.”<sup>16</sup> Relations between the United States and South Africa soured after the Mondale-Vorster encounter and deteriorated after the South African government’s

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<sup>16</sup> Thomson, *Conflict of Interests*, 95.

massive crackdown on black dissidence on 19 October 1977. In November 1977, the Carter administration implemented a series of symbolic and tangible actions to illustrate its displeasure with Pretoria, including voting for a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa in the United Nations Security Council. After this episode, however, is where the interpretation of events—from the contemporary perspective as well as the historical—gets tricky.

How strong a reaction to the October crackdown did the Carter administration take? The United States, after all, had been observing a voluntary arms embargo against South Africa since 1963. Some historians have noted that the mandatory arms embargo had little practical effect on South Africa's domestic policy and, thus, have deemed it a light reaction seemingly out of sync with Carter's antiapartheid rhetoric.<sup>17</sup> Was the administration's reaction in line with its policy objectives, or did it usher in a new phase of policy? The answer to this question depends on how one interprets the events leading up to the crackdown and the understanding one has of Carter's policy objectives.

Thomson argues that the Carter administration attempted to balance a troika of interests with South Africa (strategic, economic, human rights), but that "the results of this South African policy never matched its ambition... The result was a stalemate."<sup>18</sup> I agree that the result appeared to be a stalemate, but I disagree with Thomson's suggestion that Carter's policy was ever "ambitious." Simon Stevens, on the other hand, argues that "the administration's failure to take further measures in the second half of its term was not a

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<sup>17</sup> Anna-Mart van Wyk and Jackie Grobber, "The Carter Administration and the Institution of the 1977 Mandatory Arms Embargo against South Africa: Rhetoric or Active Action?" *Historia*, 51 no. 1 (May 2006), 197; Thomson, *Conflict of Interests*, 106-107.

<sup>18</sup> Thomson, *Conflict of Interests*, 89.

major policy reversal...it represented an essential continuity with its initial approach.”<sup>19</sup> Its initial approach was designed to be hesitant because “the Southern experiences of Carter and Young gave them a strong commitment to racial equality in South Africa, and...the specific lessons they drew from those experiences led them to adopt a very cautious policy for promoting change.”<sup>20</sup> Both Thomson and Stevens conclude that by the spring of 1978, the United States and South Africa reached a stalemated position. What is missing from these two works and others is a complete account for that stalemate. Stevens explains, “we still lack a full explanation, however, of why the Carter administration was so tentative in its approach toward apartheid South Africa during its first year and a half in office, when it did devote considerable attention to the issue.”<sup>21</sup>

This thesis provides a fuller explanation. By taking a focused look at US-South African relations between June 1976 and November 1977, this thesis clarifies the nuances of the Carter administration’s approach to apartheid South Africa—its intentions and objectives, as well as motivations. It advances the adage that foreign policy is not made in a vacuum, and illustrates that, quite contrary to an imagined vacuum which allows great liberty in policy design, sometimes it is made under tremendous constraints.

The scope of this thesis focuses attention on the year that concerns most scholars of US-South African relations during the Carter period (1977), but two additional factors influenced the choice of this periodization as well. A practical reason for choosing to focus on 1977 is that more sources are available for this year than any other. The Carter Library hosts documents on US-South African relations for all four years of Carter’s presidency, but

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<sup>19</sup> Stevens, “From the Viewpoint of a Southern Governor,” 879.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 845.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 856.

a vast majority of them—including the most important documents such as policy studies and committee meeting minutes—exist only for 1977. At the time of writing this thesis, the National Archives Central Foreign Policy Files hosted documents only through the end of 1977. I also chose the period June 1976 to November 1977 because two major events in South Africa, the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976 and the October crackdown, provide significant bookends for my story.

Chapter one begins in June 1976 in the streets of Soweto. For the Americans, it was the Angolan civil war of 1975 that invigorated Washington's interest in southern African affairs, but it was the Soweto uprising that convinced the South African government of the need to shore up its defenses, a subject introduced in chapter one and covered more thoroughly in chapters three and four. In June 1976, the Ford administration launched a shuttle mission to support peaceful change in southern Africa with a goal of precluding Soviet influence in the process of decolonization. Jimmy Carter, having won the Democratic nomination for president, began his general campaign for the Oval Office at the same time. As news outlets picked up the stories of rioting black school children and brutal retaliation by security forces in South Africa, Carter raises hopes that a White House with him as president would infuse American foreign policy with general principles of human rights and morality.

Chapter two details the Carter administration's broad and specific goals in designing policy toward South Africa between January and April 1977. It explains the constraints limiting the administration's liberty in policy formulation. Primarily, regional issues were at the forefront of its decision making. This chapter shows that while it is true that the administration decided to treat each issue of southern Africa—Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid South Africa—"separately on its own merits," Rhodesia remained the most urgent



concern in southern Africa, with Namibia not far behind. This chapter also demonstrates that the Carter administration took black African concerns into consideration in developing its approach to South Africa. In that vein, it argues that while black African leaders had hopes that the Carter administration would usher in a new American stance against apartheid South Africa, they agreed that apartheid could not be tackled head on until the regional issues were resolved. Additionally, Carter's Western allies' opinions on sanctions further limited the kind of leverage the administration desired to wield over Pretoria. Finally, chapter two supports Simon Stevens' argument that, far from being ambitious in its goal of pressing South Africa for change, the Carter administration crafted a restrained policy that balanced urges for action on the one hand, and regional and allied constraints on the other.

Chapter three is new to the story of US-South African relations during the Carter period. It reveals the South African side of the story—the challenges posed by Pretoria itself. It outlines the South African government's assessment of Carter's policies, especially in the aftermath of the May 1977 meeting between Vice President Walter Mondale and Prime Minister John Vorster in Vienna. Although the Americans did not take action other than to relay the administration's intention to implement a carrot and stick approach with Pretoria, the South Africans did not appreciate the tone of the new administration and worried about the implications of its policy. Documents from the South African Department of Foreign Affairs archive and the memoirs of former South African diplomats suggest that Pretoria implemented a creative strategy to deal with the Carter administration. It launched a public relations campaign in the United States and South Africa which sought to criticize Carter's policies as unjustified and dangerous to the stability of South Africa. To Americans, it claimed that the Carter administration undervalued US strategic interests in the

anticommunist nation. At home, the South African government played on white South Africans' fears of black radicalism and communism in order to rally white support against fundamental change to apartheid at home. Pretoria's strategy hamstrung Carter: if Washington denied the South African interpretation of events, it would look as though it supported apartheid; and if it used any of its sticks to prod Pretoria to change, it would give the South African government more ammunition for its campaign.

Chapter four centers on the second bookend of this thesis: the October crackdown and the American response to it. It argues that Carter's response to the crackdown was in line with the administration's stated policy—it was a moderate reaction that sought to express American displeasure at the SAGs actions but remain flexible enough to keep some carrots and sticks for future use. It was a reaction influenced by the same factors that shaped Carter's original policy formulation—regional concerns, allied interests, black African interests, and the administration's own interpretation of events. It was additionally influenced, however, by South Africa's own evolving strategy for dealing with mounting international pressure for change. Building on chapter three, chapter four describes Pretoria's movement towards its “total strategy” to counter a perceived “total onslaught” against it. This included a plan for building a nuclear bomb as well as blaming the Carter administration for provoking its domestic problems. Pretoria, feeling backed into a corner since the Soweto uprising and the advent of the Carter administration, in 1977 played its losing hand in the best possible way.

The documents show that the Carter administration never planned to take a heavy hand against apartheid South Africa. The constraints on the administration curtailed that option. It certainly did craft a flexible, carrot and stick approach designed to promote a progressive transformation of the South African society. And it did take action to press South

Africa for change, especially after the October crackdown. But it also was not the aggressive approach that the South African government made it out to be. The image of a provocative yet naïve Carter administration causing unnecessary trouble for a strong, anticommunist country in southern Africa was a narrative crafted by Pretoria itself. The Carter administration played its limited hand carefully in dealing with South Africa in 1977; The South African government, with its survival at stake and a growing go-it-alone attitude, played a better one.

Even though this thesis details US-South African relations in 1976 and 1977, it also attempts to contextualize those years by noting that they mark only the beginning of massive changes occurring in southern Africa—the main setting for the drama. The pace of change quickened in the region after the fall of the Portuguese empire in 1974. The Angolan civil war, the Rhodesian civil war, the Soweto uprising and the October crackdown all took place within a short time period when considering the long walk to freedom in South Africa. This thesis takes a detailed look at 1977 because of the constraints of research, but it should not be forgotten the events described comprise only one episode of the changes underway in southern Africa between 1974 and 1994. Remembering that 1977 was at the beginning of a great transition helps one understand why it is difficult to elucidate the complications and seemingly conflicting evidence apparent in the Carter administration’s policy toward South Africa. Transitions are messy.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s National Security Adviser, wrote in his memoir in 1983, “the South African issue was and is a much more difficult task than Rhodesia, and I

felt, as we were leaving office, that we had only just begun to recognize the fundamental outlines of the problem.”<sup>22</sup> The drama that follows is only the beginning.

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<sup>22</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1983), 143.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE INHERITANCE

16 June 1976. Orlando West, Soweto, South Africa. A crowd of 10,000 black South African students marched in protest through the streets of Soweto, a township on the southwest outskirts of Johannesburg, South Africa. They sang black nationalist songs while carrying their fists in the black-power salute, a symbol borrowed from the black power movement a decade earlier in the United States. While their singing and hand gestures revealed their general grievances against apartheid, the signs and banners they carried made obvious their primary reason for marching. “Do Not Want Affrikaans [*sic*],” one sign stated. “To Hell with Afrikaans,” exclaimed another.<sup>1</sup> On that day the students were protesting the enforcement of a regulation that required at least one half of the classes in black schools be taught in Afrikaans, a language derived from Dutch and the primary language of the National Party, the party of apartheid.<sup>2</sup> Smaller student protests and classroom boycotts against the regulation had taken place in the months previous, but the 16 June protest was the largest to date. It was organized, spirited and determined. It was also the beginning of the most violent racial disturbance in South Africa since the Sharpeville shootings a decade and a half earlier.<sup>3</sup>

As the students marched toward Phefeni Junior High School on Vilakazi Street, they were met by 300 policemen. Frustrated by the termination of their march, some students began to taunt the police, and when one policemen attempted to disperse the students by throwing a tear-gas grenade, the students responded by throwing rocks. The police opened fire. As students ran for safety, they began overturning government-owned vehicles, some of

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal, *Soweto: A History* (Cape Town: Maskew Longman, 1998), 84-85; for personal reflections on the Soweto uprising, see Elsabé Brink et al., compiler, *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Brink et al., *Soweto 16 June 1976*, 9-24.

<sup>3</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 241; James Barber and John Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy: The Search for Status and Security, 1945-1988* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 207.

them with officials still inside. The protestors set government buildings aflame and destroyed trains and buses—symbols of government authority and control. In a radio broadcast about the incident, Justice Minister James Kruger condemned the “aggressive” and “inflammatory” behavior of the protestors. The official report of the uprising claims that the first day of rioting left 15 persons dead.<sup>4</sup> Newspaper reports of the day claimed that the number was 23, while historians now suspect the number to be as high as 200.<sup>5</sup>

Over the next few days the rioting in Soweto continued unabated. By Friday 18 June the rioting had spread to twenty-eight nearby townships.<sup>6</sup> Despite the spread of violence and a rising death toll, South African Prime Minister John Vorster announced by radio broadcast that there was “definitely no reason for any panic.” Suggesting the likelihood of a larger conspiracy against the government by “certain organizations” attempting to bring about a race war, Vorster asserted that “this government [would] not be intimidated, and instructions [had] been given to maintain law and order at all costs.”<sup>7</sup> By the time the official inquiry about the violence came out in February 1977, “all costs” came to mean protests, rioting, and police violence in every corner of the country, the closing of black institutions involved in the uprisings, approximately 4,000 injuries, 6,000 arrests and 575 deaths.<sup>8</sup> What had begun as a spirited, yet peaceful protest against an education grievance in Soweto ended in a passionate uprising, revealing the anger of black South Africans living under apartheid-.

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<sup>4</sup> Cillié Commission, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16<sup>th</sup> of June to the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1977* vol. 1, Part A (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1980), 143.

<sup>5</sup> John F. Burns, “6 Die in South Africa Riot After Black Student Protest,” *New York Times*, 17 June 1976; Bonner and Segal, *Soweto*, 88.

<sup>6</sup> Brink et al., *Soweto 16 June 1976*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> John Vorster, “Text of Vorster Statement,” *New York Times*, 19 June 1976.

<sup>8</sup> Cillié Commission, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16<sup>th</sup> of June to the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1977* vol. 2, Part D, 522, 525, 533; Baruch Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London: Zed Press, 1979); Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 211-212.

The Soweto uprising of 1976 revived of the liberation struggle against apartheid, which had been quieted in the mid-1960s following the detention of African National Congress (ANC) leaders Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela on Robben Island and the banning of Robert Sobukwe of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). It is also remembered for its youthful spirit. As opposed to the seasoned fighters of the banned ANC and PAC, school children organized and led the protest, encouraged by the philosophy of the Black Consciousness Movement.<sup>9</sup> Despite its lack of central organization, the Soweto uprising caused an uproar in South Africa and caught the attention of onlookers near and far.

Domestically, the uprising startled the South African government, which since the mid-1960s had assumed its governance through apartheid—backed by security forces—sufficiently strong to quell black unrest. It was the great passion of the black youth, however, that prompted the Justice Minister to call for the inquiry into the causes of the uprising. “Mr. Kruger,” the *New York Times* reported from Johannesburg on 20 June, “was the first senior official to acknowledge that the Government would have to go beyond the mere exercise of its police powers and investigate the passions that were vented in the rioting.” Kruger admitted in an interview that the government could no longer ignore “black anger.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> The Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) was a mass movement that altered the way black South Africans thought of themselves and the liberation struggle against apartheid. It was adopted in the university setting in 1968. The philosophical principle of “black consciousness” first sought to liberate blacks from the psychological oppression caused by the system of racial segregation. For more on the black consciousness movement and ideology, see Steve Biko, *Black Consciousness in South Africa*, ed. Millard Arnold (New York: Random House, 1978); Robert Fatton Jr., *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986); Barney N. Pityana, et al. ed., *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1991); Daniel Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa 1968-1977* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010); Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander, and Nigel C. Gibson, eds., *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008);

<sup>10</sup> “South African in the Eye of the Storm,” *New York Times*, 21 June 1976.

The violent response of the South African police to the rioting incited criticism from around the world, but especially from black African states north of the Zambezi River. William Eteki, Secretary General of the Organization of African Unity declared that the Soweto uprising “constituted a new affront by the minority racist regime in Pretoria against the international community.” Zambia’s central newspaper, *The Daily Mail*, stated that “the rioting signaled a new era of racial conflict” which “marks the beginning of a prolonged racial war that the whites will lose in the end.”<sup>11</sup> The *New York Times* reported succinctly, “In short, South Africa is on course for an explosion.”<sup>12</sup> Together, the 47 African member-states of the United Nations requested an emergency session of the Security Council, which led to the 19 June resolution that “strongly condemn[ed] the South African Government” and “reaffirm[ed] that the policy of apartheid [was] a crime against the conscience and dignity of mankind.”<sup>13</sup> South Africa appeared to be entering a state of crisis.

As June drew to a close with Justice Minister James “Jimmy” Kruger fighting to restore order in South Africa, half way around the world another Jimmy was enduring a fight of his own. In the United States, 1976 was a presidential election year, and June marked the end of Democratic presidential candidate Jimmy Carter’s primary campaign. It had been a long fight for Carter, a candidate with whom most Americans just one year previous were unfamiliar. His populist style campaign had brought the former one-term Georgian Governor before crowds across the country, and people listened with longing for the type of America he sought to restore. By June, Carter had won most of the primary races, and on 8 June he won the important primaries of New Jersey and Ohio. On that same night, one of Carter’s

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<sup>11</sup> Michael T. Kaufman, “Outraged African Nations Talk of Violent Retaliation,” *New York Times*, 19 June 1976.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Lewis, “Under the Volcano,” *New York Times*, 29 November 1976.

<sup>13</sup> UN S/Res/392, 19 June 1976, [www.un.org/en/sc/documents](http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents) (accessed 14 March 2015).



competitors, Governor George Wallace of Alabama, released his delegates to Carter and dropped out of the race. Wallace's delegates, together with an endorsement by Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, helped secure Carter the Democratic nomination.<sup>14</sup> With the primary campaign coming to an end, by mid-June Carter embarked on his journey to the White House against a divided Republican Party.

June 1976 became a transitional month in the domestic and foreign policies of South Africa and the United States. In South Africa, the Soweto uprising tested the government's domestic policies and put the country again on the defensive within the international community. Coming on the heels of the breakup of the Portuguese empire in southern Africa in 1974, the Soweto uprising signaled that fight for majority rule in southern Africa would not stop at the borders of South Africa—change was coming to the heart of apartheid. In the United States, a governor from the Deep South won the Democratic nomination for president, campaigning to heal the country from its malaise following Vietnam and Watergate and to restore morality in American foreign policy. In November 1976, Carter won the election.

Much of what the Carter administration would have to consider in formulating its policy toward South Africa was inherited. Although South Africa was not a central campaign issue, rapid changes in the southern African region forced both the Ford administration and candidate Carter to reevaluate American foreign policy toward all of southern Africa. The problem of South African apartheid could not be ignored. Late southern African decolonization, which threatened to turn into an East-West confrontation, and Carter's own

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter: The Campaign of 1976* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 36.

campaign promises to restore morality in foreign policy combined to place constraints on Carter's approach to South Africa after his inauguration.

### **“Kissinger Has Discovered Africa”**

In the late 1960s, President Richard Nixon prioritized precluding Soviet influences in the southern African region over human rights concerns about apartheid.<sup>15</sup> This strategy was laid out in the 1969 National Security Study Memoranda, NSSM 39. In this memo, Nixon's National Security Advisor Dr. Henry Kissinger explained, “Southern Africa is geographically important for the US and its allies, particularly with the closing of the Suez Canal and the increased Soviet activity in the Indian Ocean.”<sup>16</sup> As the economically and militarily strongest country in southern Africa, South Africa was the most important anti-Soviet state on the continent. The Nixon administration sought to preserve that relationship above all other concerns.

A Cold War policy toward the region, however, did not mean that the Nixon administration was blinded to the racial problems in southern Africa. This region of white-settler colonies had a long history of racial violence. Slavery, migrant labor and exploitation along the color line fueled racial constructs of Afrikaners, Coloureds, Indians, British, and Bantu speaking Africans for three centuries after the Dutch East India Company expanded a settlement at the Cape of Good Hope in the 1650s. When in 1948 the National Party of South Africa campaigned on a policy of separate development, or *apartheid*, the economic and

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<sup>15</sup> Southern Africa refers to the region of Africa below the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) and Tanzania. See map, pg ix.

<sup>16</sup> National Security Council, “National Security Study Memorandum 39,” 10 April 1969, (hereafter NSSM 39), Digital National Security Archive (hereafter DNSA).

political subjugation of black Africans, Coloureds, and Indians was not new.<sup>17</sup> What was anomalous was the timing of such legislation. As historian Thomas Borstelmann explains in *The Cold War and the Color Line*, as the world began to distance itself from overt discrimination after the horrors of the Holocaust, South Africa moved in the opposite direction.<sup>18</sup> The United States passed the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to eliminate legally sanctioned racial discrimination; South Africa, on the other hand, passed the Bantu Homelands Commission Act of 1971.<sup>19</sup>

President Nixon knew that as decolonization rolled down the African continent in the 1960s, international criticism of South Africa's racial policies increased. As Dwight D. Eisenhower's Vice President in the 1950s, Nixon had supported civil rights legislation in the United States and travelled to Ghana in 1957 to represent the United States during the African country's independence ceremony.<sup>20</sup> In 1963, the Organization of African Unity pledged to push decolonization down the African continent by challenging South African apartheid, the epicenter of southern Africa's racial strife.<sup>21</sup> This made it even more difficult for Washington to maintain friendly relations with Pretoria. In the early 1960s the United States began to distance itself from South Africa by denouncing apartheid at the United Nations and by leading the effort to establish a voluntary arms embargo against it in 1963.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Apartheid, or "apartness," was a term coined by Afrikaner intellectuals in the 1930s but adopted by the mainstream after it was used by the National Party in the 1948 elections, which it won. See Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 186.

<sup>18</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 146; Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> The Bantu Homelands Commission Act of 1971 gave the government the power to grant independence to any of South African Homelands, or areas of land designated for specific ethnic groups. See Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 191-195.

<sup>20</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 223; Thomas Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation*, 49.

<sup>21</sup> Organization of African Unity, CIAS/Plen.2/Rev.2, in *Organization of African Unity: Basic Documents and Resolutions*, (Addis Ababa, May 1963).

<sup>22</sup> NSSM 39, 8; UN S/Res/181, 7 August 1963, [www.un.org/en/sc/documents](http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents) (accessed 14 March 2015).

Nixon underwent a change of heart on race relations during the 1960s, however. For politically motivated reasons, he spoke out against the racial violence in the United States in the late 1960s by repeating the concerns of segregationists for the return of “law and order.”<sup>23</sup> Compounding the internal unrest of the 1960s was the increasing tension of the Cold War in Cuba and Vietnam. While as Vice President in the 1950s Nixon leaned toward the left of the Republican Party, the 1960s encouraged him to lean to the right. By the time Nixon joined the ranks of United States presidents, he expressed much less concern for racial justice in Africa.

In NSSM 39, Kissinger elucidated the connection the Nixon administration understood between race and the Cold War in southern Africa. “The racial problems of southern Africa,” he warned, “will grow more acute over time, perhaps leading to violent internal upheavals and greater involvement of the communist powers.”<sup>24</sup> For Kissinger, keeping communism out of southern Africa meant preventing “violent internal upheavals,” that is, maintaining peace. In 1969, with all black opposition parties banned from South Africa, there *was* relative peace in the country—Mandela was imprisoned in 1964 and the Soweto uprising would not occur until 1976. Kissinger interpreted this lack of oppositional activity by blacks to mean “...there [were] reasons to question the depth and permanence of black resolve.” This assessment, together with the military strength of the central government in Pretoria, led to the infamous declaration of NSSM 39 about South Africa: “The whites are here to stay and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them.”<sup>25</sup> For the Nixon administration, this meant that the United States should “relax political

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<sup>23</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 224.

<sup>24</sup> NSSM 39, 4

<sup>25</sup> NSSM 39, 19.

isolation and economic restrictions on the white states” (South Africa, Rhodesia, and the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola).<sup>26</sup> Although full political participation of all of South African citizens remained a distant policy goal, Kissinger concluded that “there is virtually no evidence that change might be forthcoming in these South African [apartheid] policies as a result of any approach on our part.” The goal of NSSM 39 was to devise a policy to preclude Soviet meddling in the region, not to seek changes in apartheid.

For the next seven years, the Nixon and Ford administrations followed a policy toward South Africa based on the premises of NSSM 39. Southern Africa, therefore, became a policy backwater for the United States. Détente, conflict in the Middle East, Vietnam, Cambodia, and India dominated the administration’s energies in the first half of the 1970s. In March 1975, as historian Piero Gleijeses put it, “Angola must have seemed terribly unimportant to the weary traveler [Kissinger] aboard his Boeing 707.”<sup>27</sup> For this administration, all was quiet on the southern African front.

Nixon and Kissinger, however, failed to appreciate the “winds of change.”<sup>28</sup> This led to the Ford administration’s “shock” when a military coup in Lisbon, Portugal in April 1974 led to the rapid decolonization of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and Sao Tomé and Príncipe. When left-leaning governments assumed power in Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde and Mozambique, the administration quickly turned its attention to the ongoing civil war in Angola. Suddenly, all of southern Africa appeared to be vulnerable to communism.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 283.

<sup>28</sup> In a speech before the South African Parliament in 1960, British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan used the phrase “winds of change” to indicate the forthcoming decolonization project of the Britain. Decolonization moved down the African continent in the early 1960s until reaching the white-settler colonies in southern Africa. See South African History Online, “The ‘Wind of Change’ Speech,” [www.sahistory.org.za/wind-chnage-speech](http://www.sahistory.org.za/wind-chnage-speech) (accessed 19 April 2015).

In June 1975, the National Security Council convened under Kissinger's leadership to discuss the administration's new approach to Angola. "Instability in Angola," meant three things to the Ford administration: (1) it "[endangered the] stability in neighboring states...such as Zaire;" (2) it "[increased] the resistance to change by the white southern African states of Rhodesia and South Africa;" and (3) "a Soviet dominated Angola could be a definite threat to its neighbors," i.e. if the Angolan domino fell to communism, so might the other southern African states.<sup>29</sup> No longer able to depend on the Portuguese government to quell the fighting, and with the fall of Saigon in April 1975 still fresh in the minds of American citizens, the Ford administration had to decide how to keep the Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), a leftist political faction, from winning Angola country's first elections in November of that year.<sup>30</sup> Options discussed at the meeting included staying neutral or funneling aid to the other two political factions, the FNLA and UNITA, through third parties (such as President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire), thereby stacking the deck against the MPLA while avoiding criticism for getting involved in another third world quagmire.<sup>31</sup> The United States government, facing another potential Cold War crisis abroad, opted for covert action through third parties.

Between June 1975 and January 1976, the Angolan civil war intensified. In July, the MPLA expelled FNLA forces from the capital city of Luanda. Because South Africa feared a MPLA victory as much as the United States, Pretoria began parallel covert operations,

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<sup>29</sup> "Meeting of the National Security Council," 1, National Security Adviser's NSC Meeting File, Box 2, GRFL Digital Library.

<sup>30</sup> The MPLA enjoyed early successes in the liberation struggle with support from Zambia and limited Soviet aid.

It never espoused a consistent Marxist ideology, however, and lost its Soviet support in 1972 when the USSR could not verify that the MPLA denounced China's version of communism, Maoism. See Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 243.

<sup>31</sup> "NSC Meeting, 6/27/1975," 3, National Security Adviser's NSC Meeting File, Box 2, GRFL, Digital Library.

sending advisers in to help the FNLA in August. The stalemate continued until South Africa (with the quiet urging of the United States)<sup>32</sup> sent in Special Forces under the codename Zulu. The South African troops made it all the way north to the outskirts of the capital when the greatest shock of the war ensued: Fidel Castro, who had been observing and aiding the MPLA during the civil war, commenced Operation Carlota by dispatching a 652 man, Cuban battalion to Angola. The Cuban leader quickly escalated the number of Cuban troops in Angola to 7,500 when, in January 1976, the Soviets directly assisted the Cuban airlift. The United States Congress, dominated by Democrats, wanted to avoid an escalation of American involvement and cut off all covert aid to Angola.<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, Zulu was forced to retreat, and the Cuban-backed MPLA assumed control in Angola. The Cold War had arrived in southern Africa.<sup>34</sup>

The Angola crisis rejuvenated Washington's interest in African affairs at a critical time—an election year. This further encouraged Ford to revamp America's involvement in southern Africa because, by 1976, NSSM 39 had attracted few friends for the United States on the whole of the African continent. “As they say, Mr. President,” Kissinger quipped, “in foreign policy, timing is everything.”<sup>35</sup> In the NSC meeting on Angola, President Ford stated his desire to strengthen US relations with black African states (especially those with influence in southern African region) in order to regain influence in the area and get the Cubans out.<sup>36</sup> With American aid to the Angolan rebels cut and a presidential election

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<sup>32</sup> Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 298-299; John Daniel, “Racism, The Cold War and South Africa’s Regional Security Strategies, 1948-1990,” in *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation*, ed. Sue Onslow (New York: Routledge, 2009), 42.

<sup>33</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 832.

<sup>34</sup> For a thorough account of the Angolan civil war and its Cold War overlays, see Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, especially pp. 5-9; 230-396.

<sup>35</sup> Kissinger, ““NSC Meeting, 5/11/1976,” 2, National Security Adviser’s NSC Meeting File, Box 2, GRFL, Digital Library.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

approaching in late 1976, the administration turned to the next hotspot of the Cold War in the region, Rhodesia.

In order to gain friends and influence in the region, in April 1976 Kissinger traveled to Africa to announce that Washington had a new approach to African affairs. “We recognized that since the fiasco of Angola there was a growing radicalization in the situation in southern Africa,” President Ford explained, “and that if we didn’t do something we would be creating serious problems for ourselves.”<sup>37</sup> Kissinger’s first task in Africa was to speak with key leaders in order to get assurance that neighboring countries who were assisting black liberation fighters in white controlled states would not approach the Cubans for further support. The objective was to prevent an escalation of the armed struggle in Rhodesia. Kissinger explained that his intentions were to “find a platform on which we could rely that would arrest the armed struggle in southern Africa, preclude foreign intervention, and give the moderate regimes something to hold onto and the radicals something to think about.” With this goal, Kissinger approached Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and “told him that...if he [Nyerere] would work with us [the US], we would find some way to make progress on solving the problems of southern Africa.”<sup>38</sup>

In Nairobi, Kenya, Kissinger subsequently spoke with the presidents of Zambia, Botswana and Mozambique, expressing the same platform of working with the African states to lessen the armed struggle in the region and settle the problems of southern Africa through diplomacy. All four leaders seemed to agree that if the Americans were able to bring about a negotiated settlement to the Rhodesian issue, they would not need to call on Cuban troops or “outsiders” (i.e., Moscow) for assistance. They also pressed Kissinger to “deal more

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<sup>37</sup> Ford in *ibid*, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Kissinger in *ibid*, 3.



actively” with South Africa to acquire Pretoria’s assistance in helping resolve the Rhodesian problem.<sup>39</sup> As a landlocked country, Rhodesia was completely dependent upon South Africa’s rail system. In addition to South Africa’s defense and trade relations with Rhodesia, this gave Pretoria leverage to press the white government of Rhodesia into negotiations with black nationalists, if it chose to. Kissinger reflected upon his return from his Africa trip, “we have to talk to South Africa to give us a hand to bring [Rhodesian leader Ian] Smith to negotiations, which have to end with majority rule and the protection of minority rights.” Kissinger clarified, “I have a basic sympathy with the white Rhodesians, but black Africa is absolutely united on this issue, and if we don’t grab the initiative we will be faced with the Soviets and Cuban troops.”<sup>40</sup>

The highlight of Kissinger’s eight-country tour was his major speech on US policy toward southern Africa delivered in Lusaka, Zambia on 26 April 1976. “I have come to Africa,” Kissinger announced, “with an open mind and an open heart...My journey is intended to give fresh impetus to our cooperation and usher in a new era in American policy.” Kissinger announced that the United States was prepared to “support self-determination, majority rule, equal rights and human dignity for all the peoples of southern Africa—in the name of moral principle, international law, and world peace.”<sup>41</sup> Kissinger outlined a ten-point policy toward Rhodesia. He affirmed American support for a negotiated settlement, pledged to press Congress to repeal the Byrd Amendment,<sup>42</sup> pledged to extend economic aid to Rhodesia’s neighbors, assured US support for majority rule, and promised

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>41</sup> Kissinger, “Text of Kissinger’s Address in Zambia on US Policy toward Southern Africa,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1976.

<sup>42</sup> The Byrd Amendment, passed by Congress in 1971, exempted Rhodesian chrome from the sanctions against Rhodesia, set forth by the UN in 1966.

American assistance for the new nation of Zimbabwe – the African name for independent Rhodesia.<sup>43</sup> Kissinger emphasized the need for South Africa to assist in the Rhodesian crisis. “In the immediate future,” he said, “the Republic of South Africa can show its dedication to Africa—and its potential contribution to Africa—by using its influence in Salisbury to promote a rapid negotiated settlement for majority rule in Rhodesia.”<sup>44</sup> At long last, “Kissinger ha[d] discovered Africa,” George M. Houser, head of the American Committee on Africa, exclaimed.<sup>45</sup>

The Lusaka Speech set a new foundation for US policy toward Africa and it helped improve African opinion of the United States. “When I started this trip,” Kissinger admitted, “I was getting daily blasts from Uganda and Nigeria, but by the end, I won’t say that they were being friendly, but at least they were quiet.”<sup>46</sup> Next to South Africa, Nigeria was the most powerful and influential state in sub-Saharan Africa, and it had originally been on Kissinger’s itinerary. On 7 April 1976, however, the Nigerian government rescinded Kissinger’s invitation in protest over the United States involvement in the Angolan war.<sup>47</sup> Kissinger’s arrival, the Nigerian Government stated, could ignite fierce protests in Nigeria—an indication of the anti-American passions Kissinger had stirred.<sup>48</sup> Despite this rebuff, Kissinger noted, “the reaction in Africa [had] been uniformly favorable” to his trip. Tanzania,

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<sup>43</sup> Kissinger, “Text of Kissinger’s Address in Zambia on US Policy toward Southern Africa,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1976. Rhodesia was to be called “Zimbabwe” after independence; the name derived from the late-Iron Age civilization of Great Zimbabwe.

<sup>44</sup> Kissinger, “Text of Kissinger’s Address in Zambia on US Policy toward Southern Africa,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1976.

<sup>45</sup> George M. Houser, “Comments on Kissinger’s Lusaka Speech,” (New York: American Committee on Africa, 3 May 1976), AAA.

<sup>46</sup> Kissinger “NSC Meeting, 5/11/1976,” 3, National Security Adviser’s NSC Meeting File, Box 2, GRFL, Digital Library.

<sup>47</sup> John Darton, “Nigeria Cancels Invitation to Kissinger: Visit May Have Been Protested Scholars Meeting Canceled,” *New York Times*, 8 April 1976.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid; “Ghana Cancels Kissinger Visit, Saying Its Leader is not Well,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1976.

Mozambique, Botswana and Zambia all cautiously supported Kissinger's new approach to southern African affairs, and committed to working with the United States in the region.

While tepid, the end result was a net gain for the United States.

As Henry Kissinger worked to improve America's reputation with black African nations in order to preclude Soviet influence in southern Africa, the Ford administration's reputation in foreign affairs came under attack. Ford, having served as Richard Nixon's Vice President, was closely associated with the blunders of American foreign policy in the mid-1970s in the minds of the American public. His administration's own covert action in the Angolan civil war did not help to distance Ford from the reputation of his predecessor. Even though he and Kissinger worked tirelessly in 1976 to promote peaceful solutions to southern African problems, Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter was able to capitalize on the American public's disillusion with its country's role in world affairs in his run for office.

**“The days of ‘Nixon Shocks’ and ‘Kissinger Surprises’ must end.”**

One major theme of Jimmy Carter's presidential campaign was his criticism of the secretiveness and morally-corrupt behavior of past administrations. Carter explained in his memoir, “I was deeply troubled by the lies our people had been told; our exclusion from the shaping of American foreign political and military policy in Vietnam, Cambodia, Chile, and other countries; and other embarrassing activities of our government, such as the CIA's role in plotting murder and other crimes.”<sup>49</sup> And Carter was not alone. “From 1974,” Pat Caddell, a pollster for the Carter campaign said, “our surveys were finding a growing sense of pessimism in people...Something like 68 percent of the people believed that their leaders in

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<sup>49</sup> Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 147.

the last decade had consistently lied to them.”<sup>50</sup> This sentiment had arisen as Americans turned against the war in Vietnam in the late 1960s and erupted in 1974 as revelations about the covert activities of the CIA were brought before Congress. Watergate and the resignation of Richard Nixon further vilified the White House. At least for Carter, Ford’s pardon of Nixon was the final straw.<sup>51</sup> In 1976 campaign speech, Carter declared that “the days of ‘Nixon Shocks’ and ‘Kissinger Surprises’ must end.”<sup>52</sup>

By focusing on the recent American blunders in domestic and foreign affairs in his speeches, Carter capitalized on his “outsider” position in politics on Capitol Hill. Not having partaken in the mistakes of the recent past, Carter projected an image of wholesomeness—his hands were clean and his spirit, revitalizing. “Carter,” Patrick Anderson, a speech writer for the Carter campaign said of the candidate’s image, “was running far less on what he had done, as a one-term governor, than on what he said, as a colorful, quotable newcomer to national politics.”<sup>53</sup> He was the peanut farmer and businessman from Georgia, not the “big shot” from Washington. This image benefitted his campaign. “This was essentially a candidate perception election,” John Dearsourff, a media consultant for President Ford later explained, “and though the issues played a part in the campaign in that they reinforced

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<sup>50</sup> Patrick H. Caddell, “The Democratic Nomination,” in Jonathan Moore and Janet Fraser, eds. *Campaign for President: The Manager’s Look at ‘76*, (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1977), 85.

<sup>51</sup> Although Carter refused to specifically address the issue of the pardon in his campaign, he would, on occasion, refer to it through phrases alluding to a “double standard of justice” in which “big-shot crooks...go free and the poor ones to jail.” Carter, “Acceptance Speech,” *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 350; Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 44-65. Anderson, the lead speech writer for Carter’s campaign, adds perspective to the development of the acceptance speech, explaining Carter’s position on directly criticizing Ford’s pardon of Nixon.

<sup>52</sup> Carter, “Our Foreign Relations,” in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 114. Carter repeated his calls for non-military involvement, Congressional assistance, public awareness, and honesty in most of his other campaign speeches, including his formal announcement of his intention to run (12/12/1974), I: 3-11; “New approach to Foreign Policy (5/28/75), I: 66-70; “A New Beginning” (6/16/76), I: 245-249; “Relations between World’s Democracies” (6/23/76), I: 266-275; “Acceptance Speech” (7/15/76), I: 347-352 in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*.

<sup>53</sup> Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 2.

underlying perceptions of the candidates, they were not terribly important standing alone.”<sup>54</sup>

The malaise that had set in after Vietnam and Watergate worked in the former governor’s favor because he could criticize Ford and Kissinger for their close associations with Washington’s past policies.<sup>55</sup>

Carter’s campaign became one of hope. He spoke frequently of his vision for a restored America going into the nation’s bicentennial year. His optimism can be seen most prominently in his 1 June 1976 speech at the Martin Luther King Hospital. “The America we long for is still out there,” he declared, “somewhere ahead of us, waiting for us to find her. I see an America poised not only at the brink of a new century but at the dawn of a new era of honest, compassionate, responsive government,” he exclaimed. He then concluded with a nine-point refrain, each time beginning with “I see an America” to drive home the possibility that electing him would restore America’s honesty, equality, competence, and “simple decency.”<sup>56</sup> The “I see an America” list became wildly popular, and Carter incorporated it into subsequent speeches.<sup>57</sup> “As far as I was concerned,” Anderson, recalled, “we weren’t running against genial, bumbling Jerry Ford, but against the dark legacy of Richard Nixon... The Martin Luther King speech was a kind of morality play” to set Carter apart from Washington’s past.<sup>58</sup> “Jimmy Carter was going to be different as president,” historian Betty Glad wrote.<sup>59</sup> Carter campaigned on that principle.

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<sup>54</sup> John Deardourff, “The General Election,” in Moore and Fraser, eds. *Campaign for President*, 137.

<sup>55</sup> Jonathan Moore, “Introduction,” in Moore and Fraser, eds. *Campaign for President*, 10-11.

<sup>56</sup> Carter, “I See an America,” in *The Presidential Campaign*, 1976, I: 199.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 33-34. Variations of the “I see an America litany” were used in Carter’s Democratic National Convention Acceptance Speech (7/15/1976); his speech at the Kennedy-Lawrence Dinner (10/27/1976) in Jimmy Carter, *A Government as Good as Its People* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1996), 103-111, 207-211.

<sup>58</sup> Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 34.

<sup>59</sup> Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 7.

Carter said little about South Africa during the campaign, but what he did say fell in line with this theme of restoration. While Kissinger recalibrated US policy toward southern Africa, presidential candidate Jimmy Carter went on the offensive. What Carter attacked, however, was not Kissinger's new policy articulated in his Lusaka speech. Carter ran against NSSM 39.<sup>60</sup>

In the post-Vietnam era of the United States, Carter campaigned to move American foreign policy away from strict East-West interpretations and toward a regional approach to foreign affairs. "The world in 1975 is a very different," he declared, "recent events have proven that a stable world order for the future cannot be built on a preoccupation with the old strategic issues which have dominated East-West and North-South relations since the end of World War II."<sup>61</sup> In a Carter administration, the United States would not align itself with nations simply because they espoused an anti-communist line. There would not be another Vietnam. With regard to US-African relations, Carter's instinct was "to treat African issues on African terms," said historian Gaddis Smith, "not as elements to be manipulated in a global conflict with the Soviet Union."<sup>62</sup> The premise of NSSM 39, in contrast, was that South Africa was important only as a pawn in the Cold War. African aspirations to end colonialism on the continent and dismantle apartheid were secondary considerations. Given this framework, the maintenance of relations with minority white regimes made sense to the Nixon administration. Carter, on the other hand, promised a new way of conceptualizing American national interests.

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<sup>60</sup> NSSM 39 was leaked to the press in late 1974. Syndicated Journalist Jack Anderson broke the story alongside *Esquire Magazine* in October 1974. See Jack Anderson, "Henry Kissinger's First Big 'Tilt,'" 11 October, 1977, *The Washington Post*.

<sup>61</sup> Carter, "New Approach to Foreign Policy," 28 May 1975, in *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 66.

<sup>62</sup> Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1987), 133.

Carter campaigned against the secretiveness of the Ford administration's actions toward Angola in 1975. On the same day that Kissinger sat in West Germany with South African Prime Minister John Vorster on 23 June 1976 to discuss Rhodesia and US-South African relations, Jimmy Carter struck at the record of the Secretary of State. In an address before the Foreign Policy Association in New York, Carter delivered his most important foreign policy speech of the campaign. "Now that he was assured of the nomination," Patrick Anderson reflected on the speech, "the peanut farmer had to show the Eastern Establishment that he spoke the language of realpolitik."<sup>63</sup> In the area of foreign relations, Carter stated, the American people were troubled by the erosion of morality. He followed this assumption with his headlining statement of criticism: "Under the Nixon-Ford administration, there has evolved a kind of secretive 'Lone Ranger' foreign policy—a one-man policy of international adventure."<sup>64</sup> In a speech mainly written by Carter's foreign policy advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, the 'Lone Ranger' attack on Henry Kissinger was Carter's personal touch.<sup>65</sup> Kissinger's foreign policies were too secretive, and "a foreign policy of secrecy," Carter criticized, "has had to be closely regarded as amoral [because] we have had to forgo openness, consultation and a constant adherence to fundamental principles and high moral standards."<sup>66</sup> Although in this speech Carter did not specifically criticize the Ford administration's use of third parties to channel aid into Angola after June 1975, that was the type of secretive, amoral policy to which Carter was referring.

In addition to criticizing past administrations for narrowly focusing on the Cold War and being too secretive, Carter campaigned to actively support human rights in foreign

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<sup>63</sup> Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 41.

<sup>64</sup> Carter, "Relations between World's Democracies," 23 June 1976 in, *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 266.

<sup>65</sup> Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 42.

<sup>66</sup> Carter, "Relations between World's Democracies," 23 June 1976 in, *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 266.

policy. Carter did not initiate American concerns for human rights abroad but he ran as a born-again Southern Baptist on a platform of restoring morality to American foreign policy at a time when the international community and the US Congress were pressing for adherence to the norms of human rights.<sup>67</sup> In reality, Carter himself was hesitant to campaign forthrightly on human rights issues because of the high expectations and scrutiny such a policy would inevitably encourage. He did, however, deeply believe in the positive role America could play in world and accepted the use of human rights rhetoric in his campaign speeches.<sup>68</sup> He also argued that the United States did not have to sacrifice fighting the Cold War in order to be more just abroad; in other words, Carter campaigned that there was an inherent connection between power and principle.

On 8 September 1976, Carter delivered a major speech on human rights to a B'nai B'rith convention in Washington, D.C. "It was a serious speech," Patrick Anderson reflected, "one that gave meaning to Carter's generalities about 'a government as good as the people.'"<sup>69</sup> Carter explained, "[America's] greatest source of strength has always come from basic, priceless values [such as] our belief in the freedom of religion, our belief in the freedom of speech and expression, our belief in human dignity, [and] our belief in the principle of simple justice."<sup>70</sup> While recognizing that America had not always lived up to its own ideals, Carter reflected in his memoir that America is strongest in domestic and international affairs when it does.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Mary E. Stuckey, *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), see especially 41-45.

<sup>68</sup> Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 102.

<sup>69</sup> Anderson, *Electing Jimmy Carter*, 102.

<sup>70</sup> Carter, "Human Rights," *A Government as Good as its People*, 140.

<sup>71</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 146.



Carter accepted the challenges inherent in basing foreign policy on human rights, and therefore acknowledged such a policy's limits. "I think all of us realize that the question of supporting human rights throughout the world is a very difficult one," he commented in an October 1976 speech. "It requires a balancing of tough realism on the one hand, and idealism on the other. Our understanding of the world as it is, and the world as it ought to be."<sup>72</sup> And Carter wanted it both ways. He believed he could play *realpolitik* and be the international spokesman for human rights. In his memoir he reflected, "I was familiar with the widely accepted arguments that we had to choose between idealism and realism, or between morality and the exertion of power; but I rejected those claims." For Carter, balancing idealism with realism went back to his understanding of morality as the foundation for American strength. "To me," he explained, "the demonstration of American idealism was a practical and realistic approach to foreign affairs, and moral principles were the best foundations for the exertion of American power and influence."<sup>73</sup> Especially in waging the Cold War, Carter believed that applying American ideals to foreign policy was a winning strategy.

Carter's strategy for balancing realism and idealism would be put to the test in southern Africa after the election. What is notable about 1976, however, is that Carter won over the American public with his rhetoric on morality at the same time that violence broke out in the streets of Soweto, and yet apartheid came up surprisingly little during the campaign. In 1976, the first time that Carter is on the record mentioning South Africa was during his major foreign policy speech at the Foreign Policy Association in New York in June. Not coincidentally, his remark, "we deplore very deeply the recent bloodshed in South

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<sup>72</sup> Carter, "A Speech on Human Rights at Notre Dame University," *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 994.

<sup>73</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 147.

Africa,” came exactly one week after the rioting in Soweto began on 16 June.<sup>74</sup> It was an ad-libbed statement, without specifics and without further comment. While Carter’s beliefs about race and majority rule for all of southern Africa encouraged him to—on occasion—criticize South Africa or describe his future policy toward apartheid South Africa, it was not a campaign issue.

After the Democratic Convention in July 1976, Carter explained his broad stance on South Africa in a press briefing following his policy planning meetings in Plains, Georgia. Although his comments were brief, Carter indicated that he would pursue a different approach to American-South African relations: instead of assuming the “whites are here to stay,” Carter would stand for racial justice. He stated before the press that “we [he and his campaign advisors] discussed our relationship with South Africa and Rhodesia, with an understanding that there would be no yielding on our part on the issue of human rights and majority rule.”<sup>75</sup> This indicated that Carter planned to take a tougher line against South Africa than past administrations had. But what would that mean in terms of policy? With the situation in southern Africa rapidly deteriorating and black African leaders asking the United States to press South Africa to cooperate in finding peaceful solutions, what could that mean?

A reporter from *US News and World Report* pressed him on the issue. “About southern Africa,” the reporter asked, “it’s alright to deplore apartheid but after that, what could you do that’s useful?” This question stemmed from the ongoing debate about how to encourage South Africa to pressure the Smith regime in Salisbury into a negotiated

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<sup>74</sup> “Excerpts from Carter’s Speech and His Replies,” *New York Times*, 24 June 1976. The reference to South Africa does not appear in the text of the speech in Carter’s book, *A Government as Good as its People* (Fayetteville, 1996), 93-100. It is also absent from the version in Carter, “Relations between World’s Democracies,” 23 June 1976 in, *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 266.

<sup>75</sup> Jimmy Carter, “Press Briefing in Plains on Foreign Policy,” in *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, I: 372.

settlement leading to majority rule for Rhodesia. Could the United States get South Africa to help out in Rhodesia *and* push South Africa on apartheid? The reporter pressed on, “there’s a great debate as to whether you press too hard or maintain reasonably friendly relations with the Republic of South Africa, which way are you leaning?” Carter first addressed the question by acknowledging the economic and military power South Africa held in the region. Because of its economic dominance, Carter suggested that South Africa had “unwarranted influence” in the region and that it had “a major role to play in the resolution of the Rhodesian crisis.” He continued, “we ought to try to shape our policies in accordance with what is best for the majority of people in the individual nations. We should continue to constrain our relationship with South Africa to encourage the move toward majority rule.”<sup>76</sup>

Carter’s comments indicated that while he understood the issues of Rhodesia and South Africa to be intimately connected, he thought American policy should be to promote movement toward majority rule in both. He did not, however, suggest that each issue should be dealt with in the same way or within the same time frame. He presented a vague position that American policy should be to act in the interest of the majority of peoples in each southern African country. Beyond this general approach, in July 1976 Carter did not know how he would address the issues specifically. He told the same reporter, “I am not qualified to give those statements right now... We are working on some of those things, and I could name two or three but they may not be the most important ones. I am not trying to avoid the question. I just don’t want to list a partial series of actions to be taken.”<sup>77</sup>

Not allowing himself to be pushed into prematurely answering questions about specific actions was smart. The rapidity of change in southern Africa since 1974, the still-

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<sup>76</sup> Carter, “Press Briefing in Plains on Foreign Policy,” in *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 375.

<sup>77</sup> Carter, “Press Briefing in Plains on Foreign Policy,” in *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 375-376.

unforeseen effects of the Soweto uprising, and the shifting policies of Ford and Kissinger complicated the Carter's ability to make any promises. Because of South Africa's ability to affect change in Rhodesia and its status as a Western partner in the Cold War, for America to antagonize South Africa for its internal affairs required sound judgment and delicacy. Before fully studying the issues, Carter had neither. Furthermore, he did not want to unnecessarily raise the expectations of those who hoped to see him take a tough approach against apartheid. The African Group at the UN had just pressed the Security Council for a resolution condemning Pretoria's response to the Soweto uprising. While the African Group did not insist on mandatory sanctions in July 1976 because it wanted to streamline a unanimous resolution, the sanctions debate was not over, and Carter was not ready to discuss the strengthening of the 1963 voluntary arms embargo or voting for economic sanctions. He, therefore, asked for patience.

Some questions about Carter's ideas about how to press South Africa on apartheid did come up later in the campaign. "Should stronger sanctions, boycotts, or other measures be taken against South Africa because of its apartheid policies," one reporter inquired.<sup>78</sup> "Would you foresee any circumstances in the government under your leadership to provide military assistance to guard the principles which they are fighting for," another asked in October.<sup>79</sup> Carter's responses suggested that while he foresaw pressing South Africa for changes to apartheid, he would not force change through a hard-hitting economic or military approach. In answer to the first question, Carter argued that South Africa needed the United States more than the United States needed South Africa, which gave the United States influence. "The

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<sup>78</sup> Carter, "Policy Papers VI," in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 685.

<sup>79</sup> Carter, "Conference with Black Press at the National 4H Center, Chevy Chase, Maryland," in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 890.

economic dependence of South Africa on the United States,” he told reporters, “is such that an aggressive diplomacy need not include economic sanctions.”<sup>80</sup> He did not give a firm “no” to the question of any mandatory sanctions, but spoke of them as a method of last resort. To the second question, Carter responded in accordance with his general campaign commitment to uphold self-determination and refrain from military involvement. “My commitment to the American people is that I will never again get militarily involved in the internal affairs of another country unless our own security is directly threatened. I would doubt that would require military involvement in South Africa,” he declared.<sup>81</sup>

Could Carter plan on pursuing a policy toward South Africa that would both uphold an American observation of human rights *and* pressure Pretoria to move toward majority rule, without the use of economic or military pressure? How did Carter expect to make more headway with South Africa than Ford and Kissinger had done? To answer these difficult questions, the candidate had to do some soul searching himself. His answers reveal Carter’s baseline for his interpretation of southern African affairs—the American South.

### **From Plains to Pretoria**

Pierre Salinger, a French reporter for *L’Express*, once said, “to understand Jimmy Carter, one has to come to Plains, Georgia.”<sup>82</sup> 190 miles directly west of Savannah and 120 miles due south of Atlanta, Jimmy Carter was born in Plains in 1924. Although Carter’s naval and political careers took him far from his boyhood farm for extensive periods of time

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<sup>80</sup> Carter, “Policy Papers VI,” in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 686.

<sup>81</sup> Carter, “Conference with Black Press at the National 4H Center, Chevy Chase, Maryland,” in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 890.

<sup>82</sup> Pierre Salinger, “Interview with Pierre Salinger for the French Publication *L’Express* of Paris in Plains, GA,” in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 544.

and shaped him in many ways, like the roots the live oak which are known to weather Georgia's hurricane winds, Carter's roots in Plains run deep, and permanently tie him to the earth on which he was born. And in spite of his claim in his childhood memoir that "it is difficult for me to explain why the town of Plains is so attractive to Rosalynn and me," one needs only to skim *An Hour Before Daylight* to understand Carter's strong attachment to the land of his family. It is where he grew up through the Great Depression and Jim Crow. It is where he tried to make his father proud and his mother taught him to care for others. It is where "we [Carter and Rosalynn] expect to be buried."<sup>83</sup>

His personal history affected Carter's words and actions as president. Carter felt he had inside knowledge about South African apartheid due to his boyhood in Georgia, a Deep South state with its own long history of racism and segregation. Historian Nancy Mitchell sat down with Carter to discuss the Rhodesian crisis of 1979 when Carter defied Congress by refusing to recognize the legitimacy of elections generally considered to have been "free and fair." He claimed he did so because the Patriotic Front, guerrillas waging the Rhodesian civil war, was excluded from participating in the elections. "Why," Mitchell inquired, "was [Carter] able in this one case to transcend the compelling tropes of the Cold War and view the insurgents—whom the administration would have deemed terrorists had they been in Central America or Iran or Palestine—as freedom fighters?"<sup>84</sup> Carter's answer sheds light on his campaign promises about US policy toward South Africa.

After Carter directed Mitchell to the myriad of documents on US-Cuban relations, he pointed her 190 miles west of Savannah and 120 miles due south of Atlanta:

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<sup>83</sup> Jimmy Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight: Memories of a Rural Boyhood*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2001), 129.

<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, "Tropes of the Cold War," 264.

I would say that reading *An Hour Before Daylight*...pretty well explains where I came from. I felt a sense of responsibility and some degree of guilt that we had spent an entire century after the Civil War still persecuting blacks and to me the situation in Africa was inseparable from the fact of deprivation or persecution or oppression of Black people in the South.<sup>85</sup>

“This [was] the warp and the weft of Carter’s policy toward southern Africa,” Mitchell explained: the Cold War threat of Cuban involvement in southern Africa and *An Hour Before Daylight*.<sup>86</sup> “I know how easy it is to overlook the persecution of others when your own rights and freedoms are not in jeopardy,” Carter reflected about his own acceptance of racial segregation in Georgia during his youth and young adulthood. In his memoir, Carter recalled that he did not acknowledge the inequalities between the races until he returned from the Navy in 1953. Only at that time did he resolve to dedicate attention to these inequalities. “I was not directly involved in the early struggles to end racial discrimination,” he admitted, “but by the time my terms as state senator and governor were over, I had gained the trust and political support of some of the great civil rights leaders in the region of my country.”<sup>87</sup> Most importantly, his experiences in working with the private sector to encourage businesses to adopt fair employment and company practices greatly influenced his understanding of resolving racial conflict—an understanding he would take from Plains to Pretoria.

Carter’s campaign rhetoric is suffused with his understanding of apartheid South Africa through this prism of Jim Crow segregation. In July 1976, as Carter deflected questions about specific policy initiatives he would support toward South Africa, he revealed the undercurrents of his thinking that would color any policy options:

I think that our own country has established through its own experience with race relations and particularly in the South, an understanding of this very sensitive issue. How we deal with black and white people within the same

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<sup>85</sup> Carter, quoted in Mitchell, “Tropes of the Cold War,” 264.

<sup>86</sup> Mitchell, “Tropes of the Cold War,” 274.

<sup>87</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 146.

community so that both the blacks and whites will be well served. There is no doubt in my mind that in the South, although we feared the elimination of segregation or apartheid here, that the results of this elimination of racism—racial separation—has been good for both black and white people. And with that special knowledge in our country I think me might be a help in Africa in the resolution of that question.<sup>88</sup>

In his Position Papers on Africa, Carter declared, “the experience which we have had with race relations in this country could also help South Africa to develop a system of guaranteed majority rule, while protecting minority rights.”<sup>89</sup> More specifically, he attributed the transition of Georgia out of Jim Crow to the cooperation between the public and private spheres to encourage change; he reasoned that the same could happen in South Africa. “The changes that took place in the South were brought about substantially by the interrelationship of the government and the private sector,” he explained to reporters. He reflected that the schools in the South, for instance, remained separated as long as the only pressure on them to integrate came from the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare. “But once the business and professional community decided...this was a good thing, economically and socially, for black and white people—when that occurred, there was an alleviation of tension and a movement very rapidly toward the resolution of the racial problem in the South,” Carter explained.<sup>90</sup> The same could be true for South Africa. Precisely because the United States had economic ties with South Africa, American multinational corporations, banking interests, and investments could provide “a possible mechanism...to help bring about that kind of persuasion” in South Africa.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Carter, “Press Briefing in Plains on Foreign Policy,” in *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 375.

<sup>89</sup> Carter, “Policy Papers VI,” in *The Presidential Campaign, 1976*, I: 686.

<sup>90</sup> Carter, “Press Briefing in Plains on Foreign Policy,” *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 376.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*



Carter was not alone in thinking about the power of American businesses to promote change in South Africa. The idea of using American corporations in this manner was also supported by Andrew Young, a US Congressman from Georgia and Carter's point-man on Africa during the campaign. Young—a close associate of Martin Luther King Jr.—had worked with the civil rights movement in Atlanta, Georgia and other southern cities during the 1960s. He firmly believed that the private sector could work to make a difference in race relations by taking the initiative to implement fair employment practices. Andy Young had traveled to South Africa several times and concluded that a similar process could take place there if multinational businesses could be encouraged to act.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, up in Philadelphia, Reverend Leon Sullivan, also a civil rights activist, returned from a trip to South Africa in June 1975 resolute to do what he could to “transform US companies into a battering ram against the walls of apartheid until the walls came tumbling down.”<sup>93</sup> Sullivan, a board member of General Motors, quickly mobilized GM and other American companies with South African ties to draft and sign a business code of ethics meant to foster a strong, black middle class in South Africa.<sup>94</sup>

Indeed, the election of 1976 had come at a time when a budding debate over the utility of American businesses and investments in South Africa began to increase in volume. The idea of using American businesses in South Africa as a positive force for change started in 1971 with the revelation that a Polaroid affiliate helped create the passbooks which upheld

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<sup>92</sup> For a thorough treatment of Andrew Young's involvement in the civil rights movement and his time as US Ambassador to the United Nations, see DeRoche, *Andrew Young Civil Rights Ambassador*; Bartlett C. Jones, *Flawed Triumphs: Andy Young at the United Nations*, (New York: University Press of America, 1996); H.E. Newsum and Olayiwola Abegunrin, *United States Foreign Policy Towards Southern Africa: Andrew Young and Beyond*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), especially 1-43.

<sup>93</sup> Leon H. Sullivan, *Moving Mountains: The Principles and Purposes of Leon Sullivan* (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1998), 47.

<sup>94</sup> Sullivan, *Moving Mountains*, 52

apartheid governance.<sup>95</sup> Polaroid then launched an “experiment” designed to implement racially fair hiring and promotion standards, accelerated training programs for blacks, and community service programs to advance equality in South Africa. Although the idea had not gained much ground in the early 1970s, Carter and Young believed in the opportunity. Without specific policy initiatives, Carter emphasized the “special knowledge” America had on race relations and spoke broadly about using American businesses as a positive force for change during the remainder of the campaign.

While Carter’s future policy toward South Africa was not a major campaign issue, events in southern Africa encouraged Carter to grapple with the subject of apartheid. While Carter did not articulate a policy toward South Africa during his campaign, by the election in November 1976 he had acknowledged the significance of the problems in southern Africa and he had outlined broad initiatives he might take to combat those problems. He would not take a path similar to the “Lone Ranger” of foreign policy, Henry Kissinger. His path would be consistent with American ideals of human rights and majority rule. He would use the American South as a model for action rather than force change in South Africa through economic sanctions or military strength.

Carter’s campaign to restore morality to the United States converged with grand changes occurring in southern Africa, brought by the collision of decolonization and the Cold War. On January 20, 1977 Carter made his first declaration of a new, morally rejuvenated American foreign policy in his inaugural address. “We are a strong nation,” he reminded his audience, “and we will maintain strength so sufficient that it need not be proven in combat—

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<sup>95</sup> See Eric J. Morgan, “The World is Watching: Polaroid and South Africa,” *Enterprise and Society* 7 no. 3 (2006), 520-549 and Robert Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (New York: Nan A. Talese Doubleday, 1997), 272-273.

a quiet strength based not merely on the size of an arsenal but on the nobility of ideas.”<sup>96</sup>

This was what the country wanted.

A candid reflection on his inaugural address in *Keeping Faith*, however, provides a useful insight on Carter’s transition from candidate to president. “Standing before the people that day,” he said, “I could not have known the complexity of those issues and how they would affect my administration and my political future.”<sup>97</sup> Standing before the people on 20 January 1977, Carter could not have known the events set to unfold in South Africa in 1977, events which would test the policies the administration would work vigorously to determine immediately upon entering office.

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<sup>96</sup> Jimmy Carter: "Inaugural Address," January 20, 1977, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6575> (accessed 19 April 2015).

<sup>97</sup> Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 22.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE BALANCING ACT

6 February 1977. Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It was a symbolically important meeting. The host: Julius K. Nyerere—Tanzania’s first president and the chairman of the frontline states.<sup>1</sup> He was *Mwalimu* (teacher), a visionary influenced by African socialism but who followed his own prescript for Tanzanian development. “Nyerere was his own man,” Henry Kissinger reflected in his memoir. “His idiosyncratic blend of Western liberal rhetoric, socialist practice, nonaligned righteousness, and African tribalism was driven, above all, by a passionate desire to free his continent from Western categories of thought, of which Marxism happens to be one. His ideas were emphatically his own.”<sup>2</sup> Although his vision for development was ideologically incongruent with that of the United States, his compelling personality and dedication to purging colonialism from southern Africa made him essential to resolving the issues of Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid South Africa. The Carter administration described him as “the most interesting, influential and complicated African figure in the southern African problem.”<sup>3</sup>

Sitting with the Tanzanian president was his guest, Andrew Young, US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the first African American with cabinet rank in the White House, and Jimmy Carter’s point-man on African affairs. This was the outspoken, charismatic ambassador’s first African tour representing the new American administration. “The timing [was] excellent,” US Ambassador to Tanzania James Spain said of Young’s trip. The American delegation would attend Tanzania’s tenth anniversary celebration of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Frontline States were a loose and somewhat shifting group consisting of Angola, Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana, Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria and—after 1980—Zimbabwe. They sought to end white minority rule in southern Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 932.

<sup>3</sup> [State Department,] “Southern African Negotiations: Perspective of the Participants,” [1977], NLC-133-15-3-1-3, ARC, JCL.

Arusha Declaration and have private discussions with Nyerere concerning US-African relations and Carter's approach to the complicated issues of southern Africa. It was the perfect time and place to display the administration's dedication to Africa. Spain explained, "All of Africa is watching the new US administration. The first thing we need to do is demonstrate to Africa and our own people that we are interested in Africa."<sup>4</sup>

Ambassador Young opened the discussion by reassuring Nyerere of the new administration's commitment to majority rule in southern Africa. Not only would the United States continue to pursue peaceful solutions to the Rhodesian civil war and Namibian independence, it would encourage change in South African apartheid. That said, however, Young emphasized the administration's concern "that its actions not force South Africa into greater isolation and resistance to change," which could threaten progress in all three countries.<sup>5</sup> Nyerere responded that the Carter administration's desire to address Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa was the moral thing to do. He then recommended that the United States "deal with southern African problems in stages taking the weakest points first. The weakest points clearly are Rhodesia and Namibia," a US delegate reflected, "and Nyerere said that in developing a policy to achieve something in 1977 and 1978, our collective efforts should be concentrated on those two countries."<sup>6</sup>

The US delegation also asked Nyerere his opinion on specific steps the United States might take with respect to South Africa. Nyerere agreed with Young's suggestion that a combination of economic and political pressures would be helpful but he also "expressed skepticism about the results."<sup>7</sup> In Nyerere's view, South African whites, especially the

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<sup>4</sup> Spain, Dar es 00251, 25 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>5</sup> Easum, Lagos 01584, 10 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

National Party and its supporters, were “an entrenched minority that was not about to give up power... [No one], certainly not Vorster, would be prepared to move in that direction,” he said.<sup>8</sup> According to Ambassador Spain, “Tanzania recognize[d] South Africa as a qualitatively and quantitatively different problem from Rhodesia and Namibia, and ha[d] a less clear notion of how majority rule and racial justice [were] to be obtained there.”<sup>9</sup> Unable to make specific recommendations, Nyerere returned to his suggestion, “Let’s get Rhodesia and Namibia out of the way first.”<sup>10</sup> This, he thought, would lead to fundamental change in South Africa in time. Nyerere, while “pleased that the administration was seeking to place itself on the right side” morally by pushing South Africa on its domestic affairs, was telling the United States to prioritize the problems: Rhodesia and Namibia, and then apartheid South Africa.

Andrew Young’s visit to Tanzania was important for several reasons. Symbolically, it served as “an effective establishing of the new administration’s bona fides with Africans” and “a strong demonstration of US interest in cooperation and dialogue with the leaders of revolutionary Africa.”<sup>11</sup> Young achieved the administration’s goal of setting a positive tone for US–African relations in regard to its approach to South Africa. From a historical perspective, this meeting was important because it previewed the challenges the US would face in devising and executing a policy toward South Africa. The central question facing the Carter administration was one of linkage: if Pretoria held the key to bringing majority rule to Rhodesia, independence to Namibia and dismantling apartheid in South Africa, how should the Carter administration approach the nation on all three issues? One option would be to

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Spain, Dar es Salam 0380, 28 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>10</sup> Nyerere quoted in Easum, Lagos 01584, 10 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>11</sup> Spain, Dar es 00672, 14 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

follow the Ford administration's *quid pro quo* southern African strategy, which was to offer Pretoria "time to deal with South Africa" in exchange for assistance with Rhodesia and Namibia.<sup>12</sup> Would the Carter administration do the same?

Andrew Young's opening of the discussion on 6 February suggested that the new administration had already determined its broad approach toward Pretoria. Unlike Ford, the Carter administration would "formulate a policy that would actively support African desires for change not only in Rhodesia and Namibia, but also in South Africa."<sup>13</sup> This unequivocal statement by the US delegation demonstrated that as early as 6 February, which was two days before the first Policy Review Committee (PRC) meeting on southern Africa, the new administration wanted to pursue a policy designed to support majority rule in all of southern Africa.

The Nyerere-Young exchange also made clear that while the Carter administration had a sense of its goals, it had yet to determine specific steps to achieve them. Would applying pressure make South Africa more or less willing to change its domestic policies? Would imposing political and economic pressures on Pretoria because of apartheid jeopardize the Rhodesian and Namibian negotiations, which seemed closer to a breakthrough to majority rule? Should the United States follow Nyerere's advice to "get Rhodesia and Namibia out of the way first"? The answers to these questions were not to be resolved in Tanzania. It would take months of studying the issues and consulting with interested parties for the Carter administration to sort through the web of problems afflicting the southern African region and determine its approach to apartheid. What this meeting did preview was

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<sup>12</sup> Kissinger, "Memorandum of Conversation, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger and Amb. R.F. Botha," 14 May 1976, Memoranda of Conversations, Box 19, GRFL, Digital Library.

<sup>13</sup> Easum, Lagos 01584, 10 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

that any policy toward South Africa was likely to be as complicated as the web of problems itself.

Scholars have rightly noted the bustling attention of the Carter administration to the issues of southern Africa, including that of apartheid, during the first half of 1977. Alex Thomson argued, “Indeed, if Carter’s initial foreign policy review process can be used as a measure, southern Africa was rated by the new administration as its fourth most pressing global concern.”<sup>14</sup> Carter himself and his National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski confirmed this in their memoirs.<sup>15</sup> Thomas Borstelmann called the administration’s attention to apartheid a “strong initial stance,” and Simon Stevens noted that the White House devoted “considerable time to the issue” early on.<sup>16</sup> Others have made similar comments,<sup>17</sup> and all have done so with good reason. Soon after Andy Young’s trip to Africa, the administration pushed for the repeal of the Byrd amendment. At the United Nations in March, Young—as president of the Security Council that month—headed a new strategy for achieving Namibian independence. In May, Vice President Walter Mondale met with Prime Minister Vorster in Vienna, and Young returned to Africa, this time visiting South Africa itself. There was indeed a “flurry of activity in the spring of 1977.”<sup>18</sup>

While scholars agree that the administration devoted a lot of early time and energy to formulating a policy toward South Africa, there is little consensus on the resulting policy’s framework and intent. On the one hand, Thomson argues that the Carter administration attempted to balance a troika of interests with South Africa (strategic, economic, human

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<sup>14</sup> Thomson, *Conflict of Interests*, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Carter, *White House Diary*, 45; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 51-52.

<sup>16</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line*, 254; Stevens, “From the Viewpoint,” 856.

<sup>17</sup> Colin Legum, “The African Crisis,” *Foreign Affairs* 57 no. 3 (1979), 641-643; Crocker, “South Africa: Strategy for Change,” 326; Wyk, “South Africa’s Nuclear Programme and the Cold War,” *History Compass* 8/7 (2010), 565; Bissell, *South African and the United States*, 30-45; Lyman, *Partner to History*, 25-26.

<sup>18</sup> Thomson, *Conflict of Interest*, 106.



rights), but that “the results of this South African policy never matched its ambition.”<sup>19</sup>

Juxtaposing this policy of “ambition,” Simon Stevens argues that the administration’s initial approach was tentative by design because “the Southern experiences of Carter and Young gave them a strong commitment to racial equality in South Africa, and...the specific lessons they drew from those experiences led them to adopt a very cautious policy for promoting change.”<sup>20</sup> Is it possible that the policy studied by these two historians was simultaneously ambitious and tentative? More likely, their differing assessments resulted from differing foci: while Thomson assessed Carter’s policies from a traditional balance-of-interests approach in diplomatic history, Stevens came at it from a post-revisionist perspective, focusing instead on the ideological undertones which drove policy formulation. At an even more basic level, however, their assessments probably differed because Carter’s policy toward South Africa was, simply put, complicated.

This chapter details the broad and specific policy choices of the Carter administration in order to clarify an overall assessment of the administration’s efforts. It argues that choosing a broad policy designed to press South Africa for change to its apartheid rule turned out to be easy—the administration assumed it had no other choice. The Carter administration’s desire to strengthen US relations with black Africa at a time when African leaders had hopes that the Carter administration would be active in resolving conflict in the region ensured that the administration could not turn a blind eye to South African apartheid. On the other hand, designing specific steps Washington might take to encourage or even force South Africa to change turned out to be much more difficult. This chapter explains the challenges that confronted the Carter administration in formulating policy that sought to

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>20</sup> Stevens, “From the Viewpoint,” 845.

balance pressing South Africa for changes to apartheid without pushing Pretoria into the laager.<sup>21</sup> Not only did Carter's personal views on race relations influence this approach, but South Africa's known resistance to outside pressure and the administration's fear that Pretoria may become less helpful in resolving conflict in the region limited the influence available to Washington.

### **Broad Policy**

Before the Carter administration could devise a specific approach to apartheid, it had to decide on its broad policy toward the southern African region. As the administration's first study on South Africa noted, "the major problems of southern Africa are closely interrelated" and any approach to South Africa would have to contend with "South Africa's position as the 'primary focus' of this web of problems."<sup>22</sup> Therein stood the issue: with a breakdown in negotiations over the future of Rhodesia, little progress made toward an internationally acceptable Namibian solution, and continued rioting inside South Africa, at the time of Carter's inauguration the southern African situation remained dire.

By the beginning of 1977, the Ford administration's southern African initiatives had produced mixed results. Kissinger's April 1976 shuttle to Africa had been designed to foreclose any Soviet or Cuban assistance to armed struggle by endorsing peaceful solutions

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<sup>21</sup> The laager mentality was a defense mechanism used by the Afrikaner National Party designed to withstand external onslaught through self-isolation and unresponsiveness to outside pressures—be they pressures by black South Africans or international actors—for change to apartheid. It had roots in the literal laager practice, or circling of the wagons, practiced by the Afrikaners' ancestors to withstand physical attacks by black natives during the time of the Great Trek. For a description of the laager used by Voortrekkers during the Great Trek, see Thompson, "The Afrikaner Great Trek, 1836-1854," in *A History of South Africa*, 87-96. For an explanation of the 'laager mentality' of the National Party during the apartheid era, see Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation*, 11-13, and Thomson, *Conflict of Interests*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> Tuchman to Brzezinski, memo, "Briefing Book for Policy Review Committee Meeting on Southern Africa, Tuesday, February 8, 3:00 P.M.," 7 February, 1977, NLC-18-4-6-1-1, ARC, JCL.

to the Rhodesian and Namibian crises.<sup>23</sup> In his Lusaka speech on 27 April, 1976, Kissinger had publicly endorsed the 22 March British proposals for Rhodesian negotiations which called for majority rule and independence within two years after the conclusion of talks.<sup>24</sup> Following his April shuttle, Kissinger “ended South Africa’s twenty-year isolation from major western diplomacy by meeting with [Prime Minister] Vorster”<sup>25</sup> in June to discuss US initiatives in southern Africa. In September 1976, Kissinger went on his second shuttle to Africa in an attempt to achieve a negotiated settlement to the Rhodesian crisis. After he met with Zambian, Tanzanian, and South African officials, Kissinger presented his five-point proposal to Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith in Pretoria, South Africa. A breakthrough occurred on 24 September 1976 when Smith proclaimed that “Rhodesia agrees to majority rule within two years” and that “representatives of the Rhodesian government will meet immediately at a mutually agreed place with African leaders.”<sup>26</sup> This was the first time the Rhodesian government had publicly accepted the principle of majority rule.

The United States then took a back seat in the Rhodesian negotiations, relying on Britain “as the country that has the constitutional responsibility” to continue the process.<sup>27</sup> The British convened a Geneva conference on 28 October where the black nationalist movements and the Smith government could work out the details of an interim government and new constitution. Negotiations quickly broke down, however, and the conference

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<sup>23</sup> Kissinger, “Memorandum of Conversation, President Ford, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger and Brent Scowcroft,” 9 May 1976, Memoranda of Conversations, Box 19, GRFL, Digital Library.

<sup>24</sup> Kissinger, “Text of Kissinger’s Address in Zambia on US Policy toward Southern Africa,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1976.

<sup>25</sup> The Washington Office on Africa, “Washington Notes on Africa: Demythologizing the Kissinger Plan,” November 1976, AAA.

<sup>26</sup> Ian Smith quoted in Bowdler, Pretor 04367, “Smith’s Speech,” 24 September 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>27</sup> Kissinger quoted in Armstrong, SecTo 27340, “Transcript of CBS Interview with US Secretary of State, Henry A. Kissinger, London, September 23, 1976. Interviewer – Walter Cronkite (CBS),” 23 September 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

adjourned in December for what was meant to be a temporary break, but never reconvened. Inside Rhodesia, the civil war escalated and prospects for a peaceful solution grew increasingly dim.

As in the Rhodesian case, American initiatives for an internationally acceptable Namibian settlement also stagnated by the end of 1976. In January 1976, the Ford administration had supported UNSC resolution 385 which demanded that South Africa end its illegal occupation of Namibia and transfer power to the people of Namibia through UN supervised free elections.<sup>28</sup> It set a date of 31 August 1976 for South African compliance to the terms of the resolution. The deadline for compliance passed, however, without Pretoria's submission. Not willing to negotiate directly with the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)<sup>29</sup> or hold free elections under UN supervision, Pretoria moved forward with its own settlement that excluded SWAPO.<sup>30</sup> Under international pressure to comply with resolution 385, however, South Africa begrudgingly agreed in principle to participate in a constitutional conference at Geneva with a UN observer and SWAPO representatives. SWAPO, which the United Nations had recognized as sole representative of the Namibian people, refused to negotiate under these conditions. It also demanded that South Africa release all political prisoners.<sup>31</sup> This left an internationally acceptable solution for Namibian independence doubtful and the prospects for guerrilla war probable.

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<sup>28</sup> UN S/Res/385, "Namibia," 30 January 1976, [www.un.org/en/documents](http://www.un.org/en/documents) (accessed 28 September 2014).

<sup>29</sup> SWAPO was the Namibian liberation movement fighting South Africa for independence.

<sup>30</sup> Piero Gleijeses; *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria and the struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 33, 92-96; André du Pisani, *SWA/Namibia: The Politics of Continuity and Change* (Johannesburg: J Ball Publishers, 1985), 272-387; David Soggot, *Namibia: The Violent Heritage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 183-203.

<sup>31</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, "Tab 2: Proposals for a Namibian Settlement," February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

Inside South Africa, protests and rioting initiated by the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976 continued.<sup>32</sup> Former residents of Soweto remembered the months following the uprising for the closed schools, arrests, torture and killings of blacks by the security police, and general breakdown of ‘normal’ life.<sup>33</sup> Many also recalled the uprising as the event which spurred their “political education.” One wrote, “we had to confront the system, because now we [were] at war [with] the minority South African whites [who were] killing us.”<sup>34</sup> Another reflected of the uprising, “yes, it affected me because it is where I started to realize that we must follow this road...I must fight, we [must] fight the system.”<sup>35</sup> In the face of government reprisal, young black South Africans continued to organize, protest, and defy the system. By November 1976, Anthony Lewis of the *New York Times* reported 800 persons arrested and over 400 killed since the outbreak of violence in June, with “evidence” indicating that “the overwhelming majority died from police bullets, many of those in the back.”<sup>36</sup> The cost of protest proved steep, but even the threat of death could not quell the unrest. One protester recalled of his experience, “we [knew] they [were] going to shoot us. We [knew] somebody was going to die, and we [said]: you die but your blood is watering the trees of freedom.”<sup>37</sup>

In 1976, the South African government did not worry much about how the United States might respond to its domestic situation. Early in the year, the Ford administration had adopted a two-pronged approach to South Africa. In his Lusaka speech, Kissinger *publicly*

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<sup>32</sup> For protest and police activities related to the Soweto uprising in its aftermath, see Cillié Commission, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16<sup>th</sup> of June to the 28<sup>th</sup> of February 1977* vol. 2 (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1980). For a few selected Cillié Commission statements recapping the aftermath of Soweto, see Elsabé Brink et al., compiler, *Soweto 16 June 1976: Personal Accounts of the Uprising* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001), 139-146, 156-160.

<sup>33</sup> Brink, *Soweto 16 June 1976*, 150-176.

<sup>34</sup> Muzikayise Ntuli in Brink, *Soweto 16 June 1976*, 163.

<sup>35</sup> Tulu Mhlanga in Brink, *Soweto 16 June 1976*, 163.

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Lewis, “Under the Volcano,” *New York Times*, 29 November 1976.

<sup>37</sup> Solomon Marikele in Brink, *Soweto 16 June 1976*, 153.

criticized apartheid as “an issue of great concern to those committed to racial justice and human dignity” but later *privately* assured Pretoria ‘breathing room’ to deal with its domestic situation in exchange for help with the Rhodesian crisis. In a meeting with South African Ambassador to the United States R.F. “Pik” Botha on 14 May, Kissinger said plainly, “I think history is against you, but we want to buy time at least.”<sup>38</sup> In public, Kissinger hinted toward this policy, urging onlookers to view South Africa’s help with Rhodesia and Namibia as evidence of support for majority rule in southern Africa. For example, in his Lusaka speech Kissinger proposed, “In the immediate future, South Africa can show its dedication to Africa—and its potential contribution to Africa—by using its influence in Salisbury to promote a rapid negotiated settlement for majority rule in Rhodesia.”<sup>39</sup>

With this understanding in place, the South Africans worked with the United States to bring Ian Smith to the negotiating table in September. In the decisive days leading up to Smith’s 24 September announcement, Kissinger wrote to Vorster asking that Pretoria use its “continuing and constant influence between now and Friday to make sure that Mr. Smith lives up to this part of his commitment.”<sup>40</sup> While Vorster maintained that he would not “force” Smith into a settlement unacceptable to whites, he did apply pressure. Smith admitted in his 24 September announcement that South Africa and the United States had assured Rhodesia no relief if the guerrilla war escalated. Furthermore, evidence surfaced through a leak at the Geneva conference that Pretoria may have squeezed the Rhodesian economy by closing the border and slowing the main railway system in Rhodesia during the Vorster-

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<sup>38</sup> Kissinger, “Memorandum of Conversation, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger and Amb. R.F. Botha,” 14 May 1976, Memoranda of Conversations, Box 19, GRFL, Digital Library.

<sup>39</sup> Kissinger, “Text of Kissinger’s Address in Zambia on US Policy toward Southern Africa,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1976.

<sup>40</sup> Kissinger, “Message to Prime Minister Vorster,” SecTo 27225, 20 September 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

Kissinger-Smith talks to pressure Smith to accept the proposals.<sup>41</sup> A cable for US Ambassador William Edmonson sent 15 January concurred, explaining, “Vorster agreed to and did apply pressure on Smith to agree to majority rule. He used such strong armed tactics as withholding Rhodesian goods for a few days to show Smith the price he would pay for his intransigence if South Africa really meant to apply sanctions against Rhodesia.”<sup>42</sup> As South Africa’s internal situation continued to deteriorate, Kissinger directed his attention to Rhodesia and took no actions toward Pretoria that could hurt US-South African relations. In fact, in his letter to Vorster on 20 September, Kissinger assured the SAG of improved relations—something South Africa always desired from its “Western leader.”<sup>43</sup> He assured Vorster, “in my judgment our meetings over the past months have laid more solid foundations for relations between the United States and South Africa. I look forward to staying in close touch with you during the decisive weeks ahead.”<sup>44</sup>

This was the southern African situation facing the Carter administration as Andrew Young met with President Nyerere in Tanzania and the Policy Review Committee discussed its southern African strategy. On 8 February 1977, Vice President Walter Mondale, NSA Zbigniew Brzezinski, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and a dozen other top ranking officials representing a cross section of the administration gathered for the new administration’s first major discussion on policy options for Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa. South Africa was the first item on the agenda. After briefly recapping the previous administration’s strategy and efforts, Secretary Vance initiated the discussion:

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<sup>41</sup> Catto, Geneva 8597, “Rhodesian Conference: Nkomo surfaces a Rhodesian ‘leak’, 1 November 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Low, Lusaka 0116, 15 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>43</sup> Spiers, London 01951, “Ambassador Young’s Meeting with Foreign Secretary Crosland,” 3 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>44</sup> Kissinger, SecTo 27225, “Message to Prime Minister Vorster,” 20 September 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

We are now faced with conflicting objectives. We on the one hand seek to obtain from South Africa agreement on firmer measures toward Rhodesia and Namibia. On the other hand we don't want to give up on anti-apartheid and maybe want to strengthen our position. Yet we don't want to be in the position of double crossing South Africa into making them believe that we are soft on apartheid. Yet we are faced with the problem of forcing them into a position where they won't help. How can we resolve the conflict?<sup>45</sup>

The question they faced was how to deal with the problem of linkage. The study before them proposed three broad policy options. Option one stated that the administration should prioritize the situations in Rhodesia and Namibia because they were more urgent in terms of violence and the possibility of Soviet intervention. In focusing all of its energies on solving these crises, the United States would not do anything to risk driving South Africa into a non-cooperative stance. This was the Ford administration's *quid pro quo* strategy. Option two was similar, but it recommended a carrot and stick approach be applied to South Africa to encourage continued cooperation. Of this option, Vance explained, "if we take that position it implies that if they help us with Rhodesia and Namibia we would lesson [*sic*] our pressure on apartheid."<sup>46</sup> Option three recommended simultaneously pressing for change in all three countries, "treating each one separately on its own merits."<sup>47</sup>

Consistent with Andrew Young's statements to President Nyerere in Tanzania, the Policy Review Committee quickly agreed with option three. "I am in favor of option 3 in some fashion," Brzezinski immediately replied to Vance's inquiry.<sup>48</sup> "We are for option 3," concurred Charles Duncan, on behalf of the Department of Defense. "This," he said,

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<sup>45</sup> Special Coordination Committee Meeting, "South Africa and Rhodesia," 8 February 1977, Subject File, Box 24, Meetings, PRC 3: 1977, JCL.

<sup>46</sup> Vance in Policy Review Committee Meeting, "South Africa and Rhodesia," 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>47</sup> National Security Council, Presidential Review Memorandum/NSC-4, "South Africa and Rhodesian Negotiations," 21 January 1977, NCL-18-4-6-1-1, ARC, JCL.

<sup>48</sup> Brzezinski in Policy Review Committee Meeting, "South Africa and Rhodesia," 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.



“recognizes the individuality of South African problems and attacks them all together.”<sup>49</sup>

Soon after the meeting began, Vance determined that “there is a consensus on option 3. Options 1 and 2 are unsatisfactory courses.”<sup>50</sup> In a memo to the president, Brzezinski explained of the meeting, “There was surprisingly complete consensus that we adopt an approach which treats each of the problems of Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa separately, judging each on its own merits.”<sup>51</sup>

The rapid consensus on option three is not surprising. Considering Young’s statement to Nyerere two days before the Policy Review Committee met, there appears to have been an early understanding within the administration that pressing South Africa on apartheid would not be traded for other southern African initiatives. There are three interrelated reasons why the administration chose option three: it would be in American national interest and in accordance with the Carter administration’s ideals to support human rights and racial justice in South Africa; the PRC agreed that it was in South Africa’s self-interest to support change toward majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia and, thus, there was no need for a *quid pro quo* deal from the US; and, most importantly, only option three promised the best chance to establish its *bona fides* with black Africa.

Option three aligned the administration’s approach toward South Africa with its human rights agenda. In his inaugural address, Carter had declared an “absolute” commitment to human rights. This commitment, he explained, obligated the United States to act at home and abroad accordingly. He stated, “Ours was the first society openly to define

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<sup>49</sup> Duncan in Policy Review Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>50</sup> Vance in Policy Review Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>51</sup> Brzezinski to President, “PRC Meeting on Southern Africa – PRM 4,” 9 February 1977, Brzezinski Collection, Box 14, JCL.

itself in terms of both spirituality and human liberty. It is that unique self-definition which... imposes on us a special obligation to take on those moral duties which, when assumed, seem invariably to be in our own best interests.”<sup>52</sup> Of South Africa, Vance reflected in his memoir, “We were committed to majority rule, self-determination, and racial equality as a matter of fairness and basic human rights.”<sup>53</sup>

Turning that commitment into practical policy, however, was another matter. Thus, the State Department’s first study on southern Africa explained one of the benefits of option three: “This option,” it stated, “would provide to the world and to the American people a clear exposition of our commitment to human rights and our determined opposition to apartheid.”<sup>54</sup> In the PRC meeting on 8 February, Charles Duncan explained of his preference for option three, “This recognizes the individuality of South African problems... and demonstrates we do have a commitment on human rights.”<sup>55</sup> Vice President Walter Mondale concurred. Speaking on behalf of Carter, he said to the committee, “The president feels he knows something about this problem as a Southerner...any other policy would be alien to his traditions and beliefs.”<sup>56</sup> Brzezinski translated that sentiment into tangible policy, piggy-backing on Mondale’s statement, saying, “What follows from this is to complete our move toward more overt condemnation of apartheid.”<sup>57</sup> On the opposite side of the coin, Vance

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<sup>52</sup> Carter, “Inaugural Address” 20 January 1977, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/inaugurals.php>, (accessed 4 October 2014).

<sup>53</sup> Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 257.

<sup>54</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

<sup>55</sup> Duncan in Policy Review Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>56</sup> Mondale in Policy Review Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>57</sup> Brzezinski in Policy Review Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

closed the door on options one or two, claiming that any *quid pro quo* option would be “dishonest and wrong.”<sup>58</sup>

In addition to its moral reasons, the PRC decided against a *quid pro quo* option because it assumed that the South African government would not need one. “Vorster is not doing us any particular favor by working on Rhodesia,” Brzezinski argued at the meeting. “He is acting in his own self interest [*sic*].”<sup>59</sup> Reflecting on the 1976 initiatives, State’s study explained that “although South Africa has been generally cooperative on Rhodesia and Namibia, as yet our effort to deal through them has not produced sufficiently strong pressure on Smith. Once it perceived its own advantage in doing so, South Africa cooperated in producing proposals for a Rhodesian settlement and in getting Smith to Geneva.” According to the study, South Africa had its own reasons for wanting a peaceful settlement in Rhodesia, explaining that “Vorster strongly wants a settlement that would end the conflict on his northern border involving communist-supported nationalists and lead to the establishment of a moderate government which would provide an adequate replacement for the white Rhodesian buffer state.”<sup>60</sup> Another radical black government in the subcontinent was one of Pretoria’s great fears.<sup>61</sup> Its relationship with the Smith regime interfered with its ‘outward policy’ toward black Africa.<sup>62</sup> In a 10 February cable to the State Department, Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations, William Bennett, summarized the US opinion of Pretoria’s interests best:

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<sup>58</sup> Vance in Policy Review Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>59</sup> Brzezinski in Policy Review Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, NLC-15-65-5-3-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>60</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

<sup>61</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa’s Foreign Policy*, 226.

<sup>62</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

As discussions with Vorster already have shown, he appears aware that it would be in his interest to have an accommodation reached in Rhodesia sooner, rather than later. His chances of having a 'moderate' neighbor in Zimbabwe are lessened should lengthy military operations ensue...Vorster therefore is likely to continue his pressures on Smith with his own interests in mind, not requiring any *quid pro quo* from us.<sup>63</sup>

Most significantly, only option three had the potential establish its *bona fides* with black Africa at a time when Washington wanted to gain credibility on the continent. For personal and strategic reasons, the Carter administration wanted to develop an African policy in tune with African desires for racial justice and majority rule in southern Africa.<sup>64</sup> One of the main fora through which the United States could show its dedication to Africa was the United Nations, where debates over Rhodesia, Namibia, and South African apartheid were heating up by the beginning of 1977.

Constituting one-third of UN member representation, African nations were able to focus international attention on African issues and increase pressure on the big powers to respond, especially when those issues involved potential Cold War conflicts. At its inception, the United Nations had only two member states from black Africa (Ethiopia and Liberia). By 1965, that number had increased to 30 of 118. By the time of the Carter administration, African state membership increased to almost fifty, making the African group the largest voting bloc in the General Assembly.<sup>65</sup> With increased membership came increased attention to African issues of decolonization, economic development, and racial justice. While debates

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<sup>63</sup> Bennett, USUN 00383, 10 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>64</sup> See for example, Mitchell, "Tropes of the Cold War," 263-283.

<sup>65</sup> Christopher O'Sullivan, "The United Nations, Decolonization, and Self-Determination in Cold War Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960-1994," *Journal of Third World Studies* 22 no. 2 (2005), 103.

over African issues were not new to the UN in the 1970s (the General Assembly had held its first debate on apartheid in 1946),<sup>66</sup> they had become increasingly ferocious.

Noting the ascendance of African issues at the United Nations, Secretary Kissinger had reflected that “well before it began, the 31<sup>st</sup> UN General Assembly [held September through December 1976] was touted as an ‘African Session.’”<sup>67</sup> In a cable to all African diplomatic posts, US Ambassador to the UN William Scranton had summarized African successes of the session. Angola had been admitted to the United Nations in December. SWAPO gained observer status, which meant it could participate as observers in the UN General Assembly. “What SWAPO could not gain on the battlefield or at the ballot box,” Scranton noted, “it was able to obtain in New York.”<sup>68</sup> The African group also made significant strides against apartheid South Africa. After Soweto, for the first time the African group was able to move the apartheid debate out of committee and into plenary sessions. Furthermore, “for the first time, the use of ‘armed force’ was endorsed in a UNGA Resolution.”<sup>69</sup> The language of the resolution was important; the use of “armed force” meant that the General Assembly favored a Chapter VII finding of apartheid to be a threat to international peace and security. This paved the way to mandatory sanctions.

The strides made by the African group at the United Nations toward the end of 1976 showed no signs of stopping in 1977. In fact, two coinciding developments at the time ensured that the debates over southern Africa would heat up during the Carter administration:

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<sup>66</sup> *Yearbook of the United Nations, 1946-1947* (Lake Success, New York: United Nations, 1947), 144-148, <http://unyearbook.un.org> (accessed 19 October 2014).

<sup>67</sup> Kissinger, State 007726, “31<sup>st</sup> UNGA: African Issues and Performance by the African Group,” 13 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>68</sup> UN GA/Res/31/152, 20 December 1976, [www.un.org/en/sc/documents](http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents) (accessed 14 March 2015); Kissinger, State 00726, “African Issues and Performance by the African Group,” 13 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

the election of President Carter and his appointment of Andrew Young as Ambassador to the United Nations. Hence, African hopes that the West would take a new approach to African issues rose at the same time that progress on peaceful solutions to the crises in southern Africa seemed to be slipping away.

Even before Carter's inauguration, an article in the *Zambia Daily Mail* on 23 November 1976 reported "that the Carter administration will be more positively sympathetic to black African aspirations than any previous US administration."<sup>70</sup> Immediately upon entering office, President Carter wrote personal letters to several heads of state in Africa to reassure them of the administration's commitment to majority rule. On 28 January 1977, President Nyerere wrote back: "It is reassuring to know that you are taking a personal interest in the problems of southern Africa, and to have in your letter a reiteration of America's desire to work for peace and justice in the region." Nyerere stated that black Africans were committed to majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia, and also to the end of apartheid in South Africa. Demonstrating that he had been following Carter's public statements about US foreign policy, he wrote, "I would like to conclude this letter by congratulating you on your Inaugural Address and your Message to the World. They have been read with great care here; they gave us some hope. We do not expect miracles...but we felt your concern for humanity, and for justice, and drew hope and encouragement."<sup>71</sup>

It is generally agreed that Andrew Young's appointment as a cabinet level official in the Carter Administration was a signal to Africans of the administration's commitment to

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<sup>70</sup> Stephen Low, Lusaka 3132, "Zambia Press November 23," 23 November 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>71</sup> Nyerere to Carter, 28 January 1977, in Arthur Borg to Zbigniew Brzezinski, memo, 11 February 1977, "Letter to the President from President of Tanzania, File "Potential International Crises, 1977-9/80," Box 4, JCL.

African affairs.<sup>72</sup> On 17 December 1976, The South African newspaper, *The Star*, wrote of Young's appointment, "The move is seen as heralding a significant shift of emphasis in US policy toward majority rule in South Africa." Another South African newspaper reported, "terms of the appointment appear to make Southern Africa a touchstone of American foreign policy, particularly as a demonstration of American moral commitment."<sup>73</sup> Following Carter's inauguration, President Léopold Senghor of Senegal reportedly broadcast that "Andrew Young's appointment to the UN foretells a heightened American interest in Africa."<sup>74</sup> This sentiment also echoed in the halls of Capitol Hill. At Young's confirmation hearing on 25 January 1977, Senator Dick Clark (D-IA) stated before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that "after almost a decade of neglect and failure of American policy toward Africa that it is important that we reestablish our credibility in that continent... It seems to me now, with the new administration and the appointment of Andy Young to this position, we have the opportunity to really reestablish the credibility."<sup>75</sup> On 26 January, the Senate confirmed Young's appointment in an 89-3 vote.

Like Carter's letters to African heads of state, it was also Young's statements and actions that encouraged hope. At his Senate confirmation hearing, Young testified that the administration would give Africa "the attention it deserves" and approve the use of sanctions against South Africa "when they can be made to be effective."<sup>76</sup> Given his reputation for

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<sup>72</sup> Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 37; Jones, *Flawed Triumphs*, 16; John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency, A Re-evaluation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 102-103.

<sup>73</sup> Newspaper articles quoted in Hughes, Pretor 05781, "Media Reaction: Andrew Young Nominated UN Ambassador," 17 December 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>74</sup> AmEmbassy Dakar to SecState, Dakar 00519, "Media Reaction: Inauguration," 24 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>75</sup> Washington to Cape Town, 27 January 1977, "Transcript of hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States, Nomination of Andrew J. Young," vol. 39A "Relations with South Africa 21/1/77 – 16/2/77," Subject no. 1/33/3, Box 78, DFA.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

having Carter's ear, Young's words conveyed the administration's commitment to seeking majority rule in southern Africa. In a cable to South African Secretary for Foreign Affairs, South African Charge d'Affaires ad interim J. B. Shearar surmised: "it is of course much too early to assess the foreign policy tendencies of the new administration...but it is safe to suggest that the human rights...will be pursued vigorously." He warned that Young's testimony at his confirmation hearing "assumes added significance as an indication of the direction adopted by the new administration."<sup>77</sup> This direction was confirmed by Andrew Young's February tour of Tanzania and Nigeria. The *New York Times* reported that Young's visit "reaped a good deal of good will—especially in Nigeria, where the United States had come to be regarded as a villain not too far above South Africa."<sup>78</sup> While some African states remained doubtful that the Carter administration meant a positive or permanent change for US-African relations, the consensus was that Young's trip demonstrated a move in the right direction.<sup>79</sup> "Ambassador Young's visit to Tanzania, reinforced before and after by the President's and Secretary's statements on Rhodesia, apartheid, the Byrd Amendment, etc.," Ambassador Spain cabled the White House, "resulted in a sizable increase in Tanzanian and African trust in the new Administration."<sup>80</sup> According to US Vice President Mondale, Carter's appointment of Young was "not inadvertent": Young had personal relationships with the frontline presidents, on which the administration hoped to capitalize.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> J.B. Shearer to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, "Carter Administration," 3 February 1977, vol. 39A, "Relations with South Africa 21/1/77 – 16/2/77," Subject no. 1/33/3, Box 78, DFA.

<sup>78</sup> Bennett, USUN 00386, "Press Coverage of Ambassador Young's African Trip," 10 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>79</sup> Bennett, USUN 0361, "Press Coverage of Ambassador Young's African Trip," 08 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>80</sup> Spain, "Ambassador Young's visit to Tanzania and some thoughts on its implications," Dar es Salaam 00672, 14 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>81</sup> Walter Mondale in Gammon, Paris 02954, 29 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.



In March 1977, therefore, Carter's beliefs, campaign promises, and personnel appointments—combined with events on the ground in southern Africa—led the administration to adopt a broad policy toward South Africa that would treat “each issue [Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid] separately on its own merit.” The challenge was that, as the State Department admitted, Washington's ability to influence change in South Africa was limited. Although the administration did have economic and political leverage, Washington's ability to press South Africa for changes to apartheid was curtailed by its other southern African initiatives, its allies' relations with South Africa, and Pretoria's emphatic refusal to dismantle apartheid. Thus, the administration's strong desire to see a more racially just South Africa had to be balanced against the reality that Washington had little ability to force change. To do this, the Carter administration chose to implement a specific policy that would balance pressing Pretoria for change and withholding pressure that might derail other southern African initiatives.

### **Specific Policy: The Balancing Act**

To implement a narrow policy designed to encourage change in South Africa, the Carter administration had to determine how much and what kind of influence the United States might be able to exert on Pretoria. The State Department's initial study identified two potential avenues of influence—economic and psychological, but it considered both avenues to be limited.

The United States' economic ties with South Africa dated back to the diamond and gold mining booms of the late 1800s. After a century of expanding interests beyond the mining sector, by 1977 the United States became a strong partner in trade with South Africa,

and second only to Britain as its leading investor in the South African economy.<sup>82</sup> In 1977 US direct investment in South Africa contributed to 16 percent of South Africa's foreign investment compared to Britain's 50 percent. According to the State Department in 1977, some officials in the Carter administration believed US investment in South Africa to be insufficient to use as leverage while others argued that US investment was in important sectors of the economy, which enhanced Washington's potential economic influence.<sup>83</sup>

The administration's split over America's economic leverage with South Africa stemmed from a wider debate emerging within the American public. Antiapartheid groups reasoned that American corporations in South Africa directly supported the apartheid system. In 1978 the Institute for Policy Studies published a booklet entitled, *South Africa: Foreign Investment and Apartheid*, in which the authors argue that US corporations supported "the most strategic and dynamic" sectors of the South African economy, including petroleum, motor vehicles, computers, mining and technology.<sup>84</sup> Twelve American corporations—including Caltex, Mobil, Ford and General Motors—represented three-fourths of the American market in South Africa. By investing in these areas of the economy, the booklet argued, businesses supported Pretoria's ability to power its police state. In addition to the direct investment contributed by American corporations, the study showed that indirect investment, such as bank loans amounting to 2 billion in 1977, also contributed to the health of the South Africa economy.<sup>85</sup> "Foreign investors must not kid themselves," the American

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<sup>82</sup> Irogbe, *The Roots of United States Foreign Policy toward Apartheid South Africa*, 104.

<sup>83</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

<sup>84</sup> Lawrence Litvak, Robert DeGrasse, Kathleen McTigue, *South Africa: Foreign Investment and Apartheid* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 44, AAA.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 43.

Committee on Africa quoted Bishop Desmond Tutu saying in 1979, “their investments maintain the apartheid system.”<sup>86</sup>

Because antiapartheid organizations considered American corporate interests to be upholding the South African government, they argued that the Carter administration should support unilateral and multilateral economic sanctions. Some actions they recommended were the denial of tax credits for taxes paid by American companies to the South African government, the curtailment of Export-Import (EX-IM) Bank credits and guarantees to restrict lending, and voting for mandatory economic sanctions against South Africa in the United Nations Security Council.<sup>87</sup> Antiapartheid organizations lobbied for congressional action to support these measures, in addition to calling on the Carter administration to act.<sup>88</sup>

In 1977, many in the American business world argued against the small (but growing) antiapartheid voice, calling instead for expanding America’s economic presence in South Africa. Former Secretary of Treasury William Simon, for example, spoke about US-South African economic ties before the South African Trade Organization and Senbank on 21 January 1977. He claimed that the United States did not have enough economic influence in South Africa and should, therefore, expand its economic ties with the stable anticommunist country.<sup>89</sup> While some in the Carter administration did not agree that American businesses

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<sup>86</sup> Karen Rothmyer and TerriAnn Lowenthal, “The Sullivan Principles: A Critical Look at the US Corporate Role in South Africa,” Pamphlet by The Africa Fund (New York, August 1979): 1, AAA.

<sup>87</sup> Washington Office on Africa, “The Carter Look on South Africa” (Washington D.C.: The Washington Office on Africa, 1977), AAA; Ted Lockwood and Chris Root, “Discussion of a Southern African Strategy for 1977” (Washington D.C.: The Washington Office on Africa, 19 January 1977), AAA; American Committee on Africa, “Bank Campaign Fights Loans to South Africa” (New York: The American Committee on Africa, July/August 1977), AAA.

<sup>88</sup> The Washington Office on Africa, “Pending Bills on Southern Africa: 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 95<sup>th</sup> Congress” (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Office on Africa, [fall 1977]), AAA.

<sup>89</sup> D.B. Sole to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs Pretoria, “Relations with South Africa as seen by former Treasury Secretary, William Simon,” 27 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

should be encouraged to invest in South Africa, they did agree with Simon's assessment that the United States had limited economic influence in South Africa.

Nevertheless, there was a consensus within the administration that "US-South Africa economic links present[ed the administration] with a possible means of exerting some influence on South Africa."<sup>90</sup> This gave the United States a few options. On the table were the same disengagement actions supported by most antiapartheid organizations—the denial of tax credits, EX-IM bank curtailments, and economic sanctions at the United Nations.

Similar to the question of economic influence, there was also debate over how much leverage the United States had with South Africa due to the psychological factor, or "the very high value South Africa attaches to American friendship."<sup>91</sup> Since its rise to power during the early years of the Cold War, the South African government, dominated by the Afrikaner-based National Party, saw itself as part of the Western world. James Barber and John Barrett explain, "Most [South African] whites saw themselves as members of a Western, Christian, anti-communist society committed to a mixed/capitalist economy."<sup>92</sup> The SAG's apartheid policies, however, complicated relations with American and European countries. While South Africa's mineral wealth and growing industrial sector helped it secure economic ties with Western nations, the government often felt betrayed by the West's criticisms of apartheid.<sup>93</sup> Between 1960 and 1977, South Africa became increasingly worried about black radical and communist movements in South Africa, especially after the MPLA/Cuban victory in Angola. According to the State Department, South Africa's desire to be a part of the

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<sup>90</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid; Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation*, 13.

Western community and its fear of communist advances in southern Africa afforded the Carter administration some leverage. State's study explained, "They [the SAG] believe that only the US has sufficient power to save them from destruction and their country from falling into the hands of black radicals aided and directed by the Soviet Union."<sup>94</sup>

Nevertheless, the amount of economic or psychological pressure Washington was willing to exert was severely restricted by external factors. One problem the Carter administration faced was that America's West European allies, especially the British, were loath to any suggestion of economic sanctions. The British economy was much more closely tied to South Africa's than that of the United States. US trade with South Africa constituted only 1.5 percent of all US total foreign investment as of 1975, while for the British, investment in South Africa made up 10 percent of total foreign investment. The French had significant interests in South Africa's defense and nuclear industries.<sup>95</sup> London and Paris were steadfastly opposed to any mandatory economic, commercial or financial sanctions being invoked against South Africa at the United Nations. French Foreign Minister, Louis de Guiringaud, wrote to Vance on 18 March 1977 to reiterate this point.<sup>96</sup> Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher explained de Guiringaud's reasoning, "The three governments [Britain, France and West Germany] are under pressure from business and political circles and are concerned that [economic sanctions will] interfere in important trade relations and investment with South Africa."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 234-235.

<sup>96</sup> Louis de Guiringaud quoted in Vance, State 062940, "Letter from de Guiringaud to the Secretary on Southern Africa," 22 March 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>97</sup> Christopher, State 071044, 31 March 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

“While the United States’ economic stake in white dominated southern Africa is growing,” Professor Ruth Morgenthau, an advisor on Carter’s African policy, wrote in a paper for the National Security Council, “it is not yet so large that we cannot afford to take risks with it.” She continued, “In contrast, some of our closest European allies, particularly the United Kingdom, have a tremendous amount to lose.”<sup>98</sup> The Carter administration had to take this into consideration when devising policy toward South Africa.<sup>99</sup> In a meeting with the Jamaican Foreign Minister on 3 March, Ambassador Young reiterated the point, stating that the British restrained the United States in policy making because it feared for its economy.<sup>100</sup> This was especially true in 1977, a year UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey projected to be “difficult,” with rising unemployment and greater dependence on exports.<sup>101</sup> With its economy in recession, Britain was not willing to rock the South African boat. If the United States supported economic sanctions on South Africa in the UN Security Council, Britain would veto them. The effort would thus be ineffective, and it would hurt the Western alliance.

London had another reason to hesitate criticizing apartheid—Rhodesia. In early December 1976, the Rhodesian negotiations at Geneva broke down. British Ambassador to the United Nations Ivor Richard embarked on an African shuttle to test the possible

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<sup>98</sup> Ruth Morgenthau in Brzezinski to Tuchman, memo, 1 March 1977, File CO 141: Confidential 1/20/77-1/20/81, Box CO-53, JCL.

<sup>99</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL. The study explained, “our decisions must also take into account the viewpoints and needs of our allies, especially Great Britain, whose commercial relationship with South Africa is extremely important to the British Economy.”

<sup>100</sup> Young quoted in Bennett, USUN 00603, “Meeting with Jamaican Foreign Minister,” 3 March 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>101</sup> Denis Healey quoted in Bennett, Paris 02954, “Vice President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Callaghan,” 29 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

introduction of new proposals.<sup>102</sup> On 3 January, Richard flew to South Africa to meet with Vorster to try to convince him to press Smith into accepting the new proposals. Vorster, reflecting on his efforts to influence Smith the previous September to accept Kissinger's five points, was hesitant to stick his neck out in the negotiating ring again. At the very beginning of its term, the Carter administration assumed that if there was still time to influence the Rhodesian and Namibian situations, it was brief. "Our underlying assumption," Ronald Spiers, Deputy Chief of Mission at the US Embassy in London, cabled the State Department on 1 February 1977, "is that events in southern Africa, and most immediately in Rhodesia, are fast slipping beyond the reach of Western influence."<sup>103</sup> The delicate web of the Rhodesian negotiations narrowed the administration's options on how to handle the South African question. In discussing the administration's broad policy options during the 8 February Policy Review Committee meeting, Secretary Vance noted that the committee agreed on option three—treating each issue in southern Africa separately—but also acknowledged that "option [three] scares the daylights out of the British."<sup>104</sup> The Carter administration took this into account.

While option three meant that the United States would press South Africa on Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid, it did not mean that the Carter administration planned to press South Africa on these issues equally or that there would be no prioritization. "In terms of urgency," State's initial study on southern Africa reported, "the Rhodesian problem is highest priority."<sup>105</sup> Undersecretary of the Treasury for Monetary Affairs Anthony Solomon raised

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<sup>102</sup> Edmondson, Pretoria 0005, "Ivor Richard's Rhodesia Visit," 3 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>103</sup> Spiers, London 01792, 1 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>104</sup> Vance in Special Coordination Committee Meeting, "South Africa and Rhodesia," 8 February 1977, Subject File, Box 24, Meetings, PRC 3: 1977, JCL.

<sup>105</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

this point during the 8 February PRC meeting, reminding policymakers that “even though we are showing opposition at various levels to apartheid, Rhodesia is still the priority issue.”<sup>106</sup>

Although the administration intended to separate the issues of southern Africa, it worried that South Africa would not separate the issues so easily: any pressure the administration exerted against Pretoria for changes to apartheid could have negative effects on Washington’s other southern African initiatives.

The Carter administration had good reason to rank the issues of Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid South Africa in terms of priority. Not only were events in Rhodesia threatening to spiral out of control and the situation in Namibia becoming more urgent, the administration presumed that there was little hope for real change in South Africa in the next four years. South Africa’s recent past informed this assumption. Despite increasing criticism of apartheid within and outside of South Africa, State’s study told the administration that Pretoria had only supported minor changes in education and public discrimination.<sup>107</sup> Racial attitudes in the majority white electorate prevented further change. While there was a growing segment of liberals speaking out against apartheid, State assessed that “this vocal, articulate element of Afrikaner and English-speaking white society represents only a small percentage of the electorate—ten percent at best.”<sup>108</sup> A November 1976 State Department assessment concluded that Vorster and other key government figures “adhere[d] to the traditional apartheid policy both because of personal orientation and how they read the mood of Afrikanerdom. The rank and file prefer the system,” Ambassador Bowdler explained.<sup>109</sup> In

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<sup>106</sup> Solomon in Special Coordination Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, Subject File, Meetings, PRC 3: 1977, Box 24, JCL.

<sup>107</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Bowdler, Pretor 05292, “Prospects for Change in South Africa,” 19 November 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.



reviewing this information, Acting Director of the CIA Enno Knoche explained to the Policy Review Committee that Vorster was not likely to initiate change. “He rules his Cabinet on the basis of consensus,” Knoche said, “and there is little pressure from within the [white] African community for him to change his policies.”<sup>110</sup>

As the spring of 1977 progressed, South Africa’s resistance to change became even more apparent. On 28 January 1977, Prime Minister Vorster promised the South African Parliament “unwavering pursuit of separate development.”<sup>111</sup> During the 8 February PRC meeting, Vance reiterated the point. Pretoria, a government that did not like to be seen as being influenced by outside forces, was not likely to alter its policies regardless of any pressures exerted by the Carter administration. Pik Botha explained the SAG’s position on apartheid best, stating, “there is a point beyond which we cannot be pushed. That point is simply our right to exist as a nation and to govern ourselves—and to retain our identity. This is not negotiable. We can talk about many things...but that one—no go.”<sup>112</sup>

While the Carter administration decided to press South Africa on apartheid, South Africa’s position as the key to bringing majority rule to Rhodesia and Namibia as well as its resistance to outside pressures convinced the administration that it should do so with caution. Carter explained, “the difficult question is...how much to push the South African government and drive them it into a corner that alienates them from us because...they have a major role to play in the peaceful resolution of Rhodesia and Namibia.”<sup>113</sup> The administration

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<sup>110</sup> Knoche in Special Coordination Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, Subject File, Meetings, PRC 3: 1977, Box 24, JCL.

<sup>111</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00135, “Prime Minister Addresses Parliament,” 29 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>112</sup> Botha in SABC, broadcast, “Washington/Pretoria Straight-Talk,” vol. 41, “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/4/77-29/4/77,” Subject no. 1/33/3, Box 79, DFA.

<sup>113</sup> Carter in James Genstenzang, SAPA-Associated Press, 16 April 1977, vol. 41, “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/4/77-29/4/77,” Subject no. 1/33/3, Box 79, DFA.

feared that if it lost the ability to influence Vorster then it would lose the ability to influence events in the region altogether.<sup>114</sup> Undersecretary for Political Affairs Philip Habib announced before the House Subcommittee on African Affairs that the administration's approach toward South Africa would balance these conflicting objectives. The administration would "seek ways of persuading" South Africa while "remain[ing] sensitive to the danger that the attitudes and reactions of the outside world to events in South Africa could have the unfortunate effect of engendering greater isolation and resistance to change."<sup>115</sup>

Unwilling to use all of its influence, the United States attempted to adopt a specific policy that would encourage South Africa to alleviate the horrors of apartheid while at the same time avoiding antagonizing Pretoria so much that it would derail other southern African initiatives. On 3 March 1977 President Carter met with the National Security Council to finalize the administration's official policy toward South Africa. The president agreed with Brzezinski's suggestion that the administration's aim to promote "a moderate, progressive transformation of the South African society."<sup>116</sup> President Carter directed Secretary Vance and UN Ambassador Young to come up with a list of steps the administration could take to pursue its new course; however, he also made clear that the administration should tread lightly. "The President stated," Brzezinski summarized of the meeting, "that while we are decided on this new focus for US policy, we should make it clear to the SAG that we are not going to put immediate and absolute pressure on them for revolutionary change that would mean the end of the Afrikaner way of life."<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Spiers, London 01792, 1 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>115</sup> Habib, "Statement by Undersecretary for Political Affairs Philip C. Habib before the House Subcommittee on African Affairs," 3 March 1977, "USA Relations with SA 1977," Subject no. 1/33/3, Box 83, DFA.

<sup>116</sup> NSC Meeting on South Africa (PRM-4) "Summary of Conclusions," 3 March 1977, NLC-17-1-5-8-9, ARC, JCL.

<sup>117</sup> Brzezinski to Carter, memo, "NCS Meeting on South Africa," 4 March 1977, NLC-15-47-12-8-3, ARC, JCL.

On 29 March 1977, Vance and Young's paper on United States policy toward South Africa was circulated to Brzezinski. The paper reiterated President Carter's balanced approach to South Africa. While the administration would "aim at influencing the South African Government to change its racial policies, taking sufficiently strong action so the South Africans have no doubts about the seriousness of our purpose," it would also "avoid, if [it] could help it, pushing Vorster and his government to a position of greater intransigence."<sup>118</sup> In the immediate future, the administration would pursue three actions: (1) make forthright public statements on its preparedness to do what it could to promote progressive change in the South African society; (2) inform black African leaders about its general policy thrust, making sure not to make promises or commitments that the administration might not be able to keep; (3) privately inform Vorster that US-South Africa relations were at a watershed. As for its long-range policy, the administration would pursue a carrot and stick approach, encouraging South Africa when it made progressive changes and applying "sticks" when it increased oppression. It proposed keeping the situation under close watch and adjusting policy as the situation required.

Thus the administration's policy was to be a flexible approach, aimed at promoting moderate changes in apartheid South Africa. It was formulated under severe constraints. The administration adopted an approach that sought to balance as many conflicting interests as possible, recognizing that this balancing act might fail. Pressing South Africa on apartheid, however, was worth the risk. It put the United States on the "moral" side of history and promised to further strengthen US-black African ties. Furthermore, even though it decided to

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<sup>118</sup> Memo for Brzezinski, "Response to Presidential Directive/NSC-5: Southern Africa," 29 March 1977, NCL-132-3-9-1-1, ARC, JCL.

push South Africa on apartheid, its priorities were to obtain South Africa's cooperation in resolving the crises in Rhodesia and Namibia.

## CHAPTER THREE: FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF SOUTH AFRICAN POLICYMAKERS

*[B.J. Vorster] has learned to play the political game as he plays chess—and he plays it well. Thus it is that something he does today, viewed in isolation appears stupid and clumsy to those who are not privy to his secrets. In two months' or two years' time, or even two weeks' time another move is made. And another. And another. Suddenly the play becomes clear and the original move no longer appears either stupid or clumsy.*<sup>1</sup>

—John D'Oliveira

22 June 1977. Washington, D.C., United States of America. “You want us to accept this new commitment—a commitment to suicide...Forget it! No Way! We shall not accept that not now, not tomorrow, never, ever,” exclaimed South African Foreign Minister “Pik” Botha on the CBS Morning News. The Carter administration’s “demand” for one-man, one-vote, as Botha interpreted it, was “the height of immorality.”<sup>2</sup>

In June 1977 South African government officials—including Prime Minister B.J. Vorster and Foreign Minister Botha—wailed that Washington was calling for the immediate “destruction” of the white man in South Africa. This was Pretoria’s reaction to a comment US Vice President Walter Mondale made during a press conference at the conclusion of the 19-20 May Vienna summit. After having spent eight hours in three meetings discussing the major issues of Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid with the South Africans, Mondale disclosed to the press a recap of the meetings: The United States and South Africa guardedly agreed on how to proceed with the Rhodesian negotiations; South Africa agreed to meet again with the Contact Group on Namibia; and, although the United States and South Africa widely disagreed on apartheid, Washington had made its position clear. It was the question and

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<sup>1</sup> John D'Oliveira in Al J. Venter, *Vorster's Africa: Friendship and Frustration* (Johannesburg: Ernest Stanton Publishers, 1977), 22. D'Oliveira was a political correspondent to Johannesburg's newspaper *The Star* and the author of *Vorster—The Man* (Johannesburg: Ernest Stanton Publishers, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Pik Botha quoted in article, “Botha Scorns Black Rule for S. Africa, ‘Never Ever,’” *Washington Post*, 23 June 1977.

answer portion of the press conference that provided the opening for the South African government to criticize the work accomplished in Vienna.

“Mr. Vice President,” a reporter began for the final question of the press conference, “could you possibly go into slightly more detail on your concept of full participation as opposed to one man one vote? Do you see some kind of compromise?” Mondale—in a comment that would haunt US-South African relations for the remainder of the Carter period—replied, “No, no. It’s the same thing. Every citizen should have the right to vote and every vote should be equally weighed.”<sup>3</sup>

South Africa’s political leaders jumped on the comment. Vorster employed it in statements before parliament. Botha groaned before South African and international press.<sup>4</sup> The Department of Foreign Affairs asked South African ambassador to the United States Don Sole to speak with cabinet officials about the apparent death warrant the Carter administration had issued for South Africa.<sup>5</sup> As NSC Staffer for African Policy Henry Richardson put it, South African officials made a “political football” out of the one-man, one-vote remark in the months following the Vienna summit.<sup>6</sup> The South African outrage was fierce; it was relentless—it was exaggerated.

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<sup>3</sup> Reporter and Mondale quoted in State 121877, “Vice President Press Conference, Vienna, May 26<sup>th</sup>,” 26 May 1977, Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>4</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa’s Foreign Policy*, 233.

<sup>5</sup> Don Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Cape Town, Telegram, 2 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA. In this telegram Sole recapped his meeting with David Aaron on “impressions arising out of the Vienna meeting,” which—due to the recent Rhodesian raids into Mozambique—turned into a meeting with Zbigniew Brzezinski and President Carter. In addition to addressing the issue of violence in southern Africa, Sole also expressed his concern about the one-man, one-vote comment directly to Carter saying that he would turn to the issue again as soon as possible.

<sup>6</sup> Henry J Richardson to David Aaron, Memo “Talkers for Your Dinner with Botha,” June 22, 1977, NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77” Box 69, JCL.

During the Vienna meetings, Mondale did not call for the immediate reorganization of the South African political system.<sup>7</sup> The American delegation had been very careful to refrain from prescribing any particular solution to the South African problem.<sup>8</sup> Vice President Mondale had conveyed the administration's desire to see a "progressive transformation" of the South African society alongside progress being made in Rhodesia and Namibia. Mondale did criticize South Africa's homeland policy, but he also made it clear that Washington did not have a "road map or checklist" for how the South African government should end it.<sup>9</sup> Without recommending a specific alternate solution, Mondale did call for the eventual dissolution of apartheid: "A just society means the absence of discrimination," he explained, "and separation imposed as policy [*read apartheid*] is discrimination. We call for an end to discrimination and for full participation leading to a

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<sup>7</sup> Mondale and Vorster (along with David Aaron and Pik Botha) met privately for 35 minutes before the first meeting on 19 May. There was no transcript of the conversation available at the Carter Library at the time of writing. It is possible that Mondale told Vorster that the Carter administration sought the progressive transformation of the South African society leading to the eventual implementation of majority rule based on the principle of one man, one vote, but nothing as direct was mentioned in the three transcribed meetings that followed. In a cable from Vienna, Francis Meehan wrote a single note on the private session, stating that "Vorster opened by criticizing President Carter's statement earlier this week on the need for change in southern Africa, then turned to a request for more C-130s and Shackleton Spare Parts." See Meehan, Vienna 04122, "First Meeting Between Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster, Morning, May 19," 20 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>8</sup> Administrative documents leading up to the meeting in Vienna reveal that the White House took great efforts to ensure that the American delegation did not make any specific demands for change in South Africa. Almost every word of Mondale's opening monologue on South Africa during the third meeting can be traced back to the hundreds of pages of briefing documents and memos that circulated between the Vice President, the President, the State Department, and the NSA. Comparing the preparation documents to the Vienna meeting minutes shows that he had adhered very closely to the agreed upon script.

<sup>9</sup> The South African homeland policy was the bread and butter of apartheid in the 1970s. Originating in the 1950s and formalized through legislation in 1971, the "homelands" were envisioned as a way to consolidate and legitimize white control in South Africa by grouping the former labor "reserves" into eight (eventually ten) African "nations." Each "nation" would be responsible for its internal development, and the "white nation"—constituted of both English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites—would have absolute control since it was the largest nation in terms of the greatest proportion of land. The homelands policy, enforced through brutal forced relocations of Africans, strict pass laws and other acts of legal separation, underwent a final transformation in the mid-1970s when the Vorster administration sought to grant "independence" to each homeland in a desperate attempt to veil apartheid as a separation of freedoms and governance for distinct South African "nations." No foreign government recognized the independence of the Transkei in 1976, nor the three other "nations" granted independence in the decade following. For more information on South Africa's homeland policy, see Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 191-195.

healthy, just and secure society.”<sup>10</sup> Vorster, having presented a monologue on the history of South Africa, simply suggested to Mondale that “we must agree to differ, since we do not regard separation as discrimination.” Despite the disagreement, however, at the conclusion of the meeting the two delegations thanked each other for the frank discussion. “Whether or not we agree,” Vorster stated, “the clarification [of America’s views on apartheid] has cleared the air.”<sup>11</sup>

The calm disagreement between the United States and South Africa expressed in the third Vienna meeting contrasts starkly with the South African response to Mondale’s comment during the press conference following the meeting. But why? The Carter administration had been careful during its first months to approach the topic of apartheid gently with the South Africans; it sought to avoid Pretoria’s known tendency toward intransigence and it was convinced—based on the analogy with the US South—that gradual change could be promoted in South Africa. Furthermore, aside from its public rhetoric denouncing apartheid and its prolongation of a nuclear fuel deal struck between the United States and South Africa during the previous administration,<sup>12</sup> the Carter administration had

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<sup>10</sup> Walter Mondale, Memorandum of Conversation: Third Meeting Between Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster,” 20 May 1977, Overseas Assignments—Trip Files 1977-80, Papers of Walter F. Mondale, Box 13, JCL.

<sup>11</sup> John Vorster, Memorandum of Conversation: Third Meeting Between Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster,” 20 May 1977, Overseas Assignments—Trip Files 1977-80, Papers of Walter F. Mondale, Box 13, JCL.

<sup>12</sup> In March 1975 the South African Government applied for an export license with the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to increase the amount of nuclear material that could be exported to South Africa. The NRC could issue the license only with a recommendation from the White House. While the Ford administration delayed giving an Executive recommendation to the NRC in the fall of 1976 during its nuclear policy review, it did submit a recommendation on 19 January 1977 just before leaving office. When the NRC requested that the new administration comment on the previous administration’s recommendation, the Carter administration decided to hold off submitting its recommendation until it was able to review its nuclear policies. See Jay Katzen to Vice President, briefing paper, “Your meeting with Vorster: South African Nuclear Issues,” 18 April 1977, NLC-4-32-7-2-3, JLC; Talcott Seelye to Vance, briefing memorandum “Your Meeting with R.F. Botha June 21, 5 PM” 18 June 1977, NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77,” Box 69, JCL; Jeremy Shearar Embassy of South Africa Washington to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, telegram, “Importation of Enriched Nuclear Fuel,” 15 July, 1976, vol. 35 “USA Relations with S.A.,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.



taken no action to demonstrate its policy change toward South Africa during the first six months of office.<sup>13</sup> This was in line with its flexible, carrot and stick approach.

Furthermore, Pretoria wanted improved relations between the two countries in order to maintain a public image of cooperation between the leader of the free world and its own increasingly ostracized state. The South African government's outrage over Mondale's comment, however, risked derailing that objective. William Rusher, publisher of *National Review* magazine and friend of the SAG warned the South African Department of Information that by giving too much weight to Mondale's comment, the South African government might inadvertently "reify the alleged policy...and sanctify it far above what it deserves." He concluded his letter stating that Pretoria was its "own worst enemy" in pursuing this line.<sup>14</sup> Why did Pretoria risk worsening relations between South Africa and its "Western leader" by creating an issue out of Mondale's off-the-cuff remark?

Documents held in the Department of Foreign Affairs archive in Pretoria as well as the memoirs of former South African diplomats strongly suggest that the government's reaction to the one-man one-vote remark was a deliberate tactic in South Africa's evolving policy toward the Carter administration. To counter Carter's approach, Pretoria intentionally exaggerated Mondale's comment to make it seem as though the United States was demanding a complete and sudden reordering of South African society. The strategy was to

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<sup>13</sup> A July 1977 State Department paper states that the Mondale-Vorster meeting was the first step the new administration took to demonstrate its new approach to US-South African relations. See [State Department], "Southern Africa - Policy Review," in Christine Dodson, "Papers for the PRC Meeting on Southern Africa, July 22," 19 July 1977, CK3100062014, Declassified Documents Reference System (hereafter DDRS). A NSC memo regarding the 22 July PRC meeting on Southern Africa makes it clear that the State Department wrote the briefing paper above. See Henry Richardson to Brzezinski, NSC Memorandum, "PRC Meeting on Southern Africa," 29 June 1977, # 1B, folder "Meetings—PRC 20: 6/30/77," Subject File "Meetings—Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski: 10/80-1/81 through Meetings—PRC 55: 2/27/78," Box 24, JCL.

<sup>14</sup> William A. Rusher, publisher of *National Review* Magazine, to Les de Villiers, Department of Information, Pretoria South Africa, letter, 30 June 1977, vol. 42 "USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

create the image of a hostile Carter administration assaulting a cooperative and progressive Pretoria. It was an attempt to undercut the Carter administration's policies by rallying white support at home and abroad.

To zoom out further, the secondary literature covering South African international relations during this time period provides context for understanding why Pretoria chose this particular strategy. With the erosion of white buffer states in the region following the breakup of the Portuguese empire, and after its disastrous military campaign during the Angolan civil war in 1975, the South African government began the process of hunkering down for the "total onslaught" against the beleaguered nation. Understood in this light, the Vorster government's approach toward the Carter administration was a part of South Africa's "total strategy" against the "total onslaught." While this defense strategy had many domestic and international facets, it can be clearly seen in South Africa's attempt to wage a public perception campaign against the Carter administration in order to deflect and preempt Carter's pressures for change. After concluding that there was no hope for constructive relations between the United States and South Africa during the Carter administration, Pretoria intentionally presented Carter's South African policies as unjustified and destructive, using rhetoric of race and the Cold War to rally supporters at home and abroad in an attempt to preserve the white-controlled state.

A detailed account of Pretoria's policy toward the Carter administration contributes to the growing literature on South Africa's foreign policy shift after 1974. It also sheds new light on the Carter administration's approach toward Pretoria. Because the South Africans designed a policy to specifically undercut Carter's approach—which they understood to be derived from Carter's personal interpretation of US race relations—the South African side of

the story helps show how the Carter administration implemented its carrot and stick approach toward Pretoria in 1977 and explain why it was so cautious in using its sticks. A combined look at Washington's and Pretoria's political sparring during the Carter administration also provides an opportunity to see what happened when a super power and a regional power—equally driven by interpretations of race, cultural identity, and socio-political development—attempted to wade through the already-complicated problems of southern Africa during the Cold War.

### **Total Strategy against Total Onslaught**

Since the rise of the Afrikaner-led National Party to Premiership in 1948, the cornerstone of all domestic and foreign policies was in the consolidation and safeguarding of the white-controlled state.<sup>15</sup> It was a strategy with deep roots in the Afrikaner psyche, with vestiges reaching far back into the early nineteenth century when the ancestors of the Afrikaans-speaking whites faced real and imagined threats to their society from the encroaching British and fights with black African natives.<sup>16</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, the National Party—imbued with a profound anxiety created from a history of perceived onslaughts against a victimized, heroic people—found its public enemy number one in the world communist conspiracy. For the capitalist society dependent on cheap, black labor, communism threatened to overturn the entire socio-political system based on race. The National Party considered all threats to the South African government, including liberation parties like the African National Congress and Pan Africanist Congress, to be part of the

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<sup>15</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 2; Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation*, 10-12; Sue Onslow, "The Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Nationalism and External Intervention," *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 11.

greater communist conspiracy.<sup>17</sup> Whether or not individual policymakers believed communists to have actually inspired any individual attack on the government, they found Cold War rhetoric to be a useful tool for rallying white electorate support for the national government. If Americans saw communists lurking around every corner, South African whites saw communists walking the streets during broad daylight.

In the 1950s and 60s, South African foreign policy focused on its relations with regional neighbors. Pretoria sought to separate South Africa from the colonial struggles to its north by bolstering its surrounding white-controlled neighboring states through increased economic ties and defense arrangements.<sup>18</sup> Not only did closer ties serve to strengthen Pretoria's capitalist system and thwart anticolonial objectives, they increased Pretoria's leverage in the region by creating a network of economically dependent states. In the late 1960s as international condemnation of apartheid increased and as more African states became independent, South Africa began a search for acquiescent members of the Organization of African Unity through its "dialogue" initiative.<sup>19</sup> By establishing regular diplomatic relations with a few independent African nations, such as Malawi in 1968, South Africa hoped to lessen antiapartheid fervor within the OAU.<sup>20</sup> When the liberation movement FRELIMO took power in Mozambique in 1974, Pretoria "surprised and impressed" the

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<sup>17</sup> Anna-Mart van Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb and Regional Liberation: Cold War Perspectives," *South African Historical Journal* 62 no. 1 (2010): 2.

<sup>18</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 5; Robert Davies and Dan O'Meara, "Total Strategy in Southern Africa: An Analysis of South African Regional Policy Since 1978," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 11, no. 2 (April 1985): 187-188.

<sup>19</sup> Davies and O'Meara, "Total Strategy in Southern Africa," 186-188.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-188. The authors cite a 1971 OAU resolution that was designed in response to South Africa's dialogue initiative (it condemned South African proposals for relations amongst African nations) as evidence that suggests South Africa's success. The authors explain that "six OAU members (Malawi, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Mauritania, Madagascar and Lesotho) voted against the motion while five other states (Dahomey, Niger, Swaziland, Upper Volta and Togo) abstained."

outside world by recognizing the government and offering to extend cooperative relations.<sup>21</sup> This was the first demonstration of South Africa's new "détente" policy. Through "détente," Pretoria accepted the reality of decolonization in southern Africa, but attempted to help shape its outcome by offering friendly relations to states hostile to South Africa.<sup>22</sup> Pretoria attempted to use its regional leverage and influence to bring moderate, anticommunist governments to power in its former white cordon sanitaire. This explains why the Vorster government pressed Ian Smith's white regime in Rhodesia to negotiate, a policy the white Rhodesians considered throwing them to the figurative lions.<sup>23</sup> Détente was short lived, however. It waned when Pretoria sent South African troops into Angola to fight the Cuban-backed MPLA in August 1975 and died with Pretoria's repression of school children in Soweto in June 1976. South Africa's northern neighbors, who had been skeptical but cooperative with Vorster's détente initiative (especially Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia), lost faith in the ability to work with the South African government to end colonialism in southern Africa.<sup>24</sup>

Pretoria learned two important lessons from its military defeat in Angola in March 1976: The communist onslaught against South Africa was closing in; and Washington, which had encouraged Pretoria to invade Angola, could not be trusted.<sup>25</sup> Three months later, the streets of Soweto ignited. The Soweto uprising, which occurred in the midst of increasing international condemnation of apartheid, convinced Pretoria that it needed a new strategy for

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<sup>21</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 181.

<sup>22</sup> Onslow, "The Cold War in Southern Africa," *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 15; Venter, *Vorster's Africa*, 26-27.

<sup>23</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 184; Venter, *Vorster's Africa*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Onslow, "The Cold War in Southern Africa," *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 15; Davies and O'Meara, "Total Strategy," 188-189.

<sup>25</sup> Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb," 2.

state security. The election of Jimmy Carter in November 1976 reinforced Pretoria's assumption that it might have to undertake its new strategy without the help of the West.<sup>26</sup>

Although "total strategy" was not officially adopted as state policy until after former Minister of Defense P.W. Botha became Prime Minister in September 1978, it was first introduced under the Vorster regime in 1977. The policy debuted in a 1977 Defense White Paper that called for a complete mobilization of South African economic, political, psycho-social, and military power to confront the "total onslaught" challenging South Africa.<sup>27</sup> Because of the Cuban buildup in Angola and the Soweto uprising, Pretoria feared that a communist challenge to the National Party's power was on the horizon and that it could not count on the United States for help. Thus, the policy had both regional and international dimensions. Regionally, "total strategy" sought to reinvigorate Vorster's 1974 "constellation" of states approach by formalizing alliances with "moderate states of Southern Africa" through official diplomatic, economic and strategic relations. Because South African apartheid policies were seen as a roadblock to formalizing these relations, "total strategy" also envisioned minor reforms to address discrimination in South Africa—always within the framework of apartheid—to give the impression of moderation.

Internationally, South Africa undertook accelerated defense initiatives, including a "tenacious" search for arms on the international market, the acceleration of domestic arms

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<sup>26</sup> In a 3 February 1977 to Pretoria, South African Charge d'Affaires ad interim Jeremy B. Shearar assessed the temperature of the United States government in 1977, stating, "In the circumstances[,] South Africa can expect little overt understanding and no assistance either from the [Carter] Administration or from Congress. It is in fact doubtful in the current climate whether the situation would have been much improved had President Ford been elected." J.B. Shearar to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria and Cape Town, "Carter Administration," 3 February 1977, vol 39A "USA Relations with South Africa 21/1/77-16/2/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 78, DFA. Also see Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 205; Davies and O'Meara, "Total Strategy in Southern Africa," 189.

<sup>27</sup> Davies and O'Meara, "Total Strategy in Southern Africa," 189.

development, and the creation of a nuclear weapons program.<sup>28</sup> The documents held in the DFA archive reveal a second international component of South Africa's "total strategy": South African officials launched a public relations campaign in the United States to cast the Carter administration as having demanded rapid and fundamental change in South Africa. They claimed that Carter's policies were unjustified and dangerous to the stability of the strongest anticommunist state in southern Africa. By the autumn of 1977, South Africa's strategy toward Washington left the Carter administration unsure how to implement its policy toward Pretoria.

### **The 'Swart Gevaar' and US War on South Africa**

In the summer of 1977, white public debate in South Africa exploded over a question of US policy toward South Africa. William Bowdler, the American Ambassador to South Africa, noted from Cape Town that "in its response to new US policy spelled out...in Vienna, the SAG...has attempted to shift focus of public debate and discussion away from the central issues of ending discrimination and providing full political participation, to the alleged US 'demand' for one-man, one-vote, which SAG depicts as 'simplistic' and 'unreasonable.'"<sup>29</sup> Through a study of South African officials' public statements, the South African press, and telegrams of both US and South African diplomats, Pretoria's strategy becomes clear: The SAG invoked "white politics" to heighten fear of "the swart gevaar," (the black peril), in order to rally white South Africans behind the Vorster administration and

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<sup>28</sup> Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign policy*, 211-213, 235; Anna-Mart van Wyk, "The USA and apartheid South Africa's Nuclear aspirations, 1949-1980," in *Cold War in Southern Africa*, ed. Sue Onslow, 68-69.

<sup>29</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00914, "SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept," 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

undercut calls for moderation; it attempted to devalue the white South African public's perception of US power by calling the legitimacy of Carter's policies into question; and it attempted to put the Carter administration on the defensive after Vienna by demanding that the United States retract Mondale's statement.

The South African government played on the racial fears of whites in South Africa by insisting that the demand for one-man, one-vote would incite black radicalism in South Africa. In an interview broadcast on the BBC on 1 June, Prime Minister Vorster exclaimed that no political party in South Africa—implying even the most liberal—was prepared to accept the principle of majority rule based on one-man, one-vote.<sup>30</sup> In a speech to the Cape Town Press Club on 4 June, Foreign Minister Botha argued that America's prescription for South Africa meant “destruction” and stated plainly that “we fear black domination, that is a fact and basis of our policy.”<sup>31</sup> Later in the month Botha explained to *Reuters*, “we simply cannot accept the principle of one-man one-vote for South Africa for the simple reason that if you vote on a global basis, you would be outvoted... We will not negotiate our suicide,” he exclaimed. He also warned that American pressures were encouraging “radical militants” in southern Africa.<sup>32</sup>

South African journalists picked up on the SAG's concerns about US policy. Ambassador Bowdler reported on 7 June that “opposition political parties and press, along with [the white] public in general, have largely accepted SAG interpretation of US position and have felt compelled, in speeches and editorials, to agree that US ‘demand’ is

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<sup>30</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00901, “BBC Interview with Vorster,” 3 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>31</sup> Botha in Bowdler, Cape T 00917, “Foreign Minister Botha's Speech to Cape Town Press Club,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>32</sup> Botha in Christopher, State 145179, “Foreign Minister Botha's Remarks,” 22 June 1977, Group 59, National Archives AAD.



unacceptable.”<sup>33</sup> Afrikaans newspapers such as *Die Burger* carried editorials that interpreted Carter’s approach to be an “aggressive” policy that “runs the risk of boiling down to more additional incitement of black against white” leading to widespread race war.<sup>34</sup> In a 30 May editorial in *Natal Mercury*, an English language newspaper, the paper’s owner insisted that “the *Natal Mercury* under my chairmanship and most of my directors will always vigorously oppose any attempts to impose one-man-one-vote in multiracial RSA.”<sup>35</sup> Bowdler reported that “even the Progressive Reform Party leader Colin Eglin, in recent speech at PRP rally, said one-man one-vote was unrealistic.”<sup>36</sup>

In the early days following the Vienna summit, the political efficacy of SAG strategy to unite white South Africans seemed to be working. Ambassador Bowdler provided Washington with an explanation:

In order to understand the present controversy over ‘one-man one vote,’ it is important to recall that liberal whites in South Africa are skittish about the issue. Many recognize the moral correctness of the concept but refrain from advocating it because they fear that application would result in the white man being overwhelmed and/or its political unacceptability with the electorate. The issue is therefore primarily a function of white politics. SAG is using it to divert attention from the basics posed at Vienna, to undercut opposition demands for change and to rally widest possible segment of white voters by threatening them with the bogey of black domination. Botha speech on June 4 was explicit example of this ‘swart gevaar’ (black peril) tactic and made discernible impression on audience that included large portion of white English-speaking journalists.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00914, “SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>34</sup> Editorial in Bowdler, Cape T 00864, “Afrikaans Newspaper Advocates Appeal to American People Against Carter Administration Policy,” 26 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>35</sup> Robins in Hughes, Pretor 02741, “Media Reaction: US/RSA Relations,” 3 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>36</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00914, “SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

More than playing on racial fears of whites, the South African government, in narratives quickly echoed in the press, bellowed that the Carter administration's attacks on South Africa were not only wrong but unjustified. On 22 May, speaking before the press in Geneva, Foreign Minister Botha speculated on the reasons behind US-South African policy. Primarily, he stated, Carter's approach toward South Africa was not based on any actual understanding of the South African situation but was, instead, created as a form of repayment to American blacks who elected him to office.<sup>38</sup> By calling into question Carter's reasons for developing policy, the South African government hoped to turn the public perception campaign against the core of Carter's policies. The tactic quickly caught on.

A 2 June editorial echoed Foreign Minister Botha's claims, arguing that Carter's policies were developed as a result of his guilt complex. Citing Carter's fall 1976 interview with *Playboy*, the article explained that "he was slow to rally to the cause of racial justice in the American South; and this failure filled him with a sense of guilt."<sup>39</sup> The editorial closed by suggesting some of the problems such guilt causes in policymaking. It explained that "the substance of the Carter policy for Africa, proceeding as it does from a vision of white racism born in the American South, seems both superficial and unnecessarily risky. It is grossly interventionist. It does not acknowledge the special history and political circumstances in South Africa."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Botha in Bowdler, Cape T 00836, "Vorster and Botha Statements on Vorster-Mondale Talks," 23 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>39</sup> "Andrew Young is Not the Problem," editorial in *The Washington Post*, 2 June 1977. The editorial quoted Carter in full at the beginning of the article. In answering a question about examples of things Carter did that were not absolutely right, Carter replied to his interviewer that "... There are a lot of those in my life. Not speaking out for the cessation of the war in Vietnam. The fact that I didn't crusade at a very early stage for civil rights in the South, for the one-man, one-vote ruling. It might be that now I should drop my campaign for President and start a crusade for black-majority rule in South Africa or Rhodesia."

<sup>40</sup> "Andrew Young is Not the Problem," editorial in *The Washington Post*, 2 June 1977.

*The Washington Post* editorial gained traction in South African papers. “In recent days,” Ambassador Bowdler reported from Cape Town, “the SAG has been making extensive use of the recent Washington editorial critical of our new southern African policy in an effort to show that the policy does not have public backing in the United States. Special emphasis is being placed on the contention that the policy is a product of President Carter’s guilt complex,” he said.<sup>41</sup> On 6 June *Die Burger* picked up the story. In an editorial entitled “President Carter’s Feelings of Guilt,” the author charged Carter with scapegoating South Africa as a way of purging his guilt. “The question could...be asked,” the author posed, “what right any person has to try to rid himself of his own, personal guilty feeling at the expense of others?”<sup>42</sup> In a radio editorial broadcast by SABC, Chief Commentator Alexander Steward warned that the “Carter men suffer from a guilt complex,” which “they should not suppose they can pass on to us.”<sup>43</sup> In its efforts to degrade the Carter approach as a mere atonement exercise, the South African government worked effectively to rally South African whites together against a new enemy—the Carter administration.

This was not an accidental strategy: it was a calculated approach based on South African intelligence assessments on the Carter administration. In a telegram to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, South African Ambassador Don Sole gave his interpretation of the Carter administration’s approach toward South Africa. “We should have no illusions about the thrust of Carter’s policy,” he warned. President Carter is “fully committed” to his policy of human rights, and “as southerner he is the inheritor of a specific guilt complex which makes

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<sup>41</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00914, “SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>42</sup> Editorialist in Bowdler, Cape T 00916, “Afrikaans Newspaper Criticizes President Carter,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>43</sup> Steward in Bowdler, Cape Town 00929, “SAG Distortion of Vienna Meeting,” 8 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

him particularly committed to the principle of opposing what he views to be racism in any possible form.”<sup>44</sup> In a study submitted to the South African embassy in London, the Foreign Affairs Research Institute concurred with Sole’s interpretation of Carter’s “uncompromising” position on human rights.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Sole contended, the Carter administration saw no vital American interests at stake in South Africa, which meant that Carter could remain committed to his antiapartheid policies without sacrifice. Despite “ostensibly friendly top level exchanges,” Sole predicted, Pretoria could be certain that “a conflict with the United States is unavoidable.”<sup>46</sup>

South African officials considered Carter’s South African policy to be vulnerable because it was based on “selective morality”—and this gave them their opening. In his speech before the Cape Town Press Club on 4 June, Foreign Minister Botha challenged the United States to name one African nation on which South Africa could base its future, arguing that the Carter administration was choosing to ignore the human rights abuses in African states that were headed by blacks.<sup>47</sup> Also, the Department of Foreign Affairs noted a contradiction between Washington’s recognition of black African nationalism and its “consistent refusal to recognize the existence of different nationalisms in South Africa,” which served as the basis of Pretoria’s homeland policy.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>45</sup> A H Stanton Candlin, paper, “An Assessment of the carter Administration,” in SA Embassy London to Secretary of Foreign Affairs Pretoria, 30 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>46</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>47</sup> Botha in Bowdler, Cape T 00917, “Foreign Minister Botha’s Speech to Cape Town Press Club,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>48</sup> SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, Telegram no. 163, 1 July 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

In addition to interpreting Carter's human rights approach to Africa as inconsistent, the Department of Foreign Affairs identified five main vulnerabilities to Carter's South African policy. Fundamentally, Pretoria felt the Carter administration had an insufficient understanding of African and South African problems, which led to inappropriate policies. Secondly, Pretoria thought that Carter downgraded the "danger of Russian Imperialism," which the SAG considered to be the major threat to southern African states in 1977. Thirdly, the Carter administration discounted the strategic importance of South Africa. Sole argued that, especially in light of the Marxist onslaught, the SAG could bolster its strategic importance as an anticommunist state in the region to argue that Carter should be working to improve relations with South Africa, not drive it away.<sup>49</sup> Fourthly, Pretoria understood that the Carter administration was using the threat of sanctions to scare South Africa into compliance; however, South Africa did not take the threat too seriously. A South African secret intelligence report put it thusly:

If [sanctions were] imposed with any success against South Africa (they have yet succeeded against anyone), they would do untold damage to a series of Black states within and across our borders. And in any case, British Foreign Secretary David Owen said earlier this month that Britain would not allow sanctions to be imposed because Britain's economy, for one, could not afford them.<sup>50</sup>

Lastly, Pretoria thought that the Carter administration underestimated the international support South Africa still had. "These are five of Carter's tacks" to "demoralize" white South Africans and "destroy confidence in the course they are committed to," the report summarized. They also, however, left Carter's policy toward South Africa open to criticism

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<sup>49</sup> D.B. Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, "The Question of South Africa's Vulnerability Against US Pressures," 4 August 1977, vol. 43 "USA Relations with South Africa," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>50</sup> South African Intelligence Report, "Ambassador Young and the African Crisis," 6 July 1977, vol. 43 "USA Relations with South Africa 1/7/77-16/8/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

and counter pressure. The report explained, “they are that common kind that crumple when they come against solid resistance. Reduced to specifics, the Carter case lacks altogether the force to break our determination or to deflect us from our objective.”<sup>51</sup>

Pretoria believed it could counter US pressures for change. Its basic policy would be to stand firm. In his June assessment of the Carter administration, Ambassador Sole made a strong recommendation to the Department of Foreign Affairs:

From our side it is imperative as I see it that we should adopt and maintain the toughest of lines vis-à-vis the Carter Administration with respect to the essential issues of political power in South Africa. This implies making it abundantly and repeatedly clear that we shall continue to exercise sole responsibility for good government, law and order, the maintenance of a stable economy and the defence [*sic*] of the country and its borders.<sup>52</sup>

In July, the Iranian ambassador to the United States sat down with Ambassador Sole and seconded Sole’s assessment of the Carter administration. According to Sole, the ambassador of Iran called Carter’s policies “superficial,” explaining that they were derived “from ignorance rather than ideology.” Sole reported that the ambassador “was most emphatic about how important it was that South Africa not bow to current pressure...[that] we should not conjure up an image of intransigence but should make it quite plain the issues which in our judgment are not negotiable.” According to Sole, the Iranian’s interpretation was “in line with what we hear from other respected sources, including Dr. Henry Kissinger.”<sup>53</sup>

The counterstrategy Sole and the Iranian ambassador were recommending was one of firmness and reform: Pretoria should stand firm in its commitment to absolute control of the white state and the homeland policy; but it should demonstrate some reform in areas deemed

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>53</sup> Sole SA Embassy Washington to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, “US.-S.A. Relations,” 27 July 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

non-essential to that primary objective. A tough negotiating posture on separate development, if combined with reform in the areas of economic opportunity and petty discrimination, for example, would project a credible image of progressive movement toward justice. The Carter administration might then be limited in its ability to hurl criticisms at South Africa. Additionally, Sole thought, it would not be in Pretoria's interest for a major confrontation between the United States and South Africa to develop on Namibia or Rhodesia because Pretoria would not be as able to rally white South African support on these issues. Thus, he advised, the South African government should work constructively with the Carter administration on the Namibian and Rhodesia negotiations.<sup>54</sup>

Sole's recommendations were specifically designed to counter Carter's policy. In early 1977, Carter expressed sincere interest in ensuring Pretoria received credit for all real changes made in South Africa. This was a part of his southern approach. In a handwritten marginal note on a May 1977 memo from the Vice President, Carter warned that Mondale's proposed dialogue for his Vienna meeting with Vorster was too aggressive. He wrote, "Fritz, reading this last part from the viewpoint of a Southern governor, I could not accept it. It's best to assume better intentions than Vorster probably has and also to give them a way not to acknowledge past mistakes. This is important."<sup>55</sup> In an earlier passage in the same briefing paper, Carter told Mondale to make sure Vorster got the opportunity to first explain the changes his government would be making in South Africa rather than make specific demands for change. He said, "Let Vorster tell you what they will do and how long it will take...He

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<sup>54</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 "USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>55</sup> Carter in VP to President, Memo, "Objectives During Visit to Europe for Talks with Vorster and European Leaders," 10 May 1977, Southern Africa 5/77-5/79 file, Box 14, JCL. Underlining in original.

must get credit for what he does.”<sup>56</sup> Taking this advice to his meetings in Vienna, Mondale reiterated Carter’s message several times. In his initial approach to the subject of apartheid in which he carefully explained US policy, Mondale bookended his rather long monologue with assurances that the administration would give South Africa credit for reform. “Progress on any one [problem in southern Africa] would be welcomed and we will acknowledge it,” he began. At the end of his long explanation of policy, he stated again, “we will be grateful and commendatory when progress comes...if progress is made, we will publicly commend it and our relations will improve.”<sup>57</sup>

As Sole saw it, if Pretoria could show that it was implementing progressive change and a confrontation with the United States arose nevertheless, “the Prime Minister would be in a position to rally the united support of the country behind him.”<sup>58</sup> The Carter administration, on the other hand, would appear unreasonable, demanding too much too quickly from a government dedicated to reform.

A policy of firmness and reform was not envisioned to sway public opinion just inside South Africa, however; Pretoria’s counterstrategy for US policy was designed to sway public opinion in the United States as well. In the mid-1970s, South Africa had friends in the United States. Corporations, banks, conservative think-tanks, white churches and associations, historical societies, and lobbyists and politicians actively supported the South African government through business and financial ties, lobbying, legislative efforts in both houses of the US Congress, and by simply writing letters of support to the South African

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Mondale, Memorandum of Conversation: Third Meeting Between Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster,” 20 May 1977, Overseas Assignments – Trip Files 1977-80, Papers of Walter F. Mondale, Box 13, JCL.

<sup>58</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.



government. Although the antiapartheid movement in the United States was on the ascendance by 1977,<sup>59</sup> many South African diplomats who were stationed in the United States during that year remember finding American friends. Deputy-consul general Les Labuschagne recalled that although it was not always easy for the New York mission, liaising with New York banks remained a major activity and was not especially problematic until 1979 when “the divestment campaign raised its head.”<sup>60</sup> Theo Vorster, staff of the consulate-general in New York, remembered receiving “mixed” reactions to consulate activities on the east coast, but that “most Americans were totally ignorant of South Africa and its people.”<sup>61</sup> He recalled that he also met some “interesting and friendly people” during his time in the United States, including a member of the John Birch Society who tried to get him to join the organization and a Wall Street stockbroker who told him to stop apologizing for apartheid.<sup>62</sup> In Ambassador Sole’s opinion, “there [was] no doubt that [South Africa had] a great deal of sympathy amongst the American people.”<sup>63</sup>

South Africa’s American allies became an essential component in Pretoria’s counterstrategy. The logic, according to Ambassador Sole, went as follows: it should be assumed that Carter’s commitment to human rights and majority rule in South Africa will remain a central pillar of policy “until it can be demonstrated that the commitment clashes with vital US interests”; therefore, Pretoria should make the case to the American public that South Africa’s strategic position and mineral wealth are vital to US interests, making sure to

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<sup>59</sup> For more on the antiapartheid movement in the United States, see especially Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*.

<sup>60</sup> Les Labuschagne in *From Vorster to Mandela: South African Diplomats Remember: Total Onslaught to Normalization*, vol. 3, compiled by Pieter Wolvaardt, Tom Wheeler and Werner Scholtz (Gauteng, South Africa: Crink, 2010), 199.

<sup>61</sup> Theo Vorster in *From Vorster to Mandela*, 200.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria No. 224, 9 August 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa, 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

avoid attacking the Carter administration too directly since that could produce a rally-around the president effect; finally, South Africa should explain to the American people that the Carter administration's strategy is "reckless," "interventionist," "polarizing the situation," and jeopardizing vital American economic and security interests during the Cold War.<sup>64</sup> To implement this strategy, the South African government would rely on all major media outlets, South African diplomats on the ground, and friends in US industry and banking.

Prime Minister Vorster and Foreign Minister Botha began implementing this strategy to dominate the public narrative about US-South African relations immediately after the meeting with Mondale. Speaking at a press conference in Geneva on 23 May, Vorster told his audience that the new US approach to South Africa would only increase sympathy for Pretoria, since South Africa was a bulwark against communist influence in southern Africa.<sup>65</sup> In a separate press conference in Geneva, Botha also attacked the United States for not fully supporting the anticommunist country and "said South Africa was prepared to appeal directly to the American people."<sup>66</sup> Throughout the summer, the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister continued to plead Pretoria's case while visiting the United States—as in Botha's case—and while at home in South Africa. Ambassador Sole noted in a 9 August telegram to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs:

[The] Prime Minister's speech on [the] occasion of [the] Foreign Affairs [Department's] 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Friday evening when viewed against the background of the Foreign Minister's activities during his visits to [the United States] in June is seen here as a confirmation that it is South African Government policy—(a) to dig in its heels against further attempts on the part

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<sup>64</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 "USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>65</sup> Bowdler, Cape Town 0836, "Vorster and Botha Statements on Vorster-Mondale Talks," 23 May 1977, Group 59, National Archives, AAD.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

of the US Government to prescribe how South Africa should run its own affairs;  
 (b) to appeal over the heads of the administration to the American people.<sup>67</sup>

In the United States, South African diplomats were trained to defend their country's politics and gain American supporters. Adriaan Woudstra had been posted to the consulate-general in San Francisco as vice consul in 1976. He recalled having gone through a year of "cadet training"—or "brainwashing" as he called it—before beginning work in the United States. "I quickly grasped what American audiences would believe and where I could go with my story, how far I could push the envelope," he reflected. "I became adept at packaging anything that was remotely palatable in National Party policies in such a way that many in the diverse audiences started believing that we at least had a case. The unpalatable truths I dismissed as things that were being changed," he continued.<sup>68</sup> Others had different strategies for speaking to the American public. Theo Vorster, staff for the consulate-general in New York, had a distinct strategy: "When I was invited to speak somewhere," he said, "I would first determine where the city's ghettos were. I could then point out to the audience that there were ghettos in their proximity, too, and mention the names. This helped explain the reality of cities like Soweto in South Africa."<sup>69</sup>

Because of his declassified cables home, Ambassador Sole's experience implementing South African strategy while stationed in the embassy in Washington is well documented. In a 25 July telegram, Sole recounted a successful trip to Chicago during which he met with "top level bankers, leading industrialists with interests in South Africa, and the media (Editorial boards of *Chicago Tribune* and of *Chicago Daily News* plus TV and

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<sup>67</sup> SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria No. 224, 9 August 1977, vol. 43 "USA Relations with South Africa, 1/7/77-16/8/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>68</sup> Adriaan Woudstra in *From Vorster to Mandela*, 200.

<sup>69</sup> Theo Vorster in *From Vorster to Mandela*, 200.

Radio),” and gave an address the mid-American Committee for International Business and Government Co-Operation Incorporated.<sup>70</sup> “I was impressed with the amount of goodwill shown to South Africa,” he wrote, before recommending the establishment of a consulate general in Chicago. Sole’s mission had been to take a pulse the Mid-American business and financial sectors in order to make policy recommendations to Pretoria. Overall, he found his audiences confident in continuing business in South Africa but worried about South Africa’s ability to withstand pressures for change in the political sphere and its “slowness in implementing change in the non-political sphere.”<sup>71</sup> Here again was the crux of Sole’s recommendation for South African policy: Americans who were sympathetic to Pretoria wanted it to stand firm against pressures for significant political change but were uncomfortable with some of the uglier aspects of apartheid, especially “symbols of apartheid...which have little or no practical impact or effect but which are highlighted in campaigns directed against investment in South Africa.”<sup>72</sup>

Whether it was a South African government official speaking before the press or a diplomat addressing friends on the ground, the South Africans carefully constructed their arguments to attune to American ears, often utilizing American voices to make their case for them, such as in *The Washington Post* editorial about Carter’s guilt complex. Two additional examples are useful in showing how the South African government used the rhetoric from American apartheid defenders as well as, paradoxically, antiapartheid activists to support the SAG’s public perception campaign. On 27 June Ambassador Sole sent a telegram to Pretoria that enclosed a copy of a speech given by former US Secretary of Treasury William Simon,

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<sup>70</sup> Sole SA Embassy Washington to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, 25 July 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa, 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA. Underlining in original.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Underlining in original.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

explaining that “this can perhaps be put to good use in contacts with the banking world because of the authority and expertise of the speaker.”<sup>73</sup> Simon had served as Treasury Secretary from 1974 to January 1977, under both the Nixon and Ford administrations. In his January 1977 address at the SAFTO/SENBANK Economic Seminar, Simon argued that “it just doesn’t make much sense, economically or diplomatically, to put South Africa into a deep-freeze, to exclude it from all forms of cooperation within the international community—casting it out, slamming the door, and pretending it doesn’t exist.” Simon claimed that, although South Africa was not a “critical factor on the world business scene,” the United States should actively strengthen financial and business ties with the anti-communist country since not doing so “could have significantly adverse effects upon the prosperity and even the stability of the non-communist world.” Simon noted South Africa’s credibility as a responsible international trading partner and reminded his audience of South Africa’s “considerable importance” as a mineral supplier to the West.<sup>74</sup> In Ambassador Sole’s opinion, Simon’s favorable attitude toward South Africa as a credible international trading partner with “considerable importance” could be effectively used in South Africa’s attempts to undercut Carter’s human rights strategy.<sup>75</sup>

A skilled rhetorical strategist, Sole recommended ways in which the South African government could use the American liberal left’s criticism of US-South African relations in its counterstrategy. A 1977 article entitled “Southern Africa’s Commodity Trade with the

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<sup>73</sup> D.B. Sole to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs Pretoria, “Relations with South Africa as seen by former Treasury Secretary, William Simon,” 27 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>74</sup> William Simon, Keynote Speech before SAFTO/SENBANK Economic Seminar, Rye, New York, 21 January 1977 in D.B. Sole to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs Pretoria, “Relations with South Africa as seen by former Treasury Secretary, William Simon,” 27 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA. Double underlining in original.

<sup>75</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

US: The Impact of Political Change,” by Professor Karen Mingst of the University of Kentucky in *Africa Today* became one target. Mingst used statistical data to draw attention to South Africa’s economic resources and trade with the West, particularly the United States. She concluded that the United States was “commodity import sensitive” to South Africa since it imported raw materials such as chromite and manganese. The article suggested that if the United States were unable to get these materials from southern Africa (especially South Africa), it would be forced to turn to communist countries such as the Soviet Union. Sole noted that this made stability in southern Africa particularly important to the West, since “economic disruption or political instability in Southern Africa would result in increased dependence on Russia, a situation which the study concludes is clearly unsatisfactory to the US defence establishment.”<sup>76</sup> Ambassador Sole suggested that the study could be put to effective use in arguing that the United States needed South Africa’s vital help in the fight against communism. He also noted why the article could carry considerable political weight, explaining to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs that:

The fact that this sober evaluation of what is seen as US dependence on continued political and economic stability in specifically South Africa, has been published in a journal under the control of perhaps the most active and radical organization against white government in South Africa, namely, the American Committee On Africa, would give more credence and greater credibility to the findings of the study. Perhaps this may serve as a stimulant to revive our interest in determining new possibilities and alternatives for a feasible strategy by South Africa to utilize the leverage at our disposal in withstanding foreign pressures specifically directed from the US as a measure of self-preservation.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Sole to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, “The Questions of South Africa’s Vulnerability Against US Pressures,” 4 August 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa, 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Without having visited the archive of Prime Minister Vorster's private papers held at the University of the Free State, I cannot conclude that Sole's suggestions were explicitly utilized by the South African government in policy formulation. There are reasons to think, however, that his suggestions did shape policy, and that articles and speeches like those he suggested were used to convince American and South African audiences of Pretoria's importance in the Western fight against communism.

Ambassador Donald Bell Sole was a well-respected career diplomat with a close relationship to those in the innermost circle of the National Party. He began his tenure in the Foreign Service in 1937 and was one of the facilitators of the 1944 meeting between then Prime Minister Jan Smuts and Danish nuclear scientist Niels Bohr—the inaugural meeting which began South Africa down the path of nuclear development.<sup>78</sup> He served as the South African Permanent Representative to the UN from 1955 to 1957, was the co-author of the Constitutive Act of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 1956, served as the South African governor on the IAEA from 1957 to 1971, and worked in an executive position in Hendrik Verwoerd's government between 1961 to 1969 before returning to the Foreign Service as ambassador to Bonn in 1969.<sup>79</sup> He replaced Pik Botha as ambassador to Washington, D.C. in May 1977, just in time to attend the Mondale-Vorster meetings in Vienna. Pretoria took his analysis of the American government, business world, and public seriously.

Secondly, the SAG's actions over the course of the Carter years mirrored Sole's suggestions. At the base of Sole's suggestions was his two-pronged approach: firmness coupled with modest reform. "It is imperative...that we should adopt and maintain the

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<sup>78</sup> Don Sole in *From Verwoerd to Mandela*, 263-264.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 267-268; 271.

toughest of lines vis-à-vis the Carter Administration with respect to the essential issues of political power in South Africa,” he wrote Pretoria. “As distinguished from these essential issues, [however,] dialogue should be encouraged and developed on lesser issues such as the progressive diminution of discrimination and the movement towards equality of economic opportunity for all, as reasonably and as speedily as the economic situation of South Africa allows.”<sup>80</sup> The abolition of institutionalized discrimination, the removal of symbols of apartheid from public spaces, and the elimination of job reservation were recommendations Sole submitted to Pretoria throughout the summer of 1977.<sup>81</sup> This was in line with Pretoria’s actions, as the central government began that year to move toward its “total strategy.”

More than a military strategy, “total strategy” was a way for South Africa to deal with its mounting problems, which included black unrest after the Soweto riots, a deep recession matched with more than 10 percent inflation, population growth (especially in the black population), net white immigration, labor shortages, labor unrest, increasing international hostility, and the fear of Cuban and Soviet forces engaging in more regional conflicts.<sup>82</sup> Like Sole’s recommended policy, “total strategy” was a double-sided policy conceived to maintain firmness on the core principles of apartheid while reforming some of the minor discriminatory practices that were easily subject to criticism. To bolster apartheid, Pretoria increased defense spending,<sup>83</sup> it implemented a regional policy of both neighborly diplomacy

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<sup>80</sup> D. B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>81</sup> DVDM S.A. Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, Telegram, 8 July 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa, 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA; Sole SA Embassy Washington to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, Telegram, 25 July 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa, 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA; SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, Telegram no. 224, 9 August 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa, 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>82</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 221-224; Davies and O’Meara, “Total Strategy,” 189.

<sup>83</sup> The military budget for 1977/78 was three-and-one-half the size of that of 1973/74. See Davies and O’Meara, “Total Strategy,” 188.



and “selective destabilization” tactics; and it built weapons for deterrence as well as prestige.<sup>84</sup> On the reform side, in May 1977 Vorster claimed that his government had improved Bantu education, promoted some black police officers to sergeants, and worked toward implementing equal wages for equal work in the civil service.<sup>85</sup> Pretoria also commissioned a series of inquiries into South Africa’s domestic problems. The Wiehahn Commission, for example, examined South Africa’s escalating labor unrest. Its recommendations were adopted in 1979, which resulted in the legalization of black labor unions and the abolition of job reservation.<sup>86</sup>

The Department of Foreign Affairs archive in Pretoria holds a one-way record of communication from the South African embassy in Washington D.C. to Pretoria. No replies or advice from Pretoria to Sole are available. What is clear from the telegrams and memoirs as well as South African government officials’ speeches and interviews is that Pretoria considered the Carter administration an adversary in the total onslaught it faced in the wake of Angola and Soweto. Even though the Carter administration had not put significant pressure on South Africa to change its domestic policies, Pretoria worried that it was coming and found it profitable to preemptively counter. Through its public perception campaign, the National Party promoted an image of an irrational, ill-informed White House pursuing a policy against American interests that would have devastating effects on a pro-capitalist

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<sup>84</sup> On selective destabilization and diplomacy, Davies and O’Meara, “Total Strategy,” 184-185, On nuclear weapon as a deterrent in the aftermath of Angola and Soweto see Wyk, “Apartheid’s Atomic Bomb,” 3-11, Don Sole, *From Verwoerd to Mandela*, 264-266; Barber and Barrett, *South Africa’s Foreign Policy*, 242, Onslow, “The Cold War in Southern Africa,” *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 4.

<sup>85</sup> Vorster, Memorandum of Conversation: Second Meeting Between Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa,” 19 May 1977, NLC-133-13-27-6-4, JCL; Vorster, Memorandum of Conversation: Third Meeting Between Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster,” 20 May 1977, Overseas Assignments—Trip Files 1977-80, Papers of Walter F. Mondale, Box 13, JCL.

<sup>86</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, 224-225.

government in an increasingly revolutionary region. In this way, Pretoria attempted to put the Carter administration on the defensive after the Vorster-Mondale talks.

### **The United States Reviews Policy**

In April 1977 US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and USUN Ambassador Andrew Young recommended that the Carter administration undertake periodic policy reviews of its South African policy in order to implement its carrot and stick approach according to Pretoria's progress (or lack thereof) on apartheid. On 19 July a policy review paper in preparation for a 22 July PRC meeting on South Africa recalled that the first major step in pursuing Washington's approach to South Africa was "to inform the SAG leaders in a clear and authoritative manner that our policy toward South Africa had changed, and to insure that other countries and parties in southern Africa were also aware of the change."<sup>87</sup> This had been accomplished with the May Mondale-Vorster talks in Vienna, to which Pretoria had reacted negatively. "The first reaction of the South African Government to the Vice President's message has been a categorical refusal to make changes as the result of American pressures...rather, the SAG has engaged in a campaign to depict our policy as designed to 'submerge' the white minority."<sup>88</sup> This was a reaction that the Carter administration hoped to prevent, but well before the Vienna summit had accepted might occur. A briefing paper prepared for Vice President Mondale warned that there was "a definite risk that Vorster could react negatively and lead his country into further isolation from the rest of the world."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> [State Department], "Southern Africa - Policy Review," in Christine Dodson, "Papers for the PRC Meeting on Southern Africa, July 22," 19 July 1977, CK3100062014, DDRS.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Briefing Paper, NLC-113-13-26-14-6, ARC, JCL.

Thus, when the South Africans began making a “political football” out of Mondale’s comment during the press conference in Vienna, it was disappointing, but not unexpected.

Immediately following the Vienna summit, the Carter administration initiated a new round of strategizing how to best react to South Africa’s public perception campaign. “The SAG’s present campaign to distort the Vienna message and portray it as a hastily devised, ill-considered expiation for past racial discrimination in the [United States] should not go unanswered,” Ambassador Bowdler reported to the White House.<sup>90</sup> Bowdler went on to suggest three things the administration should do in light of the SAG’s reaction to Vienna—all three of which were subsequently implemented.

The first suggestion was for the administration to review all decisions bearing on South Africa including export license agreements and visa approvals with a goal of ensuring they could not be “misread by the SAG as temporizing with the basic policy set forth at Vienna.”<sup>91</sup> As of March 1977, the Carter administration had begun a study of US-South African nuclear relations. This included a review of a contract between the US-owned Energy Research Development Administration (ERDA) and the South African Coal, Oil and Gas Corporation (SASOL), as well as a license for the export of nuclear fuel, which had been pending before the United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission since 1975 (it required a recommendation by the Executive Branch before the license could be issued).<sup>92</sup> Throughout the summer, the administration used the pending license agreement as leverage in talks with

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<sup>90</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00914, “SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Talcott Seelye to Vance: Briefing Memorandum “Your Meeting with R.F. Botha June 21, 5 PM” June 18, 1977 NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77” Box 69, JCL.

the South Africans, especially in its efforts to get South Africa, a member of the International Atomic Energy Administration since 1957, to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.<sup>93</sup>

The second recommendation Bowdler submitted to the administration was conveying privately to the South Africans the seriousness of its policy and not giving in privately or publicly to Pretoria's attempts to get a retraction on Mondale's one-man, one-vote statement. South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha was scheduled to meet with several members of the State Department and National Security Council on 21 June. Bowdler advised that "the visit of Foreign Minister Botha should be used to let him know in no uncertain terms that highest administration officials are aware of how Vienna is being distorted...and that we regard this as a disservice."<sup>94</sup> Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Talcott Seelye warned Secretary Vance that Botha would be seeking a clarification or "possibly a retraction" of Mondale's statement, but that he should, instead, "tell him we support one-man, one vote, but have not suggested that this basic democratic principle be implemented overnight nor have we indicated any preference for one type of political organization over another."<sup>95</sup> Henry Richardson, National Security Council aide in charge of African Policy, sent the Deputy National Security Advisor a similar message, recommending that he take "a tougher rather than friendly tone during dinner (even over the port)" since Botha could be "trying to outflank the 'radicals' in the State Department by talking to others (like the NSC) who 'understand the realities of politics and power' and therefore of separate

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<sup>93</sup> Vorster, "Extract from the Honourable The Prime Minister's Speech in Cape Town on 24 August 1977," [24 August 1977], vol. 44 "USA Relations with South Africa: 17/8/77-20/9/99, Subject 1/33/3, Box 81.

<sup>94</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00914, "SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept," 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>95</sup> Talcott Seelye to Vance: Briefing Memorandum "Your Meeting with R.F. Botha June 21, 5 PM" June 18, 1977 NSA Country Files, "South African 6/77" Box 69, JCL.

development.”<sup>96</sup> In his meeting with Secretary Vance, Botha made an “impassioned speech charging that the American endorsement of ‘one man one vote’ was a ‘knife in the back.’” Despite Botha’s pleadings, Secretary Vance offered no retraction in their private meeting.<sup>97</sup>

Nor was one offered in public. Bowdler’s third recommendation was for the administration to “find an early opportunity for a high administration official...to reiterate our policy as explained by VP Mondale to PM Vorster in Vienna.”<sup>98</sup> In a 22 June press briefing, the Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Hodding Carter III, refused to give in to South Africa’s desire for a public retraction of one man, one vote, even when pressed by the media. This had to be handled skillfully, however, since the Carter administration did not want to give the impression that it was demanding any immediate change. Hodding Carter put it this way:

It would be a mis-interpretation of our policy to suggest that we are demanding the immediate or day after tomorrow implementation of any kind of a plan... What I am saying, and I repeat, is that we believe that a peaceful and just solution to the situation of Southern Africa and South Africa, particularly, will best be achieved by a movement toward full democratic participation by all citizens in the affairs of their country.<sup>99</sup>

On 1 July 1977 Secretary of State Cyrus Vance delivered his first comprehensive statement on African policy before the annual meeting of NAACP in St. Louis. South African Ambassador Sole wrote to Pik Botha that Vance restated Mondale’s message from Vienna as well as what had been said in private conversations with administration officials. “On the

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<sup>96</sup> Henry J Richardson to David Aaron, Memo “Talkers for Your Dinner with Botha,” June 22, 1977 NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77” Box 69, JCL.

<sup>97</sup> Vance to President, Memo, “My Meeting with South African Foreign Minister Botha,” 24 June 1977, NCL-15-67-6-16-9 4100, ARC, JCL.

<sup>98</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00914, “SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept,” 7 June 1977, Record Group, National Archives AAD.

<sup>99</sup> Hodding Carter, Press Briefing, in D.B Sole to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, “Press Briefing by Mr. Hodding Carter, Assistant Secretary for public affairs and departmental spokesman – 22 June 1977,” 24 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

positive side,” he noted, “no reference is made to the one man – one vote concept in South Africa. It is our interpretation that the administration wants to defuse the situation created by the Mondale statement. On the other hand it has not been repudiated by anyone in position of authority.”<sup>100</sup>

It was indeed the administration’s goal in the months following the Vienna summit to defuse rather than aggravate the tension in US-South African relations. In his 22 June memo to David Aaron, Henry Richardson advised Aaron to “emphasize that we have been patient in not responding publicly during their public distortion of our position at Vienna,” hoping that such a reminder might cool the growing tension between Washington and Pretoria.<sup>101</sup> While not exactly conciliatory, Ambassador Sole noted on several occasions how restrained even Andrew Young was being before Congress and in private conversations with Sole over the summer. Andrew Young testified before the House International Relations Committee on US-South African policy on 7 June. In answer to Congressman and Chairman of the Committee Charles Diggs’s question about US policy in light of the SAG’s response to Vienna, Young calmly announced that he respected Prime Minister Vorster as a politician and credited him with having made many concessions on Rhodesia and Namibia. Ambassador Sole commented in his telegram to Cape Town that “Young maintained a relatively moderate tone throughout both hearings and appeared to be careful to avoid the type of extempore remarks that have caused controversy in the past.”<sup>102</sup> Sole later noted after several ongoing private conversations with Young about US-South African relations that

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<sup>100</sup> S.A. Embassy Washington to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, 1 July 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>101</sup> Henry J Richardson to David Aaron, Memo “Talkers for Your Dinner with Botha,” June 22, 1977 NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77” Box 69, JCL.

<sup>102</sup> Saleg Washington to Cape Town, 8 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

Young “showed a good deal of sympathy and understanding of the difficulties and complexities of the issues at stake,” later saying “we could work...effectively with persons like Young.”<sup>103</sup>

Sole’s comments on Andrew Young are especially interesting in light of South Africa’s anti-Young sympathies, not to mention Young’s occasionally sharp anti-South Africa rhetoric. Pretoria greatly resented the Carter administration’s comparisons of the American South through desegregation and the South African situation, and it especially loathed Andrew Young for advancing this line.

Pretoria had initially refused to allow Andrew Young to visit South Africa in May 1977 following his comment about the illegitimacy of the SAG in the previous month. It only conceded to allow Young to visit in an unofficial capacity because it did not want to, as the Afrikaans paper *Die Transvaler* put it, “cast doubt on the Vienna summit.”<sup>104</sup> Even then, the South African government demanded several “preconditions” to Young’s visit, including requiring that Young not arrive on “official aircraft” and not visit Soweto or Robert Sobukwe, the founder of the Pan Africanist Congress who was at the time under banning orders and whose children had been staying with Young’s family in the United States.<sup>105</sup> Young was also warned not to make contentious comments about the RSA while visiting. In a move to circumvent the latter requirement, in his speeches Young preempted all references to the American South with cheeky caveats. “I’ll tell a story that was very meaningful to us in our civil rights movement,” he would begin, “—which has absolutely no relevance to your

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<sup>103</sup> Sole, Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria No. 220, 5 August 1977, vol. 43 “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/7/77-16/8/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>104</sup> *Die Transvaler*, article in Hughes, Pretor02388, “RSA Media Reaction – [Your] RSA Visit and Mondale/Vorster Meeting,” 14 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>105</sup> Hughes, Pretor02388, “RSA Media Reaction – [Your] RSA Visit and Mondale/Vorster Meeting,” 14 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

situation.” After telling his story, he concluded (in remarks surely directed at the SAG), “Of course I’m not advising you to do that because that would be interfering with your internal affairs. I’m a sophisticated diplomat and I don’t do that.”<sup>106</sup>

Although most black South Africans had welcomed Young’s trip, white South Africans had initially greeted Young with “hostile acquiescence,” as the *New York Times* put it.<sup>107</sup> His charm, charisma, and skillful focus on economic rationales for building a strong black middle class—a skill he utilized during the American civil rights movement—enabled him to win some whites over, however. “Don’t get mad—get smart,” he had argued.<sup>108</sup> “His ability to relate to audiences and convey his sincerity, conviction and rational approach disarmed many and impressed most of those he met,” Ambassador Bowdler summarized of Young’s trip.<sup>109</sup> The director of Cape Chamber of Commerce noted that “[Young] earned for himself a great deal more respect than many may earlier have been prepared to grant him.”<sup>110</sup> In government circles, Young’s trip did not fully alter the South African government views of him. Minister of Interior and Information Connie Mulder claimed that Young had broken the terms of the agreement by speaking on controversial topics, and that the government would view this in a “serious light,” for example.<sup>111</sup> Despite the comment, Vorster and Botha did not make the usual huff about the American ambassador. Young’s trip was a step in the

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<sup>106</sup> Young in Kirby, Johann 01307, “Transcript of Amb Young’s statement and Q&A at USIS, May 22,” 24 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>107</sup> John F. Burns, “Visit Divides South Africans,” *New York Times*, 22 May 1977.

<sup>108</sup> Young in Kirby, Johann 01307, “Transcript of Amb Young’s statement and Q&A at USIS, May 22,” 24 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>109</sup> Bowdler, Pretor 02560, “Ambassador Young’s Trip to South Africa,” 24 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>110</sup> Director of Cape Chamber of Commerce quoted in Bowdler, Cape T 00902, “Ambassador Young’s Trip to South Africa,” 04 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>111</sup> Bowdler, Pretor 02560, “Ambassador Young’s Trip to South Africa,” 24 May 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.



right direction for his public image in white South Africa, even if the SAG was slow to view it that way.

In addition to Young's public statements about South Africa, South African intelligence services were also influencing Pretoria's perception of him. In light of its concerns about a greater communist conspiracy, Ambassador Young's appointment to a cabinet-level position in the Carter administration was especially worrisome. A March 1977 Intelligence Report recounted Young's pro-communist philosophy and associations during the civil rights movement, and warned that his almost unanimous confirmation before the Senate "bodes ill for [South Africa's] internal as well as external policies."<sup>112</sup> In another intelligence report circulated in July, Ambassador Young was identified as, if not an agent of the KGB and on Moscow's payroll, at least a proponent of "the Soviet objective of destroying the anti-communist governments of Rhodesia and South Africa."<sup>113</sup>

In addition to defusing the tension between Washington and Pretoria after Vienna, the Carter administration attempted to determine if South Africa had made any progress on its domestic problems and if it was time to apply any sticks if it had not. Henry Richardson performed a rough calculation of the situation in a memo to the NSC:

The first month after Vienna has seen: one positive though hedged step in Namibia, one negative step in pressing ahead with Bophutatswana as the next step in the separate development policy, one negative step in making one-man-one vote a political football, one negative step in banning Winnie Mandela, one middling step in the relative restraint (only ten blacks killed!) by the police on Soweto's anniversary, and one highly ambiguous step represented by their behavior vis-à-vis the Rhodesians during the Mapai [Mozambique] raid.

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<sup>112</sup> Intelligence Report: "Ambassador Andrew J. Young Jr.," 11 March 1977, vol. 40 "USA Relations With South Africa" 17/2/77-31/3/77, Subject 1/33/3, Box 79, DFA.

<sup>113</sup> Intelligence Report, "Ambassador Young and the African Crisis," 6 July 1977, vol. 43 "USA Relations with South Africa: 1/7/77-16/8/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

He followed his accounting with his conclusion. “Whatever this adds to,” he stated in the memo, “it is not fundamental change toward full political participation in South Africa. Nor, in my opinion, is it the beginning of such a process.”<sup>114</sup>

The briefing paper for the 22 July PRC meeting recapped Pretoria’s attempts to directly undercut the Carter administration’s approach toward South Africa, highlighting its public perception campaign and its underlying policy of firmness plus reform. The State Department first noted Pretoria’s efforts to “rally [South African] whites by playing on their fears of blacks” at home and to emphasize South Africa’s strategic value to the West in the Cold War. It also noted that South Africa was claiming to reduce discriminatory practices at home while appealing to the American people that the Carter administration’s reckless policies were disrupting South Africa’s efforts to change.<sup>115</sup>

While the Carter administration understood Pretoria’s attempts to counter US strategy, it was not ready to apply additional pressures on South Africa. On the one hand, the State Department explained in a briefing paper for the upcoming PRC meeting, Pretoria’s sharp, yet predictable, reaction to Vienna “[argues] for some steps in the near future to support our stated policy.” On the other hand, it continued, “in our response to Presidential Review Memorandum 4, we suggested that a six month period might be allowed before taking measures clearly to demonstrate the seriousness of our purpose regarding South African policies and actions.”<sup>116</sup> Thus, as Richardson explained in a cover memorandum circulated to Brzezinski, State’s paper was to be used as a discussion paper, not an options

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<sup>114</sup> Henry J Richardson to David Aaron, Memo “Talkers for Your Dinner with Botha,” June 22, 1977 NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77” Box 69, JCL.

<sup>115</sup> [State Department], “Southern Africa - Policy Review,” in Christine Dodson, “Papers for the PRC Meeting on Southern Africa, July 22,” 19 July 1977, CK3100062014, DDRS.

<sup>116</sup> [State Department], “Southern Africa - Policy Review,” in Christine Dodson, “Papers for the PRC Meeting on Southern Africa, July 22,” 19 July 1977, CK3100062014, DDRS.

paper. The primary focus of the Policy Review Committee would be to discuss the administration's "hit list" of twelve sticks of graduated severity, but not to "go down the list and check off each item as appropriate or not." Instead, he advised, "the focus should be on the basic decision: in general what order and why some, each, all of these options should be employed."<sup>117</sup>

At the PRC meeting, officials discussed the administration's next moves toward South Africa in a general manner and decided on a guide for implementing pressures against Pretoria rather than specific steps. It was decided that "now was the time to begin taking smaller steps," but that more studies were needed to recommend "desirable ways to accomplish specific reductions of military, diplomatic, and commercial personnel in the USG South African mission."<sup>118</sup> Another study was ordered to recommend a new directive on "gray area sales"—sales of equipment that potentially had dual civilian and military purposes—as well as one on spare parts, which was to be completed by 17 August. Finally, "it was generally agreed that another meeting would be needed on Southern African issues."<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Henry Richardson to Brzezinski, NSC Memorandum, "PRC Meeting on Southern Africa," 29 June 1977, #1A, folder "Meetings—PRC 20: 6/30/77," Subject File "Meetings—Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski: 10/80-1/81 through Meetings—PRC 55: 2/27/78," Box 24, JCL. The twelve sticks, in order of severity, included: (1) Closure of a missile tracking station, (2) reduction in the size of the Defense Attaché's office, (3) Discouraging cooperation in sports, (4) Discouraging future US investment in South Africa unless investors implement fair employment practices, (5) Elimination of commercial services, (6) Reduction of mission size, including the closure of a consulate, (7) Reduction or prohibition of Export-Import Bank Facilities, (8) Restriction of South African access to high-level technology, (9) Discouragement of future investment of South Africa in the context of the "Trading with the Enemy Act," (10) Action under a Chapter VI Non-mandatory finding against South Africa in the United Nations Security Council, (11) Action under a Chapter VII mandatory finding against South Africa in the United Nations Security Council, (12) Closure of certain holes in the American arms embargo against South Africa, especially in the area of spares and maintenance parts. [State Department], "Southern Africa - Policy Review," in Christine Dodson, "Papers for the PRC Meeting on Southern Africa, July 22," 19 July 1977, CK3100062014, DDRS.

<sup>118</sup> Policy Review Committee Meeting: Southern Africa, "Summary of Conclusions," 22 July 1977, #1B, folder "Meetings—PRC 26: 7/22/77," Subject File "Meetings—Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski: 10/80-1/81 through Meetings—PRC 55: 2/27/78," Box 24, JCL.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

How were the sparring nations faring by August 1977? The United States had made its first official opening move by sending Vice President Mondale to speak with Prime Minister Vorster about the state of affairs between Washington and Pretoria in May 1977. While Mondale made no specific demands on Pretoria moving away from apartheid, his comment supporting a one-man, one-vote solution for South Africa provided the SAG an opening for its counter strategy. The United States spent the summer attempting to remain firm in its policy toward Pretoria without escalating the tensions. By July, it was considering implementing small steps to demonstrate the sincerity of its policy, but it needed additional time to study the impact such steps would have on other American interests.

Although the Carter administration did not make specific demands on South Africa for rapid change, Pretoria felt pressed. It considered the Carter administration an enemy in the total onslaught. Whether or not the Vorster administration privately considered the Carter administration as to be dedicated to the rapid overturn of South African society, it found the accusation to be a useful tool in its efforts to laager the nation. It pursued a public perception campaign to strengthen anti-Carter rhetoric in the United States and successfully used the rhetoric of race and the Cold War to rally white support across the political divide inside South Africa. This would culminate in Vorster's November 1977 emergency election campaign, which widely became known in South Africa as the "anti-Carter" campaign.

By the beginning of August 1977, South Africa and the United States stood poised for confrontation—South Africa already pursuing the initial stages of its "total strategy" and the United States preparing to respond. On June 3 South African Ambassador Don Sole had predicted that "a confrontation with the United States is unavoidable," and that "if and when

it comes, [it] must be on a South African issue.”<sup>120</sup> In the waning days of summer, Sole’s prediction would come true.

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<sup>120</sup> D.B. Sole SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Cape Town, Telegram, 3 June 1977, vol. 42 “USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

## CHAPTER FOUR: PRESSURE MATTERS

*Winston Churchill explained it best: 'The reason for having diplomatic relations is not to confer a compliment, but to secure a convenience.' We maintain diplomatic relations with many governments of which we do not necessarily approve... Without relations we forfeit opportunities to transmit our values and communicate our policies. Isolation may well bring out the worst in the new government. For the same reasons, we eschew withdrawal of diplomatic relations except in rare instances—for example the outbreak of war or events which make it physically impossible to maintain a diplomatic presence in another capital.*<sup>1</sup>

–Warren Christopher, 11 June 1977

19 October 1977. Washington, D.C., USA. The South African government asked the United States if it was planning to break relations. South African ambassador to Washington Donald Sole first approached Deputy Secretary Warren Christopher to find out if the State Department's statement from earlier in the day implied that Washington was planning a fundamental change in US-South African relations.<sup>2</sup> In the briefing, Hodding Carter had announced that the United States was “deeply disturbed by the actions the South African government has taken to ban over a score of organizations and publications and to detain or ban persons associated with the promotion of the rights and welfare of South African blacks.” From the viewpoint of the Carter administration, the South African government's crackdown “represent[ed] a very serious step backwards” for South African society. In closing, Hodding Carter declared, “we shall examine very closely the implications of these events with regard to US-South African relations.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Christopher quoting Winston Churchill in Sole to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 386, 20 October 1977, vol. 45 “USA Relations with South Africa 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>2</sup> Sole to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 386, 20 October 1977, vol. 45 “USA Relations with South Africa 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>3</sup> Saleg Washington to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 383, 19 October 1977, vol. 45 “USA Relations with South Africa 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

In public, South African government officials appeared unconcerned about any decision by the Carter administration to reevaluate its policy in the fall of 1977. At a campaign rally outside of Johannesburg, Prime Minister Vorster exclaimed that any review of policy by the American government was “irrelevant” and that South Africa was not “governed from overseas.”<sup>4</sup> In private, however, Pretoria was worried. In Washington, Sole was on a mission to find out whether or not the United States was planning to break relations. He quickly received assurance from Christopher that “it was not his [Christopher’s] understanding that there [would] be a change in the relations.” He then sent word to Pretoria that he was “personally satisfied that there is no question of the US unilaterally breaking off relations.”<sup>5</sup> This does not appear to have eased Pretoria’s fears, however, because “Sole called [Christopher] back to report ‘without any instructions whatsoever’ that [Foreign Minister] Botha claimed to be under considerable pressure to break off relations with the US. He was reported to believe that the US was moving toward a break and to have said that if that were the case, it would be best for South Africa to take the step first.”<sup>6</sup> In response to South Africa’s quest to get firm assurances, the State Department explicitly told Sole that the administration was “not contemplating a break in relations.”<sup>7</sup>

But why not? Why did the Carter administration not break relations with South Africa following the crackdown? Why did it not seem to consider the option? The October crackdown—as it became known—had been the South African government’s most extensive show of repression against blacks since the banning of the ANC and PAC in 1960. In raids

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<sup>4</sup> Vorster quoted in John Burns, “Vorster Terms Warning by US on South African Ties ‘Irrelevant,’” 21 October 1977, *The New York Times*, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Sole to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 386, 20 October 1977, vol. 45 “USA Relations with South Africa 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>6</sup> Cyrus Vance to the President, Memorandum, 20 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-13-0, ARC, JCL.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

that began before dawn on 19 October 1977, the South African government arrested and detained 47 black leaders, banned eighteen black and interracial organizations, including the Black Peoples Convention, the South African Student Organization, and the Christian Institute, shut down two principle black newspapers—*The World* and the *Daily Dispatch*—banned the editors, and arrested or banned several white sympathizers.<sup>8</sup> It was a massive move to quell black unrest generated from the death of Steve Biko at the hands of the South African security police on 12 September and, before that, the Soweto uprising of June 1976. Thus, given the Carter administration’s policy which sought to advance “a progressive transformation of the South African society,” and given the SAG’s clear “step backwards” on 19 October, why did the Carter administration assure South African officials that there would be no change in its basic policy toward South Africa?

When scholars write about US-South African relations during the Carter period, this is *the* historical question that is asked. “Did he seriously mean to take action against South Africa,” two scholars framed the question, “or was it again just the same verbal rhetoric that previous US governments had made themselves guilty of?”<sup>9</sup> The question recognizes the fact that the Carter administration did take some action against South Africa in the fall of 1977: it recalled the diplomatic and commercial officers for consultations; withdrew one naval attaché; ended “grey area” sales for equipment, maintenance and spare parts; supported a UN Security Council resolution calling for a mandatory arms embargo; and maintained a *de facto*

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<sup>8</sup> The Situation Room for Brzezinski, “Evening Notes,” 19 October 1977, NLC-1-4-2-16-7, ARC, JCL. For more information on the October crackdown, see DeRoche, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, 89-90; Tim Jukes, *Opposition in South Africa: the Leadership of Z.K. Matthews, Nelson Mandela, and Stephen Biko* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 155; Donald Woods, *Biko* (New York: Paddington Press, 1978), 170; Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 424; Study Commission on US Policy toward Southern Africa, *Time Running Out: The Report of the Study Commission on US Policy toward Southern Africa* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1981), 358-362.

<sup>9</sup> Wyk and Grobber, “The Carter Administration,” 164.



unilateral embargo on nuclear cooperation. The problem scholars find with these actions is that they were largely symbolic. “These actions” wrote Alex Thomson, “had little additional practical effect” on South Africa and were only “minor irritants” to the SAG.<sup>10</sup> Even the mandatory arms embargo—by far the most serious sanction imposed against South Africa—did not significantly impact US arms deals with South Africa since Washington had been observing a voluntary arms embargo for fourteen years. Anna-Mart van Wyk, a historian who wrote her PhD dissertation on the 1977 mandatory arms embargo, noted that “only the description of the arms embargo changed, namely from voluntary in 1963 to mandatory in 1977.” Carter’s actions, she resolved, “were merely a case of antiapartheid rhetoric, disguised under a shadow of nothing more than very limited action.”<sup>11</sup>

It doesn’t add up, Wyk concluded. She asked, “if the Carter administration was so serious about human rights, why the reluctance to impose stronger measures?”<sup>12</sup> Alex Thomson gave his answer in his 2008 book (and again in a 2010 article). He argued that, in its attempt to balance human rights, strategic, and economic interests in South Africa, the Carter administration was “not prepared to sacrifice US economic interests” by imposing harsher sanctions.<sup>13</sup> In 2012, Simon Stevens, on the other hand, disagreed that economic interest was an overriding factor in the decision-making calculus, arguing instead that the limited response was the administration following through with its inherently cautious policy.<sup>14</sup> Based on the documents held at the Carter Library, the US National Archives digital

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<sup>10</sup> Thomson, *Conflict of Interests*, 106-107.

<sup>11</sup> Wyk and Grobber, “The Carter Administration,” 197.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Thomson, *Conflict of Interests*, 109; Alex Thomson, “The Diplomacy of Impasse: the Carter Administration and Apartheid South Africa,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 21 (2010): 107-124.

<sup>14</sup> Stevens, “From the Viewpoint,” 879.

database, and the South African Department of Foreign Affairs archive, Stevens's assessment appears the most accurate. Even it, however, is incomplete.

This chapter argues that two additional factors were involved in the administration's policy review calculus and led the White House to take a limited response: nuclear weapons and a lack of pressure to do more. While these two factors do appear in scholarship on US-South African relations during the Carter period, they have not been framed as essential to understanding why Carter's response was a measured one.

When the Soviet Union informed the Carter administration of a nuclear test site in the Kalahari Desert on 6 August 1977, it shook the administration's South African policy to its core. It added a fourth area of confrontation with the SAG and exposed a significant US intelligence failure. The nuclear issue prompted the White House to reevaluate the significance of implementing some of the pressures on its "hit list"—including decreasing diplomatic ties—in the critical weeks before the October crackdown.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, while scholars focus on the budding US anti-apartheid movement and the Congressional Black Caucus's actions when they argue that Carter failed to respond adequately to the crackdown, they neglect to paint the entire picture of American sentiment. This chapter will show that Americans were divided on US-South African relations and that the Caucus agreed to moderate American sanctions against South Africa in order to get a wide consensus on a congressional resolution on an increasingly-conservative Hill. Furthermore, while it is unclear how much South Africa's own campaign to paint Carter as responsible for the unrest in South Africa affected American public opinion, it is clear that South Africa continued to have important friends in the United States who agreed with SAG sentiment.

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<sup>15</sup> Richardson to Aaron, memo, "Sanctions within South Africa," 26 September 1977, NLC-24-105-5-2-2, ARC, JCL.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first shows that the administration reacted in a measured way to the October crackdown for the same reasons that it formulated a measured policy at the beginning of 1977. Through its response, the administration demonstrated a conscious attempt to maintain a flexible, carrot and stick approach in order to deal with a progressively-hostile South Africa that might at any time decide to “go it alone.” It also balanced the concerns of its Western allies, (which limited its response) and the Africa group at the United Nations (which strengthened it). Section two covers US-South African nuclear relations and adds more currency to the argument that, as Winston Churchill said, “the reason for having diplomatic relations is not to confer a compliment, but to secure a convenience.”<sup>16</sup> Section three attempts to tie together several moving parts that affected Carter’s decision-making, all of which fall under the rubric of a lack of pressure on the administration to do more. Together, these sections show that the Carter administration responded to the October crackdown within the framework of its established policy. Furthermore, contrary to those who deem Carter’s response to have been minimal or *merely* symbolic, this chapter argues that symbolism matters: the mandatory arms embargo against South Africa was the first of its kind, and with it Carter signaled to the world continued American condemnation of Pretoria’s actions. At the time, he could not do more.

### **Back to the Basics**

In April 1977, the Carter administration adopted a flexible, carrot and stick approach to apartheid South Africa. The goal of its policy was to promote a moderate, progressive transformation of the South African society. It was designed to be responsive to events inside

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<sup>16</sup> Warren Christopher quoting Winston Churchill in Sole to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 386, 20 October 1977, vol. 45 “USA Relations with South Africa 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

South Africa—positive and negative—while taking into consideration a myriad of external factors. Most importantly, it recognized South Africa as the “key” to peaceful solutions to the Rhodesian and Namibian situations, and although the administration decided to treat each issue “separately on its own merits,” it never unranked them in terms of urgency. The policy also factored in African expectations and Western allies’ willingness to aid the administration’s southern African initiatives. When in October 1977 the South African government cracked down on black resistance, the Carter administration responded in a manner consistent with its established policy because the same external factors that impacted the policy’s original formulation remained in effect in the fall of 1977.

The Rhodesian situation was one of those factors. In September, Andrew Young and David Owen presented the Anglo-American plan for Rhodesian independence, and no party directly rejected the proposals.<sup>17</sup> However, the frontline states expressed concern about Washington’s willingness to apply pressure on South Africa to force Smith to negotiate.<sup>18</sup> In the 20 September policy review meeting, the committee concluded that since Smith said he remained willing to talk, the administration did not presently need to apply further pressure on Salisbury or Pretoria, but that now was the time to decide on future pressures.<sup>19</sup> The first set of pressures were requiring destination control warnings on goods exported to South

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<sup>17</sup> Vance to Carter, memo, “Rhodesia: A Status Report and Recommendations for Action,” 12 September 1977, NLC-15-44-2-21-2, ARC, JCL.

<sup>18</sup> Kaunda sent a letter to Carter on 13 September 1977 expressing skepticism about US willingness to apply enough pressure on Smith. His sentiments were echoed by Nyerere and Obasanjo. This led to a meeting between Vance and Kaunda’s right-hand man, Mark Chona on 15 September to ease the Zambian’s mind that the United States was working on specific contingency plans and had already warned Pik Botha that any pressures the administration applied to Smith would “almost inevitably extend to South Africa.” See Vance to President, memo, 13 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-8-5, ARC, JCL; Vance to Carter, memo, 15 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-10-2, ARC, JCL.

<sup>19</sup> Policy Review Committee Meeting Summary of Conclusions, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 20 September 1977, NLC-18-6-7-2-7, ARC, JCL; David Aaron, Memorandum, “South Africa and Rhodesia” 26 September 1977, CK3100466238, DDRS.

Africa to prevent re-exportation to Rhodesia, a UN mandatory arms embargo on South Africa for sending arms to Rhodesia, and a continued review of ‘grey area’ sales of military-related equipment sent to South Africa.<sup>20</sup> Second and third tier pressures reserved for “extreme situations” included suspension of EX-IM credits and guarantees for South Africa; and full UN oil sanctions on South Africa to cut off the flow of oil to Rhodesia. Keeping these pressures on reserve for the Rhodesian case remained important throughout the fall.

The Namibian negotiations were in trouble. During the third round of talks with the Contact Group, Foreign Minister Botha reacted “sharply negative” to the proposals regarding South African troop withdrawal and the release of political prisoners, and on 10 October, SWAPO rejected South Africa’s counter proposals.<sup>21</sup> By 18 October the US delegation conceded that only fresh proposals could advance a new round of talks and that “pressure will have to be brought to bear on both SWAPO and South Africa” to maintain cooperation.<sup>22</sup> As in the Rhodesian case, the Carter administration began considering what sticks it could use against Pretoria for not cooperating in the Namibian negotiations, which would be kept distinct from the pressures it used against Pretoria for Rhodesia or apartheid.

In a late October memo, the State Department outlined how the Rhodesian and Namibian negotiations would affect the administration’s response to the South African government’s crackdown. “In deciding what actions we take,” the memo cautioned, “we must consider that South Africa obviously plays a crucial part in efforts to find negotiated settlements to the Rhodesian and Namibian problems.”<sup>23</sup> State worried that strong measures,

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Christopher to Carter, memo, 22 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-15-7, ARC, JCL; Vance to Carter, memo, 10 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-6-5, ARC, JCL.

<sup>22</sup> Vance to Carter, memo, 10 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-6-5, ARC, JCL; Vance to Carter, memo, 18 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-11-2, ARC, JCL.

<sup>23</sup> State Department briefing memo to Secretary Vance, “USG Response to South African Situation,” October 1977, NLC-24-115-2-4-2, ARC, JCL.

such as a UN Chapter VII finding against South Africa for apartheid, might “rob [the administration] of “leverage which [it] may need to use later in the Namibian or Rhodesian context.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, it worried that firm action could push South Africa into an “uncompromising stance” on all three issues.<sup>25</sup> Ambassador Bowdler warned, “we should be careful not to push a testy Vorster to the point of more illogical actions.”<sup>26</sup>

Another factor that limited that Carter administration’s willingness to impose harsh sanctions on South Africa was the resistance of its Western European allies, particularly the British. In 1977, British cooperation was vital to the Rhodesian negotiations; however, UK economic ties to the South African economy made the British ardently opposed to economic sanctions on South Africa.<sup>27</sup> In July, the Policy Review Committee determined that if mandatory sanctions were to be put to a vote at the United Nations, the British and French would veto the resolution.<sup>28</sup> After the October crackdown, the State Department noted that “British fears for their own economic ties with South Africa are real ones.” Any measures taken against South Africa that might jeopardize those ties could jeopardize US-UK relations as well as the Rhodesian negotiations. Any “proposed actions which the British would not be prepared to go along with,” the memo explained, “would place severe strain on the Callaghan government, on our relationship and on the solid front which we are seeking to maintain with regard to Rhodesia.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bowdler, Pretoria 5664, “Events of October 19: A Preliminary Assessment,” 22 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>27</sup> Turner, CIA Intelligence Report March 29, 4518; Warren Christopher, State 071044, 31 March 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>28</sup> [State Department], “Southern Africa - Policy Review,” in Christine Dodson, “Papers for the PRC Meeting on Southern Africa, July 22,” 19 July 1977, CK3100062014, DDRS.

<sup>29</sup> State Department briefing memo to Secretary Vance, “USG Response to South African Situation,” October 1977, NLC-24-115-2-4-2, ARC, JCL.

After its initial review of the regional situation, the Carter administration leaned toward a very limited response to the October crackdown, although it did determine that some measures were needed “to demonstrate that the Administration [was] prepared to act in a manner consistent with our stated policy.”<sup>30</sup> As its first move, on 21 October, the White House recalled Ambassador Bowdler for consultations. The administration strengthened the importance of this move by giving it “unusual publicity” so that, according to the *New York Times*, “the move would be interpreted as a slap at the Government of Prime Minister John Vorster.”<sup>31</sup> This was followed by a plan for dealing with a potential call for sanctions at the United Nations, where a debate on apartheid was set to begin on 24 October.

The administration had anticipated a strong push at the United Nations for a resolution that labeled *apartheid* as a threat to international peace and security under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which would lead to a vote on mandatory sanctions in the Security Council. Possible mandatory actions included an arms embargo, a nuclear embargo, and economic sanctions. Similar to its strategy for dealing with resolutions calling for identical sanctions in March, the initial strategy of the administration in October was to try to avoid a vote altogether. In addition to its concerns about its Western allies and regional issues, the administration did not want to support a Chapter VII finding against South Africa based on *apartheid* because its longstanding position had been that “apartheid *per se*” did not constitute a threat to international peace and security.<sup>32</sup> If such a resolution was pushed to a

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Bernard Gwertman, “US. recalls envoy from South Africa for Consultations,” *New York times*, 22 October 1977.

<sup>32</sup> NSC memo, “PRC Meeting on South Africa, October 24,” 24 October 1977, NLC-28-10-20-1-7, ARC, JCL; State Department briefing memo to Secretary Vance, “USG Response to South African Situation,” October 1977, NLC-24-115-2-4-2, ARC, JCL. One reason given for this policy was that it would open the door for similar action against other UN member states for their internal policies. This was particularly a concern for Israel, which was coming under increasing attack at the United Nations at the time.

vote, the administration was at most willing to consider an abstention, which would still signal a positive shift in America's voting record on South Africa. In order to circumvent a vote on apartheid, it decided to investigate the possibility of putting forth its own resolution that would label *international arms transfers* with South Africa to be a threat to peace. This was an action the White House had been considering as a potential measure to take against South Africa for the Rhodesian case back in September, but it was willing to invoke it as a response to the crackdown, if need be. Possible sanctions attached to this resolution would include a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa for a period lasting six months, which would include an end of sales for maintenance and spare parts for items banned under the embargo and an end of "grey area sales."<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the United States would advocate that UN member states undertake an extensive review of their economic relations with South Africa—a move that could be seen as a precursor to economic sanctions.<sup>34</sup>

As the United States prepared for the UN debate on South Africa, however, it became clear that the administration would have to strengthen its response. According to the State Department, even an abstention on a Chapter VII resolution "would hardly be sufficient...to maintain the credibility of our African policy."<sup>35</sup> After the first day of debate at the United Nations, according to Vance, Young reported that the United States would have to propose firmer sanctions "to deal with pressures from the Africa group."<sup>36</sup> In response to these pressures, the United States altered the language of its draft proposals to strengthen the

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<sup>33</sup> Grey area items included civilian materials that could be used by the military or police.

<sup>34</sup> NSC memo, "PRC Meeting on South Africa, October 24," 24 October 1977, NLC-28-10-20-1-7, ARC, JCL; Richardson to Brzezinski, memo, "PRC Summary of Conclusions: October 24, 1977, on South Africa," 2 November 1977, NLC-24-115-3-1-4, ARC, JCL.

<sup>35</sup> State Department briefing memo to Secretary Vance, "USG Response to South African Situation," October 1977, NLC-24-115-2-4-2, ARC, JCL; Vance, State 254803, "Security Council Action on South Africa," 25 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>36</sup> Vance, State 255231, "Security council Action on South Africa," 25 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives ADD.



economic review by placing it under a Chapter VI finding, or non-mandatory sanctions, and calling for member states to review all financial relationships with South Africa in addition to trade in goods and services. This modification, which still received some pushback from the British, was not enough. The Africa group remained “dead set” against the proposed time limit on the mandatory arms embargo and preferred that the adopted resolution identify *apartheid* as a threat to peace, not *arms transfers*.<sup>37</sup> On 29 October, Vance wrote to the president that the United States should be “willing to concede the time limit if that is what is necessary to gain agreement with the Africans.”<sup>38</sup>

Despite the Carter administration’s efforts to avoid a vote on a resolution labeling apartheid a threat to peace and mandatory sanctions on nuclear cooperation and economic ties, on 31 October the African representatives on the Security Council tabled four resolutions and forced a vote. The first resolution, which included verbal condemnations of South Africa, was unanimously accepted. The remaining three, however, were vetoed by the Western members of the Security Council.<sup>39</sup> Resolution S/12310 labeled apartheid to be a threat to international peace and security and was vetoed by the West.<sup>40</sup> Resolution S/12311 called for a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa as well as a ban on all nuclear cooperation, and Resolution S/12312 called for economic sanctions, including a ban on “any investments in, loans to, or any export and import credits to the South African racist régime

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<sup>37</sup> Cyrus Vance to Carter, 29 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-19-4, ARC, JCL.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Nelson, Pretoria 5963, “Black Reactions to the October Crackdown,” 4 November 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD; Cyrus Vance to Carter, 31 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-20-2, ARC, JCL.

<sup>40</sup> S/12310/Rev.1, 31 October 1977, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/12310/Rev.1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/12310/Rev.1) (accessed 19 April 2015).

or companies registered in South Africa.”<sup>41</sup> The United States, France and the United Kingdom vetoed both.

The Africa group had not expected the Western members, including the United States, to support these resolutions. The United States had made it known throughout the negotiating process that it would veto them, and Andrew Young gave a speech on 31 October before the vote to that effect.<sup>42</sup> The Carter administration even suspected that the African representatives on the Council (Mauritius, Libya and Benin) were not “consulting widely with other African delegations in New York,” meaning that their move to vote on the resolutions did not entirely reflect of the Africa group’s intentions.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the triple veto by the Western members of the Security Council did not discredit the Americans in the eyes of the Africa group and did not mean the end of the effort to impose mandatory sanctions on South Africa. The push for a vote in spite of the inevitable Western vetoes appears to have been a show of African frustrations with the West, as well as a maneuver designed to force a stronger draft resolution to come from the Western camp.

It worked. On 4 November 1977, the Security Council passed a unanimous resolution labeling arms transfers to South Africa a threat to international peace and security under Chapter VII of the UN Charter and imposed a mandatory arms embargo on South Africa. It was the first time that mandatory sanctions were applied on a United Nations member state. The six-month limitation on the embargo was dropped, and language was added to label “the policies and acts of the South African government” as being “fraught with danger to

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<sup>41</sup> S/12311/Rev.1, 31 October 1977, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/12311/Rev.1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/12311/Rev.1) (accessed 19 April 2015); S/12312/Rev.1, 31 October 1977, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/12312/Rev.1](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/12312/Rev.1) (accessed 19 April 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Young in SAUN New York to Secextern Pretoria no. 179, “Extemporaneous remarks by Ambassador Young before the vote on four draft resolutions: 31 October 1977,” 31 October 1977, vol. 45, “USA Relations with South Africa 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>43</sup> Cyrus Vance to Carter, memo, 1 November 1977, NLC-128-13-2-1-2, ARC, JCL.

international peace and security.”<sup>44</sup> Although it did not label apartheid a threat to peace, the language demonstrated a major shift in Western opinion of apartheid; and, while Washington had initially desired very limited sanctions against South Africa because it wanted to reserve some specific sticks—such as the mandatory arms embargo—for use in the Rhodesian and Namibian cases, the administration strengthened its position in the face of African resolve. The result was a significant shift in America’s voting pattern on South Africa was a net win for antiapartheid forces in the United Nations.

Could the Carter administration have gone further? Why did it veto the 31 October resolution that would impose a mandatory arms embargo and a ban on all nuclear cooperation, if it was willing to support the arms embargo four days later? Although the United States had enjoyed a nearly twenty-five year history of nuclear exchange with South Africa, the Carter administration had already been curbing that relationship by delaying sales of nuclear fuel and pressing Pretoria to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Why did the administration veto a resolution that it was already *de facto* employing against Pretoria? The answers to these questions were to be found in the sands of the Kalahari Desert.

### **Nuclear Matters**

On 6 August 1977 the Soviet Union informed the United States of a South African nuclear test site in the Kalahari Desert. The South Africans, the Soviets warned, were “completing work on the creation of a nuclear weapon and the carrying out of the first experimental nuclear test.”<sup>45</sup> The Carter administration immediately launched its own

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<sup>44</sup> UN S/Res/418, 4 November 1977, [www.un.org/en/sc/documents](http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents) (accessed 14 March 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Soviet demarche on South African nuclear program in Christopher, State 189626, 11 August 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

investigation into the alleged test site, collecting satellite images and intelligence.<sup>46</sup> To its dismay, the satellite images could only prove that the Kalahari site had underground facilities, but the initial investigation could not confirm that these facilities were designed for testing a nuclear bomb. This uncertainty pushed the administration to embark on a precarious mission of trying to figure out what the South Africans were up to in the Kalahari.

The Kalahari question created major problems for the Carter administration's policy toward South Africa throughout the fall of 1977, which affected its response to the SAG's October crackdown. The administration's initial attempt to get out in front of the situation by eliciting South African assurances of its nuclear intentions backfired when Pretoria stonewalled. This left the United States in the awkward position of appearing to black Africans as the "guarantor" of the SAG's nuclear program since the Carter administration declined to sever its nuclear ties with the SAG, arguing it did not want to lose its leverage to get Pretoria to sign the NPT. This trumped its antiapartheid policy. Rather than increasing pressure on Pretoria, the nuclear issue encouraged the administration to lessen pressure and increase ties.<sup>47</sup> Given the importance of persuading South Africa to sign the NPT, the maintenance of cooperative nuclear relations with Pretoria became a priority.

Washington's nuclear relationship with Pretoria dates back to 1953.<sup>48</sup> South Africa, having created a Uranium Research Committee in 1946 and the South Africa Atomic Energy Board in 1949, tempted the United States into nuclear cooperation by offering to sell uranium

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<sup>46</sup> Vance, State 195546, "Israeli-South African Nuclear Cooperation," August 16 1977, NLC-16-107-6-21-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>47</sup> Policy Review Committee Meeting: Southern Africa, "Summary of Conclusions," 22 July 1977, #1B, folder "Meetings—PRC 26: 7/22/77," subject file "Meetings—Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski: 10/80-1/81 through Meetings—PRC 55: 2/27/78," Box 24, JCL.

<sup>48</sup> Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation*, 28.

in exchange for Washington's support at the United Nations for its nuclear program.<sup>49</sup>

Although the United States did not eagerly pursue early nuclear cooperation with South Africa, Pretoria's loyalty as a Cold War partner during the Korean War encouraged the United States to agree to the deal. Throughout the early 1950s, however, US-South African nuclear ties were confined to economic exchange, since Pretoria remained in the preliminary stages of its atomic energy program.<sup>50</sup>

In July 1957, the United States entered into a formal ten-year agreement for the civil uses of atomic energy, which included cooperation in research and the exchange of scientists and students.<sup>51</sup> Cooperation increased from there. Despite the Kennedy administration's implementation of the voluntary arms embargo in 1963, the United States continued to cooperate with Pretoria on nuclear matters, and the Johnson administration renewed the ten-year deal in 1967.<sup>52</sup> Seven years later, the US-South African Nuclear Cooperation Agreement was extended until 2007.<sup>53</sup> It was only in 1976 that the Ford administration—in conjunction with its major shift in its southern African initiatives—undertook a policy review of US nuclear cooperation with South Africa. When in 1976 Pretoria formally requested that the US-South African Nuclear Cooperation Agreement be amended to allow Pretoria to purchase increased amounts of low enriched uranium (3 percent U-235) for the light-water reactor South Africa planned to build, the Ford administration delayed processing the application. Additionally, the administration held up issuing an export license for South Africa's 1975

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid; Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 239; Wyk, "The USA," Onslow, Sue, ed. *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Wky, "The USA," Onslow, Sue, ed. *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 56.

<sup>51</sup> Barber and Barrat, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 239; Wyk, "The USA," Onslow, Sue, ed. *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 56-57; Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb," 2.

<sup>52</sup> Wyk, "The USA," Onslow, Sue, ed. *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> Katzen to Mondale, memo, "Your meeting with Vorster," 18 April 1977, NLC-4-32-7-2-3, ARC, JCL.

purchase of a two-year supply of highly enriched uranium (HEU) to be used in its Safari I research reactor.<sup>54</sup>

On 19 January 1977—as the Ford administration was clearing out its last belongings from the White House—Ford submitted the necessary recommendation to the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for the export of the two-year supply of HEU. In mid-February, however, the NRC requested that the new administration submit its views on Ford’s final-day approval. The Carter administration chose to delay the export license further while it undertook an intensive review of its nuclear relationship with South Africa. In April, President Carter gave a major speech on the administration’s nuclear policy, in which he described how the United States would seek to constrict the spread of nuclear weapons, material, and technology, and continue to press nations with nuclear capabilities to join to the NPT. South Africa was one of those nations. In late April, and then again in May and June, the Carter administration pressed South Africa to adhere to the NPT. It also kept South Africa’s application for LEU and export license for HEU under review.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the spring and summer, US-SA nuclear relations remained strained, and as summer came to a close, matters appeared on the verge of an explosion.

The Soviet discovery of the South African nuclear test site on 6 August ignited a burst of diplomatic activity between Washington and Pretoria. The Carter administration issued a *démarche* to the SAG on 18 August, requesting that Pretoria provide the United State three firm assurances: (1) that South Africa was not preparing to test nuclear weapons;

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Katzen to Mondale, memo, “Your meeting with Vorster,” 18 April 1977, NLC-4-32-7-2-3, ARC, JCL; Department of State letter to SAG, 20 April 1977 in J.B. Shearar to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria and Cape Town, “Safari I Reactor: Spent Fuel,” 27 April 1977, vol. 41 “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/4/77-29/4/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 79, DFA; Talcott Seelye to Vance, memo, “Your Meeting with R.F. Botha June 21, 5 PM” 18 June 1977, NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77” Box 69, JCL.

(2) that South Africa did not have or intend to develop nuclear explosives for any purpose, peaceful or otherwise; and (3) that there would be “no nuclear explosive testing of any kind in South Africa.”<sup>56</sup> Although Pretoria gave Washington the requested assurances in a matter of days and Vorster reaffirmed them in a speech on 24 August, the issue was far from settled. Pretoria had stated that the site in the Kalahari was not a test site for nuclear weapons; however, the South Africans evaded any explanation of what the site *was*, leaving many in the White House questioning Pretoria’s intentions. On 19 August, the CIA submitted its initial findings to the NSA concluding that, according to NSC aide Henry Richardson, “the chances are negligible that the South African facility...is anything other than a nuclear test facility.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the initial interagency assessment determined that it was not a matter of if the South Africans would test a nuclear bomb, but when.<sup>58</sup> Moving forward, the NSA determined, the best evidence recommended that the administration work on the assumption that the Kalahari site contained an underground nuclear weapons testing area and that the South Africans were only weeks away from test readiness.<sup>59</sup>

The South African government insisted that its nuclear program was for peaceful purposes; however, in 1975 it had announced its ability to create highly enriched uranium using a “unique” process at its pilot enrichment facility. This alone was not cause for concern, but the SAG’s subsequent refusal to submit the process to safeguards outlined by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was. South Africa had argued that doing so

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<sup>56</sup> Christopher, State 199063/1 ToSec 090013 “Contingency Statement on South African Nuclear Program for Lagos Conference,” 20 August 1977, NLC-16-107-6-55-0, ARC, JCL.

<sup>57</sup> Richardson to Brzezinski, memo, “South African Nuclear Problem,” August 19 1977, NLC-17-48-3-1-14-3, ARC, JCL.

<sup>58</sup> William Parmenter, National Intelligence Officer for Africa to The National Foreign Intelligence Board, “Interagency Assessment: South Africa: Policy Considerations Regarding a Nuclear Test,” 18 August 1977, NLC-24-115-9-5-4, ARC, JCL.

<sup>59</sup> Richardson to Brzezinski, memo, “South African Nuclear Problem” August 19 1977 NLC-17-48-3-1-14-3, ARC, JCL.

would force Pretoria to disclose closely-guarded details about the process, which it claimed to be cheaper and more efficient than the standard procedure.<sup>60</sup> The secrecy that surrounded South Africa's nuclear research and development was further complicated by South Africa's continued refusal to sign the NPT. This information combined with Soviet and American intelligence led the Carter administration to believe—contrary to SAG claims that its nuclear intentions were peaceful—that the “South Africans [were] engaged in a nuclear explosives program, and [were] further along than [Washington] realized previously.”<sup>61</sup>

In hindsight, the evidence indicates that South Africa was not on the verge of testing a nuclear explosive device in the fall of 1977.<sup>62</sup> In fact, it was not until 1978 that the SAG made a formal decision to develop a limited nuclear weapon capability, although the government had approved the research for peaceful nuclear explosive capability (PNE) and the funding for an underground test site in the Kalahari as early as May 1974.<sup>63</sup> South Africa's 1978 decision was made as a part of its “total strategy” initiative to give Pretoria a credible nuclear deterrent, leverage in international negotiations, and increased power and prestige.<sup>64</sup> The nuclear strategy consisted of three phases: phase one was to “maintain uncertainty: neither confirm nor deny the existence of this capability;” phase two was to prepare for a potential Cuban invasion of South Africa (through Namibia) and included confidentially informing the Americans of SAG nuclear capability “to induce them to

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<sup>60</sup> Katzen to Mondale, memo, “Your meeting with Vorster,” 18 April 1977, NLC-4-32-7-2-3, ARC, JCL; Vance, State 278266, “Meeting with Fourie on South African Nuclear,” 19 November 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>61</sup> Vance, State 195546, “Israeli-South African Nuclear Cooperation,” August 16 1977, NLC-16-107-6-21-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>62</sup> South Africa's first nuclear bomb was completed in 1978, but was dismantled for parts later that year. In 1979, South Africa completed a smaller bomb intended for testing. South Africa would eventually build six and one-half nuclear bombs before dismantling its nuclear program in 1993. See Wyk, “Sunset over Atomic Apartheid: United States-South African Nuclear Relations, 1981-93,” *Cold War History* 10 no. 1 (2010), 53.

<sup>63</sup> Wyk, “Sunset over Atomic Apartheid,” 52; Don Sole, *From Verwoerd to Mandela*, 264-265.

<sup>64</sup> Wyk, “Sunset over Atomic Apartheid, 52; Onslow, “Introduction,” *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 4.



intervene;” and phase three was to carry out a underground test “if the tactic [in phase two proved] unsuccessful.”<sup>65</sup> Over the next fifteen years, before the South Africans scrapped the entire nuclear weapons program in 1993, they never moved past phase one. The South African government had actually abandoned the test site in the Kalahari—named Vastrap (meaning, stand firm)—following Soviet exposure of it in August 1977.<sup>66</sup> Soil samples taken from the site in the late 1980s confirmed that no test had ever taken place.<sup>67</sup> At the time of the incident, however, little was known about South Africa’s closely guarded nuclear program; thus the Carter administration had to assume the worst.

The Soviets may have timed their revelation of South Africa’s nuclear capability to coincide with the World Conference for Action Against Apartheid, which was scheduled to be held in Lagos, Nigeria, 22-26 August 1977. This was, at least, the thinking of the American government. “The time of [the] release is undoubtedly related to [the] forthcoming Lagos Conference,” Vance stated. The concern was that the Soviet Union was preparing to build up pressure at Lagos for UN Security Council action against South Africa.<sup>68</sup> “Such an outcome might be sought by the Soviets, who are unhappy that the West has seized the initiative through its southern African policy,” wrote Vance.<sup>69</sup>

The Carter administration immediately took action to avert any such calls for Security Council action at Lagos. Its first objective was to get the three firm assurances from the South African government: that the Kalahari site was not for testing of nuclear weapons; that South Africa had no plans to test for itself or any other nation; and that South Africa’s

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<sup>65</sup> Sole, *From Verwoerd to Mandela*, 266.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Van Wyk & Grobler, “The Carter Administration,” 183.

<sup>68</sup> Vance, State 195546, “Israeli-South African Nuclear Cooperation,” August 16 1977, NLC-16-107-6-21-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>69</sup> Vance to Carter, memo, 19 August 1977, NLC-128-12-11-15-8, ARC, JCL; Vance, State 197411, “South Africa Nuclear Program,” 19 August 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

nuclear program was for peaceful purposes only. Its second objective was to get Pretoria to immediately join the NPT. On 18 August Ambassador Bowdler delivered the US *démarche* to Pretoria and requested permission to send a US technical team to inspect the Kalahari location “no later than Sunday, August 21, before the start of the Lagos Conference.”<sup>70</sup> The administration believed that only firm assurances and South African agreement to join the NPT would prevent calls for Security Council action.<sup>71</sup>

South Africa’s reaction was to take umbrage and to deny everything. Not getting the assurances it wanted, the administration spent the next several days working on “contingency plans” for the Lagos Conference, including increased pressure on Pretoria. Two days before the Lagos Conference started, however, South Africa gave the United States the three assurances it requested, but did not immediately agree to an inspection, and merely suggested that it would “talk” about NPT adherence.<sup>72</sup> In the end, although there was some hellraising about South Africa’s nuclear capabilities on the second day in Lagos, the nuclear issue did not dominate the conference, much to the relief of the Americans. With South Africa’s assurances in hand along with statements by President Carter and Andrew Young on the matter, the “nuclear issue faded” and there was no strong pressure for Security Council action.<sup>73</sup> The Carter administration’s increasing credibility with black Africa and Young’s presence at the conference assuaged the situation.

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<sup>70</sup> State – NODIS-Cherokee 197389 in State Department, memo August 19 1977 CK31000648187, DDRS; also see Bowdler quoted in Vance, State 196791, “Possible South African Nuclear Weapons Program,” 18 August 1977, NLC-16-18-2-19-3, ARC, JCL.

<sup>71</sup> Vance, State 197411, “South Africa Nuclear Program,” 19 August 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD; Richardson to Brzezinski, memo “South African Nuclear Problem,” August 19 1977, NLC-17-48-3-14-3, ARC, JCL.

<sup>72</sup> Christopher, State 199063/1 ToSec 090013, “Contingency Statement on South African Nuclear Program for Lagos Conference,” 20 August 1977, NLC-16-107-6-55-0, ARC, JCL.

<sup>73</sup> Easum quoted in Christopher, State 208060, “Lagos Conference: Wrap Up,” 31 August 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

The nuclear issue did not disappear after the Anti-Apartheid Conference, however. In fact, it increasingly grew into a bigger problem for US-South African relations. When after the conference US delegates encouraged a revision of a paragraph on nuclear cooperation with South Africa in the Lagos Declaration so that peaceful cooperation with the SAG was not discouraged, “the real intensity of [African] views [on any nuclear cooperation became] apparent.”<sup>74</sup> This prompted the Carter administration “to seek concrete action by South Africa to buttress the assurances given by Prime Minister Vorster.”<sup>75</sup> On 15 September the Carter administration presented another *démarche* to South Africa urging the SAG to sign the NPT, agree to a prompt inspection of its Valindaba enrichment plant (the facility that used the “unique,” unsafeguarded enrichment process), and cease activity at the Kalahari site. This aide memoire went further than its August counterpart by making these three requests prerequisites to the United States supplying South Africa with fuel for its commercial nuclear power plants. “Willingness to supply such fuel,” the State Department noted, “may be an important lever in getting South African adherence to the NPT.”<sup>76</sup>

The South African response to the American demands was more sharp and unyielding than it had been in August. In Pretoria, Foreign Minister Botha decried US threats to South African fuel supply and declared that construction at the Kalahari site would continue.<sup>77</sup> In Washington, South African ambassador Sole attempted to turn the tables by emphasizing to the administration that “unless US fuel supply assurances were watertight, it would be very

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<sup>74</sup> Leonard, USUN 2950, “South African Nuclear Issue,” 10 September 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>75</sup> The American decision to seek “concrete action” by the SAG was taken to prevent a call by African states for the United States to sever all nuclear ties with South Africa. Vance, State 222890, “South African Adherence to the NPT,” 16 September 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>76</sup> Vance, State 222890, “South African Adherence to the NPT,” 16 September 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>77</sup> Vance to Carter, memo, 15 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-10-2, ARC, JCL.

difficult for his government to take the steps urged by the US.”<sup>78</sup> Throughout the rest of the month, the United States continued to use its fuel supply as leverage to get the SAG to cooperate on its nuclear demands, and the SAG continued to argue that the United States had an “obligation” to supply the fuel and that until it did so the SAG could not discuss safeguards or the NPT. The result was a very tense standstill.

Pretoria’s response to Carter’s September démarche foiled US attempts to diffuse the nuclear problem and put the Americans in a dangerous position. “We must face up to the fact,” Jessica Tuchman, a member of the National Security Council warned, “that we are now in the situation that was identified...as being ‘the most difficult and dangerous’ for us: South African delay, stonewalling, and continued operations at the test site.”<sup>79</sup>

Andrew Young explained the problem best. South Africa’s reaction, he said, was symptomatic of its increasing intransigence, undoubtedly heightened by the death of Steve Biko on 12 September. “My own guess,” he continued, “is that if they feel under sufficient pressure from the West...they will publicly withdraw their assurances and move rapidly to a nuclear test.”<sup>80</sup> Young further predicted that the Soviets would continue to make an issue of South Africa’s nuclear capability in the UN General Assembly and press for a resolution requiring Security Council action. If the United States resisted—as Moscow knew it would—it would appear to be a “guarantor” of South Africa’s nuclear program, even though the United States knew little more about South Africa’s nuclear intentions than did the Soviets. “Lagos was only the beginning,” Young warned.<sup>81</sup> He recommended pressing once more for

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<sup>78</sup> Vance, State 221817, “US Demarche to South Africa,” 15 September 1977, NLC-16-108-3-12-9, ARC, JCL.

<sup>79</sup>Tuchman to Brzezinski, memo, “South Africa and the Nuclear Intelligence Review,” 23 September 1977, NLC-15-48-2-4-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>80</sup> Young, USUN 3197, “South African Nuclear Issue,” 22 September 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

a high level meeting with the South Africans to encourage them to take action on their assurances, but he warned that, if the South Africans refused to engage, it may be time to publicly distance the administration from South Africa's nuclear program by severing remaining nuclear supply ties, even if such an action risked the loss of SAG assistance with Rhodesia and Namibia. "The risk," Young explained, "seems far preferable to what would appear to Africans as a blatant disregard both of their concerns regarding Western cooperation with South Africa in vital areas, and the broader dangers posed by South Africa's potential possession of the bomb."<sup>82</sup>

In addition to causing a dangerous situation at the United Nations, the nuclear question forced the Carter administration to reassess its approach to South Africa. Whereas in July the Policy Review Committee had concluded that "now was the time" to take "smaller steps" to press South Africa on apartheid, South Africa's preparations to test a nuclear bomb encouraged the United States to step back from applying pressure.<sup>83</sup> An interagency assessment conducted by the CIA's National Foreign Intelligence Board concluded that there was "no credible threat from the West"—including sanctions—"which would be sufficient to deter the South African government from carrying out a test." On the contrary, the report affirmed, "threats would...be more likely to harden South African determination."<sup>84</sup> Instead of increasing pressure on South Africa to alleviate apartheid, as the July policy review had recommended, the Carter administration held back on using its sticks in order to cajole South Africa into a more forthcoming position on its nuclear capabilities after August.

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Policy Review Committee Meeting: Southern Africa, "Summary of Conclusions," 22 July 1977, #1B, folder "Meetings—PRC 26: 7/22/77," subject file "Meetings—Muskie/Brown/Brzezinski: 10/80-1/81 through Meetings—PRC 55: 2/27/78," Box 24, JCL.

<sup>84</sup> William Parmenter, National Intelligence Officer for Africa to The National Foreign Intelligence Board, "Interagency Assessment: "South Africa: Policy Considerations Regarding a Nuclear Test," August 18 1977 NLC-24-115-9-5-4, ARC, JCL.

The nuclear matter also revealed a significant failure in US intelligence gathering capabilities in South Africa. “Why didn’t we know what was happening?” the NSC asked in late September.<sup>85</sup> The question weighed heavily on the administration, and it planned for another PRC meeting to discuss South Africa in mid-October. “What are we doing now to develop detailed coverage” of the South African situation? Tuchman asked in preparation of the meeting.<sup>86</sup> Henry Richardson provided one answer.

Richardson, a liberal black lawyer who in June of that year had argued that the administration should remain steadfast after the SAG made a “political football” out of the one-man, one-vote comment, began reevaluating the administration’s best interests in its approach to the SAG. On 26 September, Richardson wrote to Deputy NSA David Aaron reflecting on the administration’s July decision to consider reductions in military, diplomatic and other embassy personnel as a “small step” on the “hit list” of measures that it could impose against Pretoria. The administration had understood the inherent “trade-off between making the diplomatic splash vs. restricting USG intelligence and information capacities” and, in July, it had been prepared to take the loss. However, Richardson wrote, the nuclear problem changed the policy calculus. Instead of balancing three problems with South Africa (Rhodesia, Namibia and apartheid) as the administration had been doing in July, Washington was now dealing with “four polarized areas of confrontation.”<sup>87</sup> This meant that “the balance of judgment now [swung] in favor of maintaining intelligence and informational capacity.” He recommended that the administration “remove embassy personnel reductions from the hit

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<sup>85</sup> Tuchman to Brzezinski, memo, “South Africa and the Nuclear Intelligence Review,” 23 September 1977, NLC-15-48-2-4-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>86</sup> Tuchman to Brzezinski, memo, “South Africa and the Nuclear Intelligence Review,” 23 September 1977, NLC-15-48-2-4-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>87</sup> Richardson to Aaron, memo, “Sanctions within South Africa,” 26 September 1977, NLC-24-105-5-2-2, ARC, JCL.

list as potential actions” and that it even “consider expanding and strengthening [the US] South African embassy.” Should “the number of potential confrontations with South Africa be reduced to a more manageable one or two,” Richardson concluded, “reduction of embassy personnel [could] again [become] available as a symbolic act.”<sup>88</sup>

By the time of the October crackdown, US-South African relations were strained in all areas. The South Africans had finally responded Carter’s 15 September démarche on 13 October by reversing US demands: instead of South Africa agreeing to join the NPT and secure its pilot enrichment facility under international safeguards before the United States followed through with any commitments on fuel supply, the South African demanded that the fuel be delivered first. The United States, Vorster claimed, had an obligation to supply the contracted fuel and was testing South Africa’s willingness to work with the United States on other southern African initiatives. “We cannot escape the impression that the United States...while expecting our further active co-operation in the search for peace [in Rhodesia and Namibia], nevertheless continue[s] to take steps which we cannot interpret as otherwise than hostile and which endanger our continued cooperation,” Vorster threatened.<sup>89</sup> Although the Carter administration was not pleased with the “hard line” Pretoria took on the issue, it was relieved that Vorster was willing to continue talks. “Our preliminary reaction is that the SAG is seeking to keep open lines of communication with us...and is not foreclosing meeting our objective of NPT adherence and application of safeguards to the South African nuclear program” Vance inferred from Vorster’s letter.<sup>90</sup> This gave the administration some

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Vorster in Bowdler, “SAG Response to September 15 Nuclear Demarche,” 13 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>90</sup> Vance, State 247704, “South African Response to US Nuclear Demarche,” 15 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

hope, and when it came to making a decision on how severely to reduce ties with South Africa, which risked reducing its leverage, the administration was not ready to give up that hope.

At the United Nations after the October crackdown, the United States vetoed tougher sanctions on South Africa, including a ban on all nuclear cooperation. As long as the South Africans remained willing to discuss the NPT and safeguards, the United States would attempt to use its fuel supply as leverage in those talks. Andrew Young articulated the Americans' stance in an interview with ABC on 30 October. "By maintaining some kind of relationship," he explained, "we do have the possibility of influencing them to sign the nuclear proliferation treaty and accepting all of the safeguards that go with the international atomic energy agency." It would be dangerous to sever nuclear ties precisely because South Africa took such a highly ambiguous position on its nuclear program. "It's almost because you can't trust them that you have to stay close to them," he exclaimed. It was a "frustrating position."<sup>91</sup>

Without the revelation of the Kalahari test site, it is conceivable that Washington would have reduced nuclear cooperation—if not terminated all nuclear ties—following the crackdown. Washington's nuclear relationship with South Africa remained under intensive review throughout 1977. Additionally, had the administration not thought South Africa was on the verge of testing a nuclear bomb, it might have been more inclined to reduce its mission size. Reduction in diplomatic personnel had been on the "hit list" for several months—specifically as an apartheid-related pressure—and it was only after the intelligence

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<sup>91</sup> Young in Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 175, "Ambassador Young: ABC Issues and Answers: 30 October 1977," 30 October 1977, vol. 45, "USA Relations with South Africa: 13/10/77-31/10/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.



failure revealed by the Soviet *démarche* that the administration began reconsidering the cost of such reductions. At the very least, Ambassador Bowdler might have remained longer in Washington to harden America's sign of disapproval for Pretoria's actions.

What is certain is that Washington's uncertainty of South Africa's nuclear capability strengthened Pretoria's hand in US-South African relations. Pretoria's 'bomb in the basement' gave the SAG a bargaining chip to use in its attempts to get the United States to supply fuel for its nuclear reactors in Pelindaba and Valindaba.<sup>92</sup> At a minimum, it gave the SAG the ability to string along the United States in high level talks over nuclear matters: as long as Pretoria appeared willing to talk about joining the NPT, Washington would continue to pursue negotiations.

Finally, the nuclear issue gave Pretoria a showcase for its media campaign against the United States. One of its criticisms of Carter's policy was that it unfairly singled out the SAG for condemnation. Pretoria pointed out, in public and private, that the United States continued to supply India with fuel, even though it had tested a nuclear bomb that it had built in a dual-use facility; and in June 1977, Pretoria argued, the United States had supported Egypt as South Africa's replacement on the IAEA Board of Governors, even though Egypt had yet to join the NPT. "Why must South Africa again be singled out?" Vorster argued.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Wyk, "Apartheid's Atomic Bomb," 11.

<sup>93</sup> Embassy Washington D.C. to the Secretary of Foreign Affairs Pretoria and Cape Town "Nuclear Power Issues and Choices," 31 March 1977, vol. 40, "USA Relations with South Africa: 17/2/77-31/3/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 79, DFA; Vorster, "Extract from the Honourable The Prime Minister's Speech in Cape Town on 24 August 1977," 24 October 1977, vol. 44, "USA Relations with South Africa: 17/8/77-20/9/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

## **Winds of Change?**

In October 1977, the Carter administration faced not three but four areas of contention with South Africa, which challenged the administration to divvy out its supply of pressures against South Africa while making sure to retain some sticks for future action. In addition to the complexity of the regional situation and of South Africa's nuclear capability, however, there was one more reason that the Carter administration limited its response to the October crackdown. There was a lack of pressure on the administration to do more.

The 1970s was a decade of increasing antiapartheid activity in the United States. At the center of the movement stood the argument that American economic ties with South Africa directly supported apartheid. Pressure began building on American corporations with interests in South Africa to reassess the *status quo*. This led some American businesses with facilities or affiliates in South Africa to reform by adopting "enlightened" business practices. The Polaroid "experiment" and the Sullivan Principles represented this side of the debate.

On the other hand, a growing—but still small—body of college students, churches, African American organizations, and trade unions called for divestment, disinvestment and mandatory economic sanctions. Harvard, MIT, the American Committee on Africa, the Washington Office on Africa: these represented the schools and organizations driving the American antiapartheid movement, and theirs were the voices that carried the movement into the 1980s when Americans lobbied for comprehensive sanctions against South Africa.

Even though the American antiapartheid movement was gaining strength throughout the 1970s, it was not yet strong enough to sway mainstream American opinion about how the United States should respond to South Africa's internal situation. A cross-country poll conducted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in early 1979—more than a

year after the October crackdown and when the antiapartheid movement was beginning to pick up steam on college campuses—showed that while an overwhelming majority of Americans condemned the South African system of apartheid (86 percent), and a majority thought the United States should do something about it (53 percent), there was an almost equal split over the ways in which the United States should get involved.<sup>94</sup> One third of those polled did not respond to the questions dealing with South Africa at all. The poll concluded that American public opinion on South Africa mirrored American public opinion on US foreign policy in general: people agreed that the United States had some roll to play in foreign affairs, but were divided on its nature. “The picture which emerges,” the poll stated of US-South African relations, “is a deeply divided public with a significant portion still sitting on the fence.”<sup>95</sup>

In deciding what actions to take against South Africa following the October crackdown, the Carter administration believed that the majority of Americans were opposed to strong measures. The State Department, for example, advised that the administration try to take as multilateral an approach (i.e. at United Nations) as possible in order to “make the unilateral steps more acceptable domestically,” and it cautioned against a Chapter VII vote at the United Nations because “such a vote would be highly controversial domestically.”<sup>96</sup> Also, as the NSA noted, the American press was not urging the administration to take strong measures against South Africa; instead it was asking why focus on South Africa “when the USSR has been oppressing citizens for years, etc.”<sup>97</sup> According to a Harris poll on US-South

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<sup>94</sup> James E. Baker, J. Daniel O’Flaherty, and John de St. Jorre, *Full Report: Public Opinion on American Attitudes toward South Africa* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1979), 37.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>96</sup> State Department briefing memo to Vance, “USG Response to South African Situation,” October 1977, NLC-24-115-2-4-2, ARC, JCL.

<sup>97</sup> NSC memo, “PRC Meeting on South Africa, October 24, 24 October 1977, NLC-28-10-20-1-7, ARC, JCL.

African relations conducted in the fall of 1977, the administration's assessment of public opinion was correct. Only "63 percent of those polled said that apartheid in South Africa was not justified," and only 46 percent favored the United States and other western governments applying pressure to South Africa for apartheid. In fact, 26 percent answered that they were opposed to any pressure on South Africa at all.<sup>98</sup>

This survey, which Christopher sent in a memo to Carter, suggested a divide in American opinion on South Africa in 1977. It also falls in line with South African diplomats' remembrances that the antiapartheid movement, especially of the divestment campaign on college campuses, which one diplomat recalled did not become disconcerting until 1979.<sup>99</sup> It also aligns with literature on the American antiapartheid movement in general (and the British Anti-Apartheid Movement) which describes the 1970s as a decade of buildup and the 1980s as the decade of force.<sup>100</sup> The South African government's October crackdown and the Carter administration's measured response to it, both of which dovetailed with renewed black activism in South Africa, contributed to the growth of the international antiapartheid movement after 1977, but in the moment of decision making, the movement was not a factor.

The United States Congress played a part parallel to that of the American public in the administration's considerations. In the 1970s, vocal opposition to apartheid grew in

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<sup>98</sup> Christopher to Carter, memo, 9 December 1977, NLC-128-13-3-7-5, ARC, JCL.

<sup>99</sup> Les Lauschagne, staff at the consulate-general in New York since 1974, for example remembered that "it was only in 1979 that the divestment campaign raised its head." See Lauschagne in *From Verwoerd to Mandela*, 199.

<sup>100</sup> Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, 404-619; Francis N. Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions: African Americans Against Apartheid, 1946-1994* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 69-172; Donald Culverson, *Contesting Apartheid: US Activism, 1960-1987* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 77-135; Morgan, "The World is Watching," 547; Christabel Gurney, "The 1970s: The Anti-Apartheid Movement's Difficult Decade," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35 no. 2 (2009): 471-487; Janice Love, *The US Anti-Apartheid Movement: Local Activism in Global Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 15, 29-51; Bissell, *South Africa and the United States*, 120-133; Lyman, *Partner to History*, 27-43; David Hostetter: *Movement Matters: American Antiapartheid Activism and the Rise of Multicultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Congress, especially in the Congressional Black Caucus (which supported the founding of TransAfrica in 1977) and the House International Relations Committee (HIRC) Subcommittee on Africa. Immediately following the October crackdown, the Caucus requested a meeting with the White House and enclosed a list of twelve steps for the administration to take against South Africa.<sup>101</sup> Because the administration did not implement all twelve recommendations, some scholars have cited the Caucus's demands as evidence that Carter defied antiapartheid voices in Congress when reacting to the October crackdown.<sup>102</sup> This is misleading. In fact, the Carter administration wanted to stay in close touch with the Caucus and other members of Congress after the crackdown because it wanted support for its actions against Pretoria, many of which were also on the Caucus's list.<sup>103</sup>

On 26 October the HIRC Subcommittee on Africa approved a resolution "which expressed concern about the recent act of repression by the Government of South Africa and

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<sup>101</sup> Saleg Washington to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 392, 21 October 1977, vol. 45, "USA Relations with South Africa: 13/10/77-31/10/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA; Washington Office on Africa, press release, 21 October 1977, AAA.

<sup>102</sup> See, for example, Wyk, "The USA," in Onslow, Sue, ed. *Cold War in Southern Africa*, 72-73; Stevens, "From the Viewpoint," 867-868. The Carter administration did not, for example, support the Caucus's call to downgrade the US mission in South Africa (#2 on its list of proposed actions), deny tax credits to US businesses in South Africa (#4), eliminate Export-Import bank guarantees for loans to US companies trading and investing in South Africa (#5), UN resolutions for sanctions in the nuclear or economic fields (part of #9), or a moratorium on all US – South African exchange programs (#11). Some of these pressures it wanted to reserve for future use. For the Caucus's list, see Washington Office on Africa, "Excerpts from Congressional Black Caucus Statement in Response to Bannings and Arrests in South Africa," press release (Washington D.C.: Washington Office on Africa) 21 October 1977, AAA. For the Carter administration's reply to the Caucus, see "Memorandum on Congressional Black Caucus Twelve Points on South Africa in Richardson to Aaron, memo, "Response to Congressman Digg's Telegram of December 20 on South Africa; Your Letter of January 9," 9 January 1978, File CO 141 Confidential 1/20/77-1/20/81, White House Central Files, Subject Files, Box CO-53, JCL.

<sup>103</sup> State Department briefing memo to Secretary Vance, "USG Response to South African Situation," October 1977, NLC-24-115-2-4-2, ARC, JCL; NSC memorandum, "PRC Meeting on South Africa, October 24, 24 October 1977, NLC-28-10-20-1-7, ARC, JCL. Actions on the Caucus's list that the administration supported were the recall of US Ambassador to South Africa for consultation (#1), recall of an attaché (#3, the Caucus called for the elimination of US commercial, defense and agricultural attaches and the Carter administration recalled the naval attaché and recalled the commercial officer for consultations), ending the granting of export licenses for the export of nuclear materials to South Africa (#6, the administration maintained its *de facto* nuclear embargo as a lever to use against South Africa in the nuclear field), end grey area sales (#7), initiate Security Council action against South Africa (#8), and support congressional action (#10).

‘urged the President to take effective measures to register the deep concern of the American people about the continued violation of human rights in South Africa.’”<sup>104</sup> It was a moderate resolution that did not completely satisfy antiapartheid voices. Congressman Charles Diggs (D-MI), for example, preferred an explicit call for an international arms embargo,<sup>105</sup> an end to nuclear cooperation, and a unilateral ban on new investment in South Africa and export-import (EX-IM) loan guarantees.<sup>106</sup> The Subcommittee, however, unanimously approved the moderate resolution. South African Ambassador Sole reported that “a spirit of co-operation prevailed” during the hearings and vote, and Cyrus Vance reported that “a strong consensus emerged in favor of a resolution which could gain broad support in the Congress.”<sup>107</sup> With measured proposals spelled out, the Collins Resolution (named after Rep. Cardiss Collins D-IL, Treasurer of the Black Caucus who introduced it in Subcommittee) passed by an overwhelming majority of 347 to 47 on the House floor. Identical measures were also introduced in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 1 November.<sup>108</sup>

It was essential that the resolution be moderate because opposition to it was strong in both parties in Congress. According to the *Washington Post*, Representative Philip Crane (R-IL) reportedly “said the resolution showed ‘moral schizophrenia’ by focusing on human rights violations in one country and not others,”<sup>109</sup> and Representative Robert Bauman (R-

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<sup>104</sup> Vance to Carter, memo, 26 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-17-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>105</sup> Recall that the administration at this point was still against mandatory sanctions at the United Nations.

<sup>106</sup> Vance to Carter, memo, 26 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-17-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>107</sup> Sole to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, telegram, “Subcommittee on Africa Hearing on Steve Biko’s Death and Recent Actions by the South African Government,” 27 October 1977, vol. 45, “USA Relations with South Africa: 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA; Vance to Carter, memo, 26 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-17-6, ARC, JCL.

<sup>108</sup> Susanna McBee, “House Censures ‘Repressive’ South African Tactics,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1977; Vance in Saleg Washington to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 431, 2 November 1977, vol. 45A, “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/11/77-17/11/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>109</sup> Susanna McBee, “House Censures ‘Repressive’ South African Tactics,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1977.

MD) asserted that sanctions would hurt US-South African trade relations, which he argued would negatively impact blacks in South Africa.<sup>110</sup> While even a moderate resolution could not gain a ‘yea’ from all members of Congress, it offered the best chance of getting the most votes; and the wide consensus was necessary because it strengthened the Carter administration’s negotiating position at the United Nations. It gave the White House the needed mandate to support moderate resolutions in the Security Council.

The criticism that opponents to the resolution gave—that sanctions singled out South Africa—is telling: it was the same line that the South African government had been espousing about the Carter administration’s approach to South Africa since the summer. It also segues nicely into the final element one should consider when taking the pulse of American opinion on apartheid during the October crackdown. Just how effective was the South African government’s public perception campaign at shaping American opinion, popular and congressional, in the fall of 1977?

It is no coincidence that the American press, opponents of sanctions, and the South African government sang the same tune about the Carter administration’s reaction to the October crackdown: that it was unreasonable and unfair. Recall that the thrust of this argument originated in the SAG’s distortion of Mondale’s comment about one-man, one vote in Vienna at the end of May. From this point forward, the South African government’s narrative became one of a vindictive Carter administration demanding fast and fundamental change of a country that was a needed friend of the United States in the Cold War. This spin on Carter’s policy had quickly spread in American and South African media, with individuals like Ronald Reagan and former Treasury Secretary William Simon calling out the Carter

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

administration for its unfair treatment of South Africa.<sup>111</sup> Throughout the summer, the South African Embassy in Washington telegraphed Pretoria encouraging SAG officials to latch onto these and other examples of the Carter administration's "selective morality."<sup>112</sup> Pretoria's most tangible case came in August when Carter demanded Pretoria adhere to the NPT and place its "unique" enrichment process under international safeguards.<sup>113</sup> In his August speech, Vorster criticized the Carter administration for applying a double standard to South Africa.<sup>114</sup> By the end of October, Carter's unfair treatment of South Africa had become a mantra in the South African press, and frequently repeated in the American press.

The majority of Americans sympathetic to Pretoria were not overtly racist; they did not vocally support the most heinous parts of apartheid, although some did.<sup>115</sup> More often, those who supported Pretoria, even if they privately favored racial discrimination, did not defend apartheid directly. This is what made the case for defending South Africa on the grounds of unfair treatment by the Carter administration so appealing—it masked racist

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<sup>111</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Human Rights and the Soviet Challenge: Before Rebuking Friends, America Should Remember Brezhnev's Warning," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 June 1977; D.B. Sole to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, "Relations with South Africa as seen by former Treasury Secretary, William Simon," 27 June 1977, vol. 42, "USA Relations with South Africa: 2/5/77-30/6/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA. Reagan's article had been delivered as a speech before the Foreign Policy Association in New York earlier in June.

<sup>112</sup> S.A. Embassy Washington to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, 1 July 1977, vol. 43, "USA Relations with South Africa: 1/4/77-16/8/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA; South African Intelligence Report, "Ambassador Young and the African Crisis," 6 July 1977, vol. 43 "USA Relations with South Africa 1/7/77-16/8/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>113</sup> SA Embassy Washington to Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria No. 224, 9 August 1977, vol. 43, "USA Relations with South Africa: 1/4/77-16/8/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>114</sup> Vorster, "Extract from the Honourable The Prime Minister's Speech in Cape Town on 24 August 1977," 24 October 1977, vol. 44, "USA Relations with South Africa: 17/8/77-20/9/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>115</sup> While in the DFA archive I did come across a few letters written to the South African embassy that demonstrated that some individuals and organizations in the United States supported Pretoria explicitly because of its systemic racial hierarchy. A letter signed by "American Friends," for example, was sent to the South African general-consulate in the aftermath of the Soweto riots (stamped 28 June 1976). It stated, "Dear Sir, Regardless of Kissinger, most white Americans sympathize with the Union of South African government. Black riots are always red inspired and have nothing to do with segregation. Our advice is to deport blacks out of your country, back to the jungle, while you still have a choice and before your liberals institute race integration and complete ruination." American Friends, letter, vol. 43, "USA Relations with South Africa: 1/7/77-16/8/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.



rhetoric, called Carter's international human rights policies into question, and turned South Africa into the underdog. "If we deplore alleged violations of human rights in Chile, Argentina and Brazil," Ronald Reagan asked rhetorically, "can we ignore them in Panama?"

He continued:

Can we, on humanitarian grounds, carry on a constant drumbeat of criticism toward South Africa and Rhodesia—and, at the same time, talk of recognizing a regime in Cambodia[?]. . . On what grounds do we nudge closer to recognizing Castro's Cuba, which Amnesty International estimates holds 4,000 to 5,000 of its citizens as political prisoners? That same Amnesty International, by the way, counts only 217 political prisoners in South Africa. And yet. . . we insist on applying our own political standards to South Africa [but] do not insist on these standards for the rest of that continent, where. . . in 40-odd of the newly emerged African states they believe in one man, one vote—*once*.<sup>116</sup>

It was exactly the line of reasoning the South African government wanted repeated in American media circles.

This line of reasoning, however, was not immune to criticism, and throughout the fall many American friends of Pretoria increased their pleas for the SAG to strengthen its public perception campaign and show some signs of positive change in its domestic policies in order to make it easier for them to support South Africa. From American businesses to members of Congress, many sympathizers informed Pretoria that it would be difficult to advocate improvements to US-South African relations while the SAG continue its hardline policies. After the death of Steve Biko, for example, Ambassador Sole met top executives from Mobile and Caltex in New York on 17 September. "We should get our priorities right," Sole reported as one of his conclusions from the discussion. "The argument is advanced that it is imperative that the business world's case for holding the line. . . should not be undermined by what is seen as a failure of the South African government to appreciate and adequately

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<sup>116</sup> Ronald Reagan, "Human Rights and the Soviet Challenge: Before Rebuking Friends, America Should Remember Brezhnev's Warning," *Los Angeles Times*, 23 June 1977.

respond to the emotional content of the Biko case.”<sup>117</sup> Sole even recommended that the South African government provide the best medical care to Robert Sobukwe after he had a lung removed—even if the act went against the SAG’s typical practice—in order to prevent future problems. “If he should die in the near future,” Sole warned, “it requires little imagination to visualize the extent to which his death will be exploited as further evidence of the determination of the South African government to rid itself of the most effective and articulate leaders of black opinion.”<sup>118</sup>

Members of the United States Congress reported similar sentiments to Sole as well. In a meeting with Senator Dick Stone (D-FL) on 21 September, for example, Stone reportedly told Sole that “he and others in Congress like him who are sympathetic to South Africa” could not do much to influence the development of stronger US-South African relations “unless the South African government...takes action to project to the US people a positive image of its achievements and its intentions.”<sup>119</sup> South African diplomat John Meere telegraphed to Pretoria at the end of October that it was his impression that, “as we have found with most top Americans, they would like to have good relations with us [and] despite the fact that they are fully aware of our strategic, mineral and diplomatic importance, they cannot and will not do so while internal policies, which are unacceptable to them, are being pursued by us.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Sole for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, telegram no. 95, 19 September 1977, vol. 44, “USA Relations with South Africa: 17/8/77-20/9/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Sole for the Secretary, telegram 319, 21 September 1977, vol. 44A, “USA Relations with South Africa: 21/9/77-12/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>120</sup> Meere, “Notes on my meeting with Admiral Stansfield Turner, Directory of the CIA, Washington, Wednesday, October 26, 1977,” 2 November 1977, vol. 45, “USA Relations with South Africa: 13/10/77-31/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

What most concerned American supporters of Pretoria after the October crackdown was the SAG's censorship of the free press. Sole reported that "while the traditionally anti-South Africa groups as well as the Carter administration are concerned more with the detention and bannings of individuals, our friends are more concerned about the banning of the two newspapers...and the threat of further restrictions on the freedom of the press."<sup>121</sup> The South African Consul General in New York reported that "it would seem that the banning of activists per se has not caused as much concern among members of the New York business section as closure of 'The World' has done," since "activists should be prepared to take what is coming to them."<sup>122</sup> Meere wrote of the censorship, "this action had touched Americans I had talked to on a nerve."<sup>123</sup> This encouraged Sole to suggest that Pretoria lift the banning orders on *The World* as soon as possible.<sup>124</sup> In March 1978, the South African government lifted the ban on *The World's* editor, Percy Qoboza—who immediately started working for *The Post*—although it did not lift the ban on *The World* directly.<sup>125</sup>

The advice that Pretoria's American friends gave the South African government after the death of Steve Biko and the October crackdown was the same advice Ambassador Sole had been advancing since the summer: launch a public relations campaign to keep American support for Pretoria. "The main thrust of their argument to me," Sole reported of his

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<sup>121</sup> Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, telegram no. 389, 20 October 1977, vol. 45, "USA Relations with South Africa: 13/10/77-31/10/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>122</sup> General Consult, NY to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, "Reaction to shut-down of 'The World' and related matters," 21 October 1977, vol. 35, "USA Relations with SA: B 2/7/76-E 11/8/76," Subject 1/33/3, Box 80, DFA.

<sup>123</sup> Meere, "Notes on my meeting with Admiral Stansfield Turner, Directory of the CIA, Washington, Wednesday, October 26, 1977," vol. 45, "USA Relations with South Africa: 13/10/77-31/10/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>124</sup> Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, telegram no. 389, 20 October 1977, vol. 45, "USA Relations with South Africa: 13/10/77-31/10/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>125</sup> Caryle Murphy, "Qoboza Returns to Work with 'New Commitment,'" *The Washington Post*, 24 March 1978.

September meetings with New York business people, “was the need for a crash effort in public relations.”<sup>126</sup> Senator Stone told Sole to make more effective use of the American media to influence the Carter administration, “since what counts with Carter is how he is doing in the [Patrick] Caddell poll.”<sup>127</sup> Through his conversations with Americans, Sole concluded that Pretoria should spare no cost to put its case to the American public. “In time of economic recession such as the present when resources are more limited than ever,” Sole argued, “we must divert funds spent on information from other areas of the world and concentrate on the US. In this way we would better be able to afford network advertising (the 30 second ‘message’) which plays a key role in image building in this country.”<sup>128</sup>

Evidence suggests this PR campaign was underway in 1977. In addition to South African officials’ direct pleas to the American public and the work of the South African Foundation, the South African Department of Information hired American law firms and public relations firms to represent South Africa’s interests in the United States.<sup>129</sup> On 2 October 1977, the *Washington Post* Sunday edition ran a story about South Africa’s “image improvement” efforts. It asserted that the South African government had hired a Washington D.C. law firm “to enlist support and understanding of American politicians,” as well as paying a New York public relations firm \$365,000 to manage its image on the Eastern seaboard. It also noted that Bernard Beame, son of then-New York City Mayor Abraham

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<sup>126</sup> Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, telegram 310, 17 September 1977, vol. 44, “USA Relations with South Africa: 17/8/77-20/9/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>127</sup> Sole for the Secretary, telegram 319, 21 September 1977, vol. 44A, “USA Relations with South Africa: 21/9/77-12/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA. Patrick Caddell was Carter’s internal pollster.

<sup>128</sup> Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, telegram 310, 17 September 1977, vol. 44, “USA Relations with South Africa: 17/8/77-20/9/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>129</sup> Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, telegram 310, 17 September 1977, vol. 44, “USA Relations with South Africa: 17/8/77-20/9/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

Beame, was working on behalf of a private South African outfit to arrange trips for US legislators and business owners to South Africa. The *Post* explained:

While Congressmen may not receive campaign contributions from foreign governments or their representatives, lobbyists are not outlawed from having individual members from their firms make personal contributions to legislatures [*sic*] of their choice. Thus, the record shows that Donald de Kieffer of Collier, Shannon, Rill, and Edwards contributed to the campaigns of Reps. Robert Bauman of Maryland, John Dent of Pennsylvania, Richard Ichord of Missouri, Harold Runnels of New Mexico and others.<sup>130</sup>

And Pretoria did not rely solely on hired guns. It accelerated its own efforts to shape the narrative through its attacks on the Carter administration in the media, directly blaming Carter for the racial violence in South Africa. Almost daily since May, David Ottaway had reported in the *Washington Post* that South African government officials used the “slogan of one man, one vote” as “proof” that the Carter administration was “out to do the whites in.” In the days after the October crackdown, Ottaway explained, “this thesis has now been twisted to blame the United States for the present crisis.”<sup>131</sup> On 23 October, Pik Botha reportedly charged that while Carter’s policies may have been intended “to avert racial conflict,” they were in practice “producing a far greater degree of polarization, thus rendering infinitely more difficult the process of achieving evolution by peaceful change.”<sup>132</sup> In an interview with the *New York Times*, South African Justice Minister Jimmy Kruger said that “President Carter bears a lot of responsibility for this... particularly that this thin[g] (the Oct. 19 bannings and detentions) had to come now.”<sup>133</sup> Assessing these comments, the US deputy

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<sup>130</sup> Sole to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, “Public Relations in the United States,” 3 October 1977, vol. 44A, “USA Relations with South Africa: 21/9/77-12/10/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>131</sup> David Ottaway, “Confrontation with US Expected in South Africa Over Crackdown on Dissent,” 25 October 1977, *The Washington Post*.

<sup>132</sup> Botha in Nelson, Pretoria 5672, “SAG Blames US for Crisis,” 24 October, 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>133</sup> Kruger in Nelson, Pretoria 5672, “SAG Blames US for Crisis,” 24 October, 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

chief of mission in South Africa stated, “while [Pik] Botha has earlier cited the US as a greater enemy than the Soviet Union, and Prime Minister Vorster has again asserted...the US seeks to ‘strangle South Africa with finesse,’ Botha and Kruger have now put more directly and specifically than before the charge that the US is responsible for the country’s troubles.”<sup>134</sup>

The US press began recycling this narrative and questioning the Carter administration directly. In a telephone interview with the *Sunday Times*, Hodding Carter said that he did not wish to comment on Kruger’s charges directly, “but would observe that the events cited by South African leader as the reason for the Oct. 19 action and the aspirations of South Africans for a less oppressive society and movement toward full participation by all citizens in government long pre-date the Carter administration.”<sup>135</sup> At the beginning of November, a reporter asked Cyrus Vance: “Do you think that the United States contributed to this in any way by the May meeting with Mr. Vorster and President Mondale in which the United States presented a very hard line to South Africa?” Vance responded in the negative, saying “the seeds which have led to the incidents which have brought on the present crisis have been sown a long while ago.”<sup>136</sup> With its twist on the narrative, the South African government again managed to take the offensive, leaving the Carter administration to repeatedly defend its actions in May in Vienna—which had never been as forceful as the South Africans made them out to be.

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<sup>134</sup> Nelson, Pretoria 5672, “SAG Blames US for Crisis,” 24 October, 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Vance in Saleg Washington to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 431, 2 November 1977, vol. 45A, “USA Relations with South Africa: 1/11/77-17/11/77,” Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

While Pretoria's story led the public conversation about the Carter administration and the October crackdown in America, more importantly for the SAG it served as a powerful tool to help Vorster start circling the wagons. After the death of Steve Biko, Vorster called for a general election to mobilize the white population—liberals, moderates and conservatives, English and Afrikaans speaking—in support of his leadership.<sup>137</sup> On 19 October, the CIA commented that it was no coincidence that the South African government initiated the crackdown on the day before its election campaign was set to begin. Pretoria, it reported, was “undoubtedly...displaying an attitude of roughness to its white constituency and hoping it can achieve the same results now by using the repressive measures it did in 1960.”<sup>138</sup> According to Ambassador Bowdler, the October crackdown was “not an isolated reaction but part of a careful strategy” of the Vorster government to deal with increasing domestic and international pressure. The strategy itself was one of firmness first followed by some reform: Pretoria wanted to demonstrate to the world its resilience in the face of mounting pressure, and, at the same time, in going into the election Vorster was planning to strengthen his mandate to enact reforms in South Africa, including a new constitution which would provide some power sharing to Indians and Coloureds.<sup>139</sup> The proposed reforms did not include fundamental changes to apartheid and would not entertain giving blacks any political rights. In fact, the implementation of separate development was accelerated.<sup>140</sup>

The South African government's efforts to paint the Carter administration as the culprit behind the country's disturbances not only shaped American public opinion, it was

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<sup>137</sup> Bowdler, Pretoria 4939, 21 September 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>138</sup> The Situation Room for Brzezinski, “Evening Notes,” 19 October 1977, NLC-1-4-2-16-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>139</sup> Bowdler, Pretoria 5664, “Events of October 19: A Preliminary Assessment,” 22 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

also a campaign strategy. In blaming Carter's policies for the domestic problems of South Africa, according to US Deputy Chief of Mission Nelson, Vorster's team hoped to accomplish three campaign goals: (1) increase the National Party's popular vote through "a patriotic appeal to English speakers for national unity in a time of crisis;" (2) hold down the opposition by accusing those in the Progressive Federal Party (PFP) of "national betrayal" because they called Carter's policies moderate; and (3) "[finish] off the extreme rightwing [Hertigte Nationale Party] by demonstrating a strong policy in dealing with black agitation and foreign '[meddling].'"<sup>141</sup>

The anti-Carter rhetoric quickly caught on as a major campaign issue. On 29 October, leader of the PFP, Colin Eglin, attempted to counter National Party claims by agreeing that Carter's policies were making it more difficult to find peaceful solutions in South Africa.<sup>142</sup> Other major opposition parties also railed against outside pressures in an effort to jump on the bandwagon of nationalism.<sup>143</sup> It became an anti-Carter campaign. At the end of November, the National Party won an "avalanche" victory, with an increase in parliamentary seats for his party from 131 to 135 of 165.<sup>144</sup> With around 65% percent of the popular vote, Vorster received the mandate to move forward with his domestic strategy of firmness and reform.

For the United States, the South African government's campaign strategy—like its earlier threats to 'go it alone'—encouraged the administration to temper its response to the October crackdown. In his preliminary assessment of the SAG's 19 October actions,

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<sup>141</sup> Nelson, Pretoria 5962, "Election Campaign Heats Up," 4 November 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>142</sup> Nelson, Pretoria 5856, "Opposition Leaders Criticize US Policy," 31 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Bowdler, Pretoria 6535, "National Party Wins Landslide in South Africa," 1 December 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.



Ambassador Bowdler made it clear that Pretoria's attacks on Carter were a deliberate attempt to rally white South African public support for the National Party. Because of this, Bowdler advised that the Carter administration carefully balance taking a strong rhetorical stance against South Africa while avoiding "restrictive measures." On October 22, he explained that "with general elections less than a month-and-a-half away, we should avoid giving Vorster ammunition to support his charge that we are strangling South Africa and thereby run the risk of adding to his majority."<sup>145</sup> In public, the Carter administration made an effort to downplay South Africa's charges by explaining its measured policy toward South Africa and repeating that it was misinterpreted by South African officials in Vienna.<sup>146</sup>

Pretoria thought that its strategy would succeed because it felt the winds of change to be slowing and shifting in a more favorable direction. Minister of the Interior and Information Connie Mulder "summed up nationalist thinking when he said that with current world trends moving in a conservative direction what South Africa needed was three or four years of relative tranquility in which to put into effect the new constitutional plan and independence for the homelands."<sup>147</sup> Without acknowledging it—perhaps without even realizing it—the Carter administration reacted to the October crackdown feeling the same

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<sup>145</sup> Bowdler, Pretoria 5664, "Events of October 19: A Preliminary Assessment," 22 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>146</sup> One of the PRC's conclusions on 24 October was "that public statements issued by the United States about the current situation vis-à-vis South Africa should be put in the context of Vice President Mondale's previous statements in Vienna, should not imply the beginning of a series of pressures to turn around South Africa, should express hope for improvement, and should not involve the US Government in a public negotiating round on specific South Africa measures." Several US officials adopted this policy in making public statements after the PRC meeting, including Vance and Young. See Richardson to Brzezinski, memo, "PRC Summary of Conclusions: October 24, 1977, on South Africa," 2 November 1977, NLC-24-115-3-1-4, ARC, JCL; Vance in Saleg Washington to Secextern Pretoria, telegram no. 431, 2 November 1977, vol. 45A, "USA Relations with South Africa: 1/11/77-17/11/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA; Young, United States Information Service, "Ambassador Young's Statement in U.N. Security Council," 3 November 1977, vol. 45A, "USA Relations with South Africa: 1/11/77-17/11/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA.

<sup>147</sup> Bowdler, Pretoria 5664, "Events of October 19: A Preliminary Assessment," 22 October 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

winds as did Dr. Mulder. As the results of the Harris Survey and the activities of Pretoria's friends in the United States suggested, the winds of change had died down by the fall of 1977. Thus, even though South Africa took an obvious step backward with its curbing of domestic dissent, there was essentially a lack of pressure—a lack of wind—compelling the Carter administration to respond more forcefully.

### **Pressure Matters**

What could Carter have done in response to the October crackdown? If we imagine the range of responses available as sitting on a horizontal plane, on the far right we might picture Carter congratulating the South African government and extending friendlier relations. On the far left, we might imagine that him launching a nuclear strike on Pretoria. Falling in between we could imagine him implementing a series of increasing pressures (from right to left): a verbal condemnation without sanctions; reductions in embassy personnel; non-mandatory sanctions; mandatory sanctions affecting arms, oil, or nuclear cooperation; economic sanctions; a military intervention. “Soft” pressures hovering above the plane might include supporting the Sullivan principles, curbing government economic ties, a *de facto* unilateral embargo on nuclear trade, increasing educational and cultural exchange programs and increasing communications with black leaders in South Africa, and carrots promising better relations if there was movement towards a progressive transformation of the South African society. If we imagine Carter standing on the plane of pressures, he would be standing somewhere in the middle. Picturing him to the left or right of center is a matter of perspective; by any measure, however, he is not far off center.

Carter's response to the October crackdown represented a continuation of his flexible, carrot and stick policy toward South Africa. It was a measured response that balanced regional issues, the concerns of Washington's Western allies and of the African group at the United Nations, and the administration's belief in the ineffectiveness of voting for economic sanctions. The ambiguity of South Africa's nuclear program after August encouraged the administration to tread even more lightly. The African group did push the United States into strengthening its response at the United Nations by supporting a Chapter VII finding against South Africa along with a permanent arms embargo; however, the Carter administration preserved some of its "sticks" for future use by not supporting all of the Congressional Black Caucus's actions. It was able to do so because of the divide that existed in American public opinion on apartheid South Africa at the time. Because it was going into 1978 facing four areas of confrontation with Pretoria, keeping arrows in the quiver was important.

While measured, the pressures the Carter administration implemented were more than rhetorical. Even though NSC aide Richardson warned against reducing diplomatic ties with South Africa due to the intelligence failure revealed by the Kalahari issue, after the October crackdown the administration did withdraw its naval attaché and recall Ambassador Bowdler and the commercial officer for consultations. Also, while the United States had been observing a voluntary arms embargo since 1963, when it adopted the mandatory arms embargo it further prohibited gray areas sales and the export of spare parts or maintenance items destined for the South African military or police. It took this policy seriously. In 1979, for example, the Department of Commerce argued that the administration's policy prohibiting sales of anything that "could conceivably find [its] way into the hands of the South Africa police or military" to be "unnecessarily ridged." It gave an example suggesting

that if an exporter had any reason to suspect items such as “pencils, toothpaste, writing paper, etc.” could end up with the South African police or military, that those items would be banned. In response, the Department of State “strongly advise[d] against weakening the controls.”<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, although the UN arms embargo made binding a policy the United States already observed, it was the first time in history mandatory sanctions were imposed on a member of the United Nations. It also affected arms sales to South Africa from US allies, especially France.

Although the administration did not formally implement all of the actions on Congressman Digg’s list of twelve, it did observe some of them *de facto*. For one, the administration continued to review and restrain its nuclear relationship with South Africa. Since Washington held a monopoly on American nuclear fuel, this was significant. Also, since the beginning of 1977 the Carter administration had kept under review a proposed agreement between the United States Department of Energy (DOE) and the South Africa Government involving coal liquefaction (converting coal to oil) technology. When the DOE asked the White House to support the agreement in January 1978, State did not recommend it. State’s background paper stated that “this would be the wrong signal to send the South African Government in the aftermath of the multilateral and individual actions which we have taken recently to express our concern over the October 19 bannings and arrests in South Africa.”<sup>149</sup>

Finally, there were soft pressures. Carter and Young’s statements on using the American business community to act as a force for positive change in South Africa was not

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<sup>148</sup> [Briefing paper], 24 December 1977, NLC-12-41-4-23-4, ARC, JCL.

<sup>149</sup> State background paper, “Proposed DOE-SASOL Agreement” in Richardson to DA, 4 January 1978, NCL-132-3-8-6-7, ARC, JCL.

rhetoric. It was a belief they shared based on their experiences in the US South during America's transition out of Jim Crow, and it was an idea they thought could be applied in South Africa's transition out of apartheid. It was at the heart of Young's conversations with the South African business community in May 1977. On 5 October 1977, Cyrus Vance gave a speech before Leon Sullivan and others in the American business community applauding Sullivan's efforts to gain more signatories to his Sullivan Principles.<sup>150</sup> And when the director of the Export-Import Bank, John Moore, approached the administration in December 1977 about the administration's views on EX-IM's activities, Carter handwrote in a memo, "Can't John get borrowers to agree to employment principles?"<sup>151</sup>

In addition to soft economic pressures, the administration also believed in the use of people power, i.e., expanding cultural and educational exchanges, and the building of relationships between American diplomats and other representatives in South Africa with black communities. One sanction the administration did not support on Diggs's list was the termination of these types of programs. The NSC explained that "in South Africa, educational and cultural programs have been instrumental in maintaining contact with black, coloured, and Asian communities."<sup>152</sup> Former US Ambassador Thomas Hull recalled that his position in Pretoria as assistant cultural affairs officer was created in 1978 specifically to increase exchanges "because the embassy and the US government recognized they needed

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<sup>150</sup> Cyrus Vance, "Remarks at Pierre Hotel, 5 October 1977," in Press Release, 11 August 1977, "USA Relations with South Africa: 1977," Subject 1/33/3/AJ77, Box 83, DFA.

<sup>151</sup> Carter, handwritten note in Christopher to the President, memo, 7 December 1977, NLC-128-13-3-5-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>152</sup> Richardson to Aaron, memo, "Response to Congressman Digg's Telegram of December 20 on South Africa; Your Letter of January 9," 9 January 1978, File CO 141 Confidential 1/20/77-1/20/81, White House Central Files, Subject Files, Box CO-53, JCL.

more programs.”<sup>153</sup> William Edmondson, who replaced Bill Bowdler as US ambassador to South Africa in 1978, recalled going to South Africa eager to expand contacts with black leaders in the labor and student movements.<sup>154</sup> Of Edmondson, Hull remembered being “delighted” to work with him because he had previously worked as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs and had a “strong interest” in the exchange programs.<sup>155</sup> He also remembered the embassy’s support for going out to the townships to engage with the black communities. “Other embassies did not do that,” he said. Hull reflected, for example, on Steve McDonald, a political officer in 1977, and his engagement activities. “He knew Steve Biko,” Hull recalled, “he knew all the black leadership. When there was a death in the black leadership, he would be the white face at the funeral”<sup>156</sup>

The Carter administration’s response to the South African government’s October crackdown included overt multilateral and unilateral action, as well as symbolic action. The administration applied the strongest combination of pressures it felt it could in light of the constraints it faced. With at least three years remaining, the Carter administration needed to retain flexibility in its approach to South Africa. It knew that 1977 was only the beginning.

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<sup>153</sup> Thomas Hull, interview by Daniel F. Whitman, 8 January 2010, Frontline Diplomacy: The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://www.loc.gov/collection/foreign-affairs-oral-history/> (accessed 15 March 2015).

<sup>154</sup> William Edmondson, interview with Arthur Tienken and Thomas J. Dunnigan, 5 April, 1988, Frontline Diplomacy: The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://www.loc.gov/collection/foreign-affairs-oral-history/> (accessed 15 March 2015).

<sup>155</sup> Hull, interview, Frontline Diplomacy.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

## CONCLUSION: TRANSITIONS

How does one make sense of the Carter administration's policy toward South Africa in 1977? The challenge seems to be in marrying Carter's moralist approach to foreign policy on the one hand with his limited response to the South African October crackdown on the other. "If the Carter administration was so serious about human rights," Wyk wrote, "why the reluctance to impose stronger measures?"<sup>1</sup>

This question makes the traditionalist framework exceptionally enticing to scholars. Reasoning that Carter's concern for human rights did not exempt the administration from dealing with competing American interests seems to provide a satisfactory way of understanding the incongruence. Revisionists like Kema Irogbe and Richard Bissell claim that, in spite of its antiapartheid rhetoric, the Carter administration prioritized American business interests in South Africa over its concern for apartheid. Realists like Alex Thomson assess multiple competing interests and show that, while Carter's antiapartheid rhetoric may have been sincere, conflicting economic, strategic and political interests constrained his administration's ability to implement policy as preached.

As alluring as the traditionalist approach is, however, the question it poses—namely, how one aligns the administration's policy as stated with its actions—is not a puzzle reflected in the historical record. By utilizing Carter administration documents and a post-revisionist framework, scholars like Simon Stevens show that the Carter administration designed a tentative approach to South Africa, not one of moralist ambition. Stevens does not reject realist claims about competing interests but argues that Carter's ideological understanding of how apartheid could be changed also constrained the administration's approach. What

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<sup>1</sup> Wyk and Grobber, "The Carter Administration," 197.

follows from the post-revisionist framework is an assessment that finds Carter's stated policy toward South Africa to be congruent with its implementation—both design and actions appear measured.

What is interesting about Stevens's work is that while he delineates the constraints on the Carter administration more fully than any previous scholar, he comes away thinking that "we still lack a full explanation...of why the Carter administration was so tentative in its approach toward apartheid...when it did devote considerable attention to the issue."<sup>2</sup> This statement suggests that, even though Stevens presents enough evidence to argue that Carter designed a hesitant policy, he is not convinced by that evidence that Carter should not have done more. This resembles the traditionalist's main question. Instead of asking why Carter did not do more after the October crackdown, however, Stevens moves the question backwards in time, asking why it did not do more to press for change to apartheid in its initial policy design. It appears that both traditionalists and post-revisionists have an expectation that the Carter administration should have done more to combat apartheid in South Africa.

On the surface, scholars' expectations of Carter's South African policy mirror the raised expectations of some American liberals and black African leaders in 1976 and 1977. As described in chapters one and two, the election of Jimmy Carter and his appointment of Andrew Young as US Permanent Representative to the United Nations signaled a new direction in US-black African relations, which included an expectation that the new administration would impose increased pressure on South Africa. Part of this may have been driven by Young's public statements and actions. In a *New York Times Magazine* article published in early February 1977, a journalist quotes Young as claiming that change in South

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<sup>2</sup> Stevens, "From the Viewpoint," 856.



Africa could be reached “within four years of 18 months,” and that the time frame was “not that ambitious.”<sup>3</sup> That same month, an advisor to the administration claimed that Young’s first trip to Africa as ambassador “raised expectations.”<sup>4</sup>

But what exactly did domestic and international audiences expect at the time? During the 1976 presidential election, even in the immediate aftermath of the June Soweto uprising, South Africa was not a campaign issue. Carter ad-libbed a line about the uprising in a major foreign policy speech delivered on 24 June 1976, but it was an unremarkable remark. The pressure the media placed on Carter to explain his approach to apartheid is also notable upon reflection: journalists were not asking what the Carter administration *would* do to challenge apartheid, but rather, what *could* it do. “It’s alright to deplore apartheid,” one said, “but after that, what could you do that’s useful?”<sup>5</sup> Many press inquiries during the campaign acknowledged the difficulty any American administration would face in pressing South Africa on apartheid while cooperating with Pretoria as the “key” to peaceful change in the region. Preventing chaos in southern Africa was a Cold War mandate: an escalation of violence would benefit the Soviet Union.

The election of Carter certainly did not raise the expectations of American antiapartheid groups like the Washington Office on Africa or the American Committee on Africa (ACOA). In early 1977, both east-coast organizations published literature acknowledging Carter’s new tone of toughness toward South Africa, but argued that the substance of his policy was not likely to be substantially different from past administrations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Young in Bennett, USUN 00339, “New York Times Magazine Article on Amb. Young,” 6 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Morgenthau in Brzezinski to Tuchman, memo, 1 March 1977, File CO 141: Confidential 1/20/77-1/20/81, Box CO-53, JCL.

<sup>5</sup> Carter, “Press Briefing in Plains on Foreign Policy,” in *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 375.

<sup>6</sup> See in particular Ted Lockwood and Chris Root, “Discussion of a Southern African Strategy for 1977” (Washington D.C.: the Washington Office on Africa), 19 January 1977, AAA; Washington Notes on Africa,

These organizations expected Carter to continue to support American economic interests above all others. The revisionist assessment of Carter's policy toward South Africa is grounded in the liberal antiapartheid movement's line of reasoning.

As for black African expectations, those too prove illusory upon close analysis of the historical record. It is true that the election of Jimmy Carter and his appointment of Andrew Young signaled something new in America's concern for black African interests, including support for majority rule in all of southern Africa; but, George Houser of the ACOA may have stated it more accurately than even he realized when he wrote, "many Africans have expressed hopes for dramatic change in US policy [under Carter]. The appointment of Andrew Young as ambassador to the United Nations has strengthened that hope."<sup>7</sup>

*Hope.* Carter and Young did not raise black African expectations for a new radical American approach to South Africa; they offered hope. Julius Nyerere reflected of Carter's inaugural address and other statements: "they have been read with great care here; they gave us some hope. We do not expect miracles...but we felt your concern for humanity, and for justice, and drew hope and encouragement."<sup>8</sup>

There is a difference between hope and expectations, and it matters. For one, understanding black African pressures on the Carter administration in terms of hope rather than expectations sheds new light on the administration's policy design. When Young traveled to Tanzania to meet with President Nyerere, it was Young who broached the subject of South Africa. He explained that the administration wanted to press Pretoria for change to

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newsletter, "The Carter Look on Southern Africa" (Washington D.C.: the Washington Office on Africa), Spring 1977, AAA.

<sup>7</sup> George M. Houser, "Needed: A Change in US Policy in Southern Africa" (New York: The American Committee on Africa), [March 1977], AAA.

<sup>8</sup> Nyerere to Carter, 28 January 1977, in Arthur Borg to Zbigniew Brzezinski, memo, 11 February 1977, "Letter to the President from President of Tanzania, File "Potential International Crises, 1977-9/80," Box 4, JCL.

apartheid in addition to pressing it for assistance in Rhodesia and Namibia. Nyerere replied that while the administration's goal of attending to all three situations was laudable, he was skeptical about effecting change in South Africa and said, "let's get Rhodesia and Namibia out of the way first."<sup>9</sup> Nyerere not only doubted the ability of the United States to influence significant change in South Africa, he doubted the potential for change at all. This aligned with the Carter administration's own assessment that there was little hope for real change in South Africa in the coming years.<sup>10</sup> Black Africans and Americans agreed: the prospects for successfully attacking apartheid head-on would be grim until the regional issues were resolved.

Understanding black African pressures in terms of hope also leads to a more sober assessment of Carter's response to the October crackdown. The African group at the United Nations did not expect the United States and its Western allies to vote for resolutions labeling apartheid a threat to international peace and calling for nuclear and economic sanctions against South Africa. It did, however, hope that it could pry a stronger reaction from the Americans by pressing the resolutions to a vote.<sup>11</sup> It worked; the Carter administration dropped the six month limit on the mandatory arms embargo and voted in favor of it on 4 November 1977. Similar to the African group at the United Nations, the US Congressional Black Caucus also took advantage of the opportunity presented by the crackdown to

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<sup>9</sup> Nyerere quoted in Easum, Lagos 01584, 10 February 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>10</sup> Presidential Review Memorandum: Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa, February 1977, NLC-18-4-6-11, ARC, JCL.

<sup>11</sup> Young in SAUN New York to Secextern Pretoria no. 179, "Extemporaneous remarks by Ambassador Young before the vote on four draft resolutions: 31 October 1977," 31 October 1977, vol. 45, "USA Relations with South Africa 13/10/77-31/10/77," Subject 1/33/3, Box 81, DFA; Cyrus Vance to Carter, memo, 1 November 1977, NLC-128-13-2-1-2, ARC, JCL.

strengthen America's stance on South Africa. The administration worked closely with the Caucus to push through a congressional resolution in the House that condemned apartheid.<sup>12</sup>

During the Carter administration, both the African group at the United Nations and the Congressional Black Caucus saw real advances in America's stance on apartheid. In New York, Resolution 418 represented the first time mandatory sanctions were applied against a member of the United Nations. Furthermore, the Carter administration reflected in December 1977 that it had favored seven of the fifteen United Nations General Assembly resolutions "condemning South Africa's apartheid policies and urging the international community to take various steps to pressure South Africa." It compared this to Washington's 1976 record, which showed that the United States supported only two of eleven similar resolutions before the Carter period.<sup>13</sup> In Congress, although the Carter administration did not favor implementing all twelve proposed measures on the Caucus's list, it did implement three proposals in full and parts of several others, including maintaining a *de facto* moratorium on nuclear trade and supporting Security Council action to close loopholes in military cooperation with South Africa.<sup>14</sup> This was three-whole-and-several-parts more action than the Caucus had witnessed since Congressman Diggs first introduced the twelve measures in

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<sup>12</sup> In preparation for the 24 October PRC meeting, a State Department briefing memoranda for Vance explained, "On the Hill we have been in close touch with a number of members of Congress, including the Black Caucus. We need to continue to consult and involve them in our thinking on the difficult choices we face. They will be crucial in supporting the steps we take, which are certain to arouse opposition domestically and on the Hill." An NSC memo for the same meeting stated, "It is recommended that under no circumstances the President's meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus be put off beyond Wednesday, and that if a public announcement of our position is to be made Monday or Tuesday, the President be in touch with Caucus leadership to inform them beforehand. In any case, do not get into a fight with the Caucus or Congress over the wording of the Resolution." See State Department Briefing Memorandum to Secretary Vance, "USG Response to South African Situation," October 1977, NLC-24-115-2-4-2, ARC, JCL; NSC memorandum, "PRC Meeting on South Africa, October 24, 24 October 1977, NLC-28-10-20-1-7, ARC, JCL.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher to Carter, memo, 14 December 1977, NLC-128-13-3-10-1, ARC, JCL.

<sup>14</sup> Washington Office on Africa, press release (Washington D.C.: Washington Office on Africa), 21 October 1977, AAA.

1972. The Carter administration did not lose its credibility with black African leaders<sup>15</sup> or the Caucus after the October crackdown: both groups had hopes to strengthen America's stance against South Africa; the crackdown provided an opportunity to press Carter for stronger action; and Carter took stronger action than the administration had initially planned.

Many Americans and Africans moderated their expectations of the Carter administration because they understood the constraints Washington faced in trying to press South Africa for change to apartheid in the late 1970s. Chapters one and two of this thesis employ a post-revisionist framework to describe the economic, political, strategic, and ideological, constraints on Carter. The main challenge stemmed from the collision of the Cold War and decolonization in southern Africa, marked especially by the Angolan civil war of 1975. The Ford administration had hastily reevaluated its southern African strategy to focus on energizing peaceful solutions to the problems of the area in order to preclude further Soviet influence. Although the Carter administration did advocate a more regional approach to foreign affairs—African solutions to African problems<sup>16</sup>—this did not mean that it was unconcerned about Soviet power in the region as well. One premise of the State Department's February 1977 study advised that the administration could best prevent an East-West confrontation in southern Africa by working with black Africa, the United Kingdom, and Pretoria to peacefully transition Rhodesia, Namibia, and eventually South Africa, to black majority ruled states.

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<sup>15</sup> Even the three African representatives on the Security Council, who had pushed the 31 resolutions to a vote (Benin, Mauritius and Libya) quickly agreed to the revised Western draft resolution on 2 November which dropped the six month time limit on the mandatory arms embargo. After the negotiations, Young reported from the United Nations, "sigh of relief at what now appears to be a successful solution to SC impasse on sanctions on South Africa was heard in African as well as Western Accents." See Young in Vance, State 262852, "Accord near on Security Council Arms Embargo on South Africa," 03 November 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.

<sup>16</sup> Carter, "New Approach to Foreign Policy," 28 May 1975, in *The Presidential Campaign*, I: 66; Smith, *Morality, Reason and Power*, 133.

A problem with this approach was that the United Kingdom, the constitutionally responsible party for Rhodesia, was loath to apply pressure on Pretoria. Although Britain had great economic interests in South Africa, due to the world recession and to the potential for domestic backlash, the government was not willing to leverage its economic ties with South Africa to press Pretoria to deliver Ian Smith. Britain's insistence against the use of economic sanctions curtailed the Carter administration's options on South Africa. Carter's belief in the power of American businesses to act as agents of change in South Africa further caused him to question the value of economic sanctions. The administration designed a flexible, carrot and stick approach to encourage change in South Africa. On its plane of pressures, the administration considered economic sanctions to be risky measures of last resort: they would not effect change in South Africa if the United Kingdom and other Western countries would veto; they threatened to divide a united Western front in tackling the problems of Rhodesia and Namibia, thus risking diplomatic effectiveness; and they had the potential to push Pretoria into isolation and noncooperation if implemented.

The greatest constraint to the administration's policy was the challenge presented by the South African government itself. The breakup of the Portuguese empire in 1974-75 broke Pretoria's confidence in the future of white minority control in its neighboring states, and the Soweto uprising in 1976 signaled the revival of the violent liberation struggle in South Africa itself. By the beginning of 1977, the South African government had begun to position the wagons in defense against looming radical black militancy. A 1977 Defense White Paper called for a "total strategy" to combat the "total onslaught," and Prime Minister Vorster opened parliament that year promising unwavering pursuit of separate development.<sup>17</sup> In

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<sup>17</sup> Bowdler, Cape T 00135, "Prime Minister Addresses Parliament," 29 January 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD; Barber and Barrett, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, 205.

Washington, the State Department and CIA assessed the South African situation for the Carter administration in February 1977. They warned that the South African government was not going rogue within its white constituency; “the rank and file prefer the system,” Ambassador William Bowdler said.<sup>18</sup>

Unlike previous administrations, the Carter administration weighed white South Africa’s refusal to dissolve the fundamentals of apartheid against its other interests, and in its first NSC meeting on the subject it decided to push Pretoria for change. This was a significant departure from Nixon and Kissinger’s 1969 NSSM 39 policy, as well as a change from Ford and Kissinger’s 1976 *quid pro quo* strategy, in which Kissinger offered Pretoria “time to deal with South Africa” in exchange for assistance with Rhodesia and Namibia.<sup>19</sup> The Carter administration chose to press South Africa to assist in the negotiations about the future of Rhodesia, to withdraw and grant independence to Namibia, and to pursue “a progressive transformation of the South African society.” Carter’s demand for change to apartheid in South Africa was limited, but it was more than any previous administration had asked.

What the Carter administration was not prepared to handle—and what the South African documents underscore—was Pretoria’s strategy for countering American pressure. The events following US Vice President Walter Mondale’s a one man, one vote comment at the May Vienna summit illustrate the importance of the South African side of the story. American newspapers report that Mondale’s comment annoyed the South Africans, who

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<sup>18</sup> Bowdler, Pretor 05292, “Prospects for Change in South Africa,” 19 November 1976, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD; Knoche in Special Coordination Committee Meeting, “South Africa and Rhodesia,” 8 February 1977, Subject File, Box 24, Meetings, PRC 3: 1977, JCL.

<sup>19</sup> Kissinger, “Memorandum of Conversation, Dr. Henry A. Kissinger and Amb. R.F. Botha,” 14 May 1976, Memoranda of Conversations, Box 19, GRFL, Digital Library.

criticized Carter for allegedly demanding them to implement rapid, fundamental—and suicidal—change.<sup>20</sup> Documents from the Carter administration show that Washington knew that Pretoria was intentionally making “a political football” out of the issue.<sup>21</sup> Adding documents from South African Department of Foreign Affairs into the mix reveals that Pretoria’s response to Mondale’s comment was part of its larger strategy to undercut the Carter administration’s South African policy. The SAG’s public campaign to paint Carter as unfairly pushing South Africa for rapid change was effective. It put Carter in the awkward position of having either to deny South African charges and thereby risk its credibility as a supporter of black African desires, or having to apply pressure on Pretoria to signal displeasure with its campaign, thereby substantiating it. Following the October crackdown, Pretoria capitalized on its efforts to direct the public conversation in the United States and white South Africa by blaming Carter for doing exactly what the SAG was supposedly warning against that summer—inciting black militancy and violence.

South African sources also shed light on Pretoria’s nuclear policy in 1977 and how it affected Carter’s ability to react to the October crackdown. After the Kalahari site was discovered, Pretoria played its hand well, not closing the door to the possibility that it was developing a nuclear weapon while, at the same time, holding out the vague (and for the Carter administration, alluring) promise it might join the NPT. Meanwhile, it used its nuclear relationship with the United States in its public relations campaign to amplify the charge that the Carter administration was unfairly singling out South Africa. The memoirs of South

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<sup>20</sup> “Approaches to South Africa,” editorial, *Washington Post*, 9 June 1977, accessed 18 April 2015; “Vance Told of Problems in Ties with South Africa,” article, *New York Times*, 21 June 1977; “Botha Scorns Black Rule for S. Africa, ‘Never Ever,’” editorial, *Washington Post*, 23 June 1977; Graham Hovey, “South African Campaigns in US Against Black Rule,” *New York Times*, 25 June 1975.

<sup>21</sup> Henry J Richardson to David Aaron, Memo “Talkers for Your Dinner with Botha,” June 22, 1977, NSA Country Files, “South African 6/77” Box 69, JCL; Bowdler, Cape T 00914, “SAG distortion of one-man one-vote concept,” 7 June 1977, Record Group 59, National Archives AAD.



African diplomats confirm that South Africa's nuclear policy beginning in 1977 was threefold: "neither confirm nor deny the existence this capability;" prepare for a potential Cuban invasion of South Africa (through Namibia) and confidentially inform the Americans of SAG nuclear capability "to induce them to intervene;" and, finally, carry out a underground test "if the tactic [in phase two proved] unsuccessful."<sup>22</sup> Like South Africa's public perception campaign, Pretoria's nuclear strategy was effective. Its ambiguity about the Kalahari site and nuclear capabilities convinced Washington of a need to strengthen intelligence gathering capabilities and maintain its nuclear relationship with Pretoria in the fall of 1977. While the Carter administration developed its initial policy toward apartheid knowing that it would be pressing South Africa on three issues, nuclear matters in the summer of 1977 meant that the administration faced "four polarized areas of confrontation"<sup>23</sup> when determining how to respond to the 19 October crackdown.

The South African government's attempts to undercut the Carter administration was a part of its "total strategy" defensive. It capitalized on white South African fears of black radicalism and communism to spur its supporters to circle the wagons. It also painted Carter as a precipitator of upheaval in South Africa at a time when the American public was divided on its role in South African affairs. In 1977, the South African government's strategy became a highly effective constraint on the Carter administration's policy toward apartheid.

In spite of the constraints, the Carter administration took symbolic and real action to respond to the South African government's crackdown on 19 October 1977. Assessing the strength of his actions is subjective; however, the increasing availability of American and

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<sup>22</sup> Sole, *From Verwoerd to Mandela*, 266.

<sup>23</sup> Richardson to Aaron, memo, "Sanctions within South Africa," 26 September 1977, NLC-24-105-5-2-2, ARC, JCL.

South African documents now make it possible for historians to analyze the Carter administration's South African policy design and implementation. What the documents show is that it does not make sense for historians to approach the topic with an expectation that Carter had promised to do more to press South Africa on apartheid. People at the time did not expect fundamental change to occur in South Africa during the Carter period—certainly not without extreme violence and bloodshed. While the election of Carter raised hope, it did not raise expectations. If scholars recalibrate their own expectations to reflect the historic record more accurately, and then look at the constraints on Carter—including the stunning success of Pretoria's counter strategy—then one sees a highly engaged administration willing to take some risks in challenging Pretoria on apartheid at a time when the active liberation struggle in South Africa was reawakening.

Assessing the Carter administration's policy toward apartheid South Africa is not a matter of marrying Carter's moralist approach to foreign policy on the one hand with his limited response to the South African October crackdown on the other. Nor is it a matter of asking why Carter did not do more to press South Africa in its policy design. A more interesting question for future research is—given the measured expectations on the Carter administration at the time—when, how, and why did these expectations of scholars of the administration become inflated? One possibility of the genesis of the “expectations inflation” was the South African government itself. As the DFA documents show, Pretoria was serious about leading the American public narrative about Carter's policy. Did South Africa's campaign to paint Carter as demanding immediate and fundamental changes in South Africa distort perceptions of Carter's goals? Not only is approaching the study of US-South African relations during the Carter period with inflated expectations a trope, it's a trap. By not

calibrating one's expectations to reflect the historic record of 1976 and the beginning of the Carter administration, it is nearly impossible to sort through the remainder of the complicated story of 1977.

And 1977 was only the beginning. It was the beginning of the Carter administration's single term in office, and the beginning of a new American stance toward apartheid. It was also the beginning of the South African government's "total defense" strategy and a new phase in the antiapartheid liberation struggle in South Africa. As black South Africans organized in schools, trade unions and new black consciousness organizations in South Africa to challenge apartheid, they also went into exile to join the ANC and PAC.<sup>24</sup> 1977 was a year of transition. Although transitions are messy, with an open mind and a lot of documents, historians can hope to better understand them.

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<sup>24</sup> Barney Pityana, et al. ed., *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: D. Philip, 1991), 51-52.

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