

## **A Principled Pragmatism: Gerald R. Ford and apartheid South Africa**

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**Abstract:** My article explores the stance of 'Principled Pragmatism' adopted by the Gerald R. Ford Presidential administration in its relations with apartheid era South Africa during the mid 1970s. This policy was shaped by the values of equality, fairness and justice that stemmed from the political and private persona of Ford himself. Moderated by a practical real politik, however, Ford recognized the necessity of avoiding measures, that while carrying an important moral symbolism, would in fact prove to be counterproductive to the aim of ending apartheid. Ford further identified the geopolitical necessity of engaging with rather than isolating South Africa in order to advance broader U.S. strategic and moral objectives in the southern African region.

**Keywords:** U.S. foreign policy, South Africa, Apartheid, Racial Equality, Cold War Geopolitics.

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## Introduction

On August 9, 1974, Vice-President Gerald Rudolph Ford ascended to the Presidency of the United States following the resignation of Richard M. Nixon. The new administration sought to bring a sense of moral decency and integrity to the White House after the trauma of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. Ford, the former minority leader in the House of Representatives was also known as, the “Congressman’s Congressman”, who over his twenty-five year Congressional career had developed a reputation for balance, compromise and a rational approach to resolving political problems. Both Ford’s morality and pragmatism are evident in his approach to the vexed issue of U.S. policy towards apartheid era South Africa.<sup>1</sup>

An examination of U.S. relations with South Africa during the Ford years reveals that the White House developed a position of principled pragmatism in its dealings with Pretoria. This policy was shaped by the values of equality, fairness and justice that stemmed from the political and private persona of Ford himself. Moderated by a practical real politik, however, he recognized the necessity of avoiding measures, that while carrying an important moral symbolism, would in fact prove to be counterproductive to the aim of ending apartheid. Ford further identified the geopolitical necessity of engaging with rather than isolating South Africa in order to advance broader U.S. strategic and moral objectives in the southern African region.

The Ford administration adopted a strong posture in its interpretation of the arms embargo on Pretoria, rebuffed efforts to end the ban on direct Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im Bank) loans and reduced nuclear collaboration with the apartheid state. At the same time, Ford opposed, on practical grounds, actions that would lead to the greater global ostracism of South Africa, including expulsion from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) or United Nations (UN), as these bodies were forums where the international community could seek to sway and moderate the practitioners of apartheid.

Under the leadership of Ford, for the first time Washington also involved itself diplomatically in southern Africa both to stem communism expansion but also achieve the goal of ending white minority rule in the region. The decision to use Pretoria itself as an agent of change, whether in confronting the Marxist-oriented People’s Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) or seeking an end to white minority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia demonstrated the willingness of the White House, on pragmatic grounds, to collaborate with South Africa to achieve its geopolitical and moral objectives.

## Historiography

There is a wealth of existing literature that offers a range of arguments that purport to explain U.S. foreign policy towards southern Africa during the Cold War and de-colonization eras. *The Cold War and the Color Line* by Thomas Borstelmann underlines the struggle faced by successive American presidential administrations in balancing Cold War concerns with the growing movement for racial justice both in the U.S. and southern Africa. *Cold War and Black Liberation* by Thomas Noer explores U.S. relations with the white minority regimes of southern Africa with a particular focus on the influence of domestic Civil Rights movements in shaping foreign policy and further highlights the complex and emotive clash between the question of majority rule and immediate hard policy interests. *An African Volk* by Jamie Miller explores, through the lens of South African foreign policy, the role of Washington in seeking a settlement

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<sup>1</sup> The New York Times Website, The New York Times, December 28, 2006, Editorial “Gerald R. Ford”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/12/28/opinion/28thur1.html>;  
Govtrack.us Website, 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, H. R. 409, “Celebrating the life of President Gerald R. Ford on what would have been his 96th birthday”, May 6, 2009, <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hres409/text>.

to end white minority rule in Rhodesia. His work, however, is not an examination of U.S. foreign relations but rather an account of the ideological viewpoints that Pretoria utilized to adapt to the changing norms of the post-colonial world in Africa<sup>2</sup>

*U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa*, by Alex Thomson offers an impressive overview of U.S.-South Africa relations throughout the apartheid era. The book, however, does not exclusively focus on the 1970s, and principally examines policy through the lens of a clash between human rights and strategic or economic interests. The more recent work by Gerald Horne, *White Supremacy Confronted*, explores the close linkage between key South African and American anti-apartheid figures and argues that their work in tandem with communist nations was a key factor in forcing the end of white political control in both apartheid South Africa and the southern U.S. While an insightful account of the parallel struggle against white supremacy it is not primarily concerned with the bilateral relationship between Pretoria and Washington during the Ford era.<sup>3</sup>

There is, however, a paucity of literature directly examining relations with Pretoria through the lens of the Ford administration and especially the impact of the political persona of the President in formulating policy towards apartheid South Africa. The importance of Ford's commitment to moral principles as a determining factor in shaping his approach has typically been overshadowed in the literature by a focus on the calculated geopolitical approach of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and broader dynamics such as the Cold War or race.

*Jimmy Carter in Africa* by Nancy Mitchell, provides a perceptive account of President Jimmy Carter's approach toward Rhodesia. Her book offers an insightful portrait of Carter himself, as well as examining the broader makeup and functioning of his administration. She highlights Carter's grappling with the complex relationship between a desire to stop communist expansion in southern Africa and the contentious issue of domestic race relations. While Mitchell does discuss Kissinger's failed peace initiative in 1976 the work remains primarily an examination of the Carter years.<sup>4</sup>

The research of Carl Watts has highlighted the significance of Ford's commitment to morality in shaping his foreign policy. He has argued that in the case of Rhodesia, Ford's determination to do the right thing by placing the weight of the U.S. firmly behind the cause of majority rule was obscured by the prominent role accorded to Kissinger. The work of Mitchell and Watts while offering insightful analysis of White House decision making, nonetheless, focuses on Rhodesia and not her neighbour south of the Limpopo.<sup>5</sup>

In this article, I seek to clarify and add to the previous scholarship especially the work of Miller, Mitchell, Thomson and Watts. I suggest that under the leadership of President Ford the U.S. adopted a stance of principled pragmatism in its approach with Pretoria. The Ford administration took a moral yet practical position in its commercial, nuclear and diplomatic dealings with the South African Government taking a strong stance where necessary to clearly indicate disapproval of its policies yet opposing actions which the White House saw as counterproductive. Ford was also quite prepared to engage with Pretoria both to prevent communist expansion and end white minority rule in the region.

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<sup>2</sup> T. Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); J. Miller, *An African Volk. The apartheid regime and its search for survival* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); T. Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: The United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948-1968* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> G. Horne, *White Supremacy Confronted: U.S. Imperialism and Anti-Communism vs. the Liberation of Southern Africa from Rhodes to Mandela* (New York: International Publishers, 2019) A. Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> N. Mitchell, *Jimmy Carter in Africa: Race and the Cold War* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press 2016);

<sup>5</sup> C. Watts, "'Dropping the F-bomb': President Ford, the Rhodesian crisis, and the 1976 election.", Lexington, Kentucky: SHAFR Conference, 2014.

I further suggest that unlike the calculated and cynical geopolitical approach of President Nixon, Ford's direct predecessor in the Oval Office, who demonstrated little if any compassion for the plight of the black African majorities under white minority rule, Ford's decency and sense of justice played an important role in his geostrategic approach and outlook towards southern Africa. Indeed, Ford's policy towards South Africa should be viewed as an antecedent to the ensuing Carter administration's deliberate emphasis on morality and human rights as an integral part of the Cold War struggle in southern Africa.

## Background

On May 26, 1948, the National Party (HNP) led by Daniel Francois Malan defeated long term South African leader Jan Christian Smuts in an election that heralded the onset of the strict system of racial discrimination, known as apartheid in Afrikaans, that would become the prevailing theme in South African politics and society for the following half century. The Population Registration and Group Areas Acts of July 1950 forced all South African residents to be classified into racial groupings and empowered the Governor-General to declare geographical areas, including urban residential and business neighborhoods, to be for the exclusive occupation of specific racial groups. Pretoria also passed legislation that would enforce what became known as petty apartheid. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 was followed in 1950 by the Immorality Amendment Act which prohibited extramarital sex between whites and individuals of any other race.<sup>6</sup>

In the global arena, long before Ford assumed the Presidency in 1974, apartheid and indeed the broader question of white minority rule in southern Africa had developed into a major international issue. As early as 1946, during the Smuts era, Pretoria been under attack at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) both for the treatment of Indians and those of Indian descent in South Africa and for its refusal to submit Namibia, which it governed under a League of Nations mandate, to a UN trusteeship. On December 5, 1952, in response to a request from thirteen Afro-Asian member states, the UNGA adopted Resolution 616 (VII) which established a three-member commission to examine the racial situation in South Africa.<sup>7</sup>

Over the course of the next two decades the overtly racist policies of the National Party government, came under increasingly criticism at the UN and from the newly independent black African states. On August 7, 1963, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 181 imposing an arms embargo on South Africa. In July, 1970 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 282 proposing that member states adopt a series of measures to further tighten the arms embargo. Seven years earlier, following the formation of the Organization of

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<sup>6</sup> Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter TL), Papers of Harry S. Truman, Box 177, President's Secretary's Files, NSC Meetings June 17, 1948, CIA Review; TL, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Box 170, President's Secretary's Files, National Security Policies, Vol. I Geographical Areas, NSC Report on the Current Policies of the United States of America Relating to the National Security; Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1948, Vol. V, Part 1, Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948; Nelson Centre of Memory, O'Malley Archive, Population Registration Act No 30, Apartheid Legislation 1948-1990, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01828/05lv01829/06lv01838.htm> University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Department of Historical Papers, Box A1485, Union of South Africa Act, No.41 1950; TL, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation Box 3, Union of South Africa Act No. 55, 1949; TL, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation Box 3, Union of South Africa Act No. 21, 1950; D. Aikman, *Great Souls: Six Who Changed the Century*, (Lanham: W Pub Group, 2003), 81; T. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 253.

<sup>7</sup> TL, Papers of Harry S. Truman, National Intelligence Estimate, President's Secretary's Files, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949; TL, Dean Acheson Papers, Memoranda of Conversations File October 1952, Box 71, Memorandum of Conversation, October 14, 1952 and FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume XI, Part 1, Editorial Note.

African Unity (OAU) on 23 May 1963, the organization imposed an economic boycott of South Africa and set up a Liberation Committee to assist the movements of southern Africa fighting white minority rule. In Washington, however, the U.S. response to apartheid was far less clear cut.<sup>8</sup>

During the early apartheid era, Cold War considerations and economic ties dominated U.S. decision making regarding South Africa. The strategic position of the apartheid state combined with Pretoria's support for Western actions against the global communist threat and agreement to sell large quantities of uranium to Washington placed the Afrikaner leadership in the good graces of both the Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidencies. During the subsequent John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations, the increasing international and domestic criticism of apartheid led Washington to seek greater disassociation from South Africa but close economic and strategic ties combined with Pretoria's growing financial and military strength made disengagement a difficult balancing act.<sup>9</sup>

Following the election of Nixon the U.S. shifted towards a closer relationship with South Africa. On a conceptual level, the Nixon Doctrine advocated the pursuance of strategic interests by supporting friendly governments, including unpalatable regimes with distinctly anti-communist credentials, through military and other aid. For Nixon, the military strength and vehement anti-communism of Pretoria combined with the close economic ties, U.S. businesses had invested approximately one billion dollars in South Africa and Washington enjoyed a highly favorable balance of trade payments, trumped any concerns the administration may have had over apartheid.<sup>10</sup>

On January 28, 1970, Nixon ordered National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 38, a policy of quietly easing restrictions on bilateral relations with the white in southern Africa. His decision stemmed from the principal options proposed by National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 39, a comprehensive review of U.S. interests and objectives in the region. The study had proposed a choice between continuing the existing policy of symbolic dissociation while preserving tangible interests or building closer ties, termed "communication", with the white minority governments.<sup>11</sup>

The new policy of "communication" also included a relaxation of the 1963 arms embargo as it related to the sale of dual-purpose civilian/military equipment, termed "gray area" exports, to South Africa. In NSDM 81, issued on August 17, 1970, Nixon specified that in addition to allowing the sale of non-lethal dual use items to the South African Defence Forces (SADF),

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<sup>8</sup> Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (hereafter LBJL), Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 73, South Africa, CIA National Intelligence Estimate, May 20, 1964; LBJL, National Security Files, Box 78, South Africa, 11/64-9/66, Vol. 2, CIA Special Report, September 3, 1965; Gerald R. Ford Library (hereafter GFL), White House Central Files (hereafter WHCF), Box 45, South Africa 6/1/75-11/30/75, Briefing Memorandum for Ford;

<sup>9</sup> TL, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President's Secretary's File's, Box 150, Foreign Affairs, Department of State Report: The Berlin Crisis; Library of Congress, South Africa: A Country Study (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 1997), 338; FRUS, 1950, Vol. V, MemCon September 27, 1950; FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, Secretary of State to South African Ambassador, February 5, 1951; FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, Consul General Johannesburg to the Department of State, April 19, 1951; FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXIV, Africa National Security Action Memorandum (hereafter NSAM) No. 295, April 24, 1964; Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 4, 50 and 81; E. Michel, "My children, you are permitted in time of great danger to walk with the Devil until you have crossed the bridge": President Truman, apartheid and the early Cold War" *South African Historical Journal*, 72 (2) 2020 2 and 25-26; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 31, 34 and 47.

<sup>10</sup> Richard Nixon Library (hereafter RNL), NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-145, NSSM 39, Minutes of NSC Meeting, December 17 1969; E. Michel, "The Luster of Chrome: Nixon, Rhodesia and the defiance of UN sanctions", *Diplomatic History*, 42 (1) 2018 8.

<sup>11</sup> RNL, NSC Institutional "H" Files, Box H-026, NSSM-39, Memo for Rogers et al. from Kissinger, April 10, 1969; RNL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-144, NSSM-39, August 15, 1969; RNL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-145, NSSM-39, Memo from Kissinger to the Vice President et al., January 28, 1970; Michel, "The Luster of Chrome", 14.

licenses could also be issued, on the concurrence of the Departments' of Commerce and State, for the sale of dual-use items with a "clear and direct application to combat or to internal security operations" to "civilian" purchasers within South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

Nixon, heavily influenced by racial prejudice, was also apathetic towards the cause of black liberation and had little interest in black Africa. Indeed, both Nixon's racism and contempt for Africa are highlighted by his suggestion to then National Security Adviser Kissinger that "let's leave the niggers to Bill (Secretary of State William Rogers) and we'll take care of the rest of the world." As noted by Andy DeRoche, Nixon repeatedly snubbed Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda during his visits to Washington as well as emissaries from the Organization of African Unity.<sup>13</sup>

### **President Gerald R. Ford (1974-77)**

In contrast, under the leadership of Ford the White House adopted a position of principled pragmatism taking a strong position on the gray area arms sales, refusing to lift the Ex-Im policy of direct bank loans and reducing nuclear cooperation with Pretoria. The White House, however, opposed actions such as the removal of Pretoria's membership from international organizations as counterproductive to the goal of ending apartheid. The Ford era also witnessed the first major diplomatic initiative by Washington to both actively engage with southern Africa and use South Africa itself to combat both communist expansion in Angola and to resolve the longstanding issues of white minority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia.

Ford himself entered the White House with a genuine commitment to moral principles and as a man of fairness and justice who opposed any form of racial discrimination as fundamentally unjust. Even as a young man in the 1930s, an era when African-Americans were still subject to pervasive racism throughout the nation, Ford proved unafraid to take a stance for racial justice. This was demonstrated in 1934 by his refusal to play in a college football game when the opponents, Georgia Tech, demanded that the sole African-American player on the University of Michigan team be benched for the match. Ford's decision to join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1946, an era when discrimination and violence against African-Americans and their supporters was commonplace, was also demonstrative of both his commitment to racial justice and his strength of character.<sup>14</sup>

As President, Ford refused to tolerate the casual racism that had been so prevalent in the Nixon administration. Indeed, October 1976, Ford forced the resignation of Agriculture Secretary Earl Butz for an offensive joke he made about African-American voters. Ford informed Butz that "the language and attitude attributed to you is not acceptable in my Administration. Such comments are offensive to me, and to the American people." Furthermore Ford, within days of taking office, organized a meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus, a group that Nixon had adamantly refused to meet with. It was also significant that the primary item on the agenda at the meeting was U.S. foreign policy in Africa.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> RNL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-208, NSDM 81, Memo for Vice President Agnew et al. from Kissinger, August 17, 1970.

<sup>13</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, September 28, 1971; A. DeRoche, "KK, the Godfather, and the Duke: Maintaining Positive Relations between Zambia and the USA in Spite of Nixon's Other Priorities", *Safundi*, 12 (1) 2011 97; S. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 111.

<sup>14</sup> B. Kruger and B. Moorehouse, "Willis Ward, Gerald Ford and Michigan Football's darkest day". <http://blogs.detroitnews.com/history/2012/08/09/willis-ward-gerald-ford-and-michigan-footballs-darkest-day/>; J. Cannon, *Gerald R. Ford: An Honorable Life*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 63.

<sup>15</sup> GFL, General (1), Box 3, Stanley S. Scott Papers 1971-1977, Black Caucus – Meeting with the President, August, 1974, Washington Post, August 13, 1974; GFL, General (1), Box 3, Stanley S. Scott Papers 1971-1977,

It is clear that Ford's commitment to racial justice extended beyond America. In March 1976, in Illinois, Ford stated; "We have to be on the right side morally, and the right side morally is to be for majority rule." Public pronouncements were mirrored by a private determination to achieve a just but also geopolitically acceptable settlement. At an NSC meeting on southern Africa in May 1976, the president stated that it was important to do what was morally right regardless of the domestic political consequences.<sup>16</sup>

The White House was also well aware that the ending of white minority rule in southern Africa, especially in the aftermath of the domestic Civil Rights movement, had become a cause celebre for many Americans especially African-Americans, liberals and church groups. Presidential correspondence reveals a wealth of letters to Ford urging his administration to not only take a strong diplomatic posture against apartheid but also use the power and influence of the U.S. to end racial discrimination and across southern Africa. On Capitol Hill, political leaders including Congressmen Cardiss Collins, Charles Rangel, Charles C. Diggs as well as Senators Dick Clark, Hubert H. Humphrey and Edward Kennedy also urged the administration to take steps towards achieving majority rule in the region.<sup>17</sup>

The Ford administration's approach towards South Africa, however, could not ignore the strategic and economic realities of the 1970s. On a geopolitical level, the pro-Western stance and vehement anti-communism of the National Party government combined with its strategic location on the Cape sea route and powerful military, the strongest on the African continent, made Pretoria an important de facto ally in the global struggle against the communist threat. The claims of the apartheid state to be a staunch Western ally were bolstered by its record of supporting U.S. military actions in the post-World War II era including South African Air Force participation in the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War.<sup>18</sup>

The growing nuclear capability of South Africa, however, concerned the White House. Since the 1950s, Washington and Pretoria had collaborated together regarding uranium enrichment for peaceful nuclear purposes and South Africa had been a founding member of the IAEA. By the mid-1970s, though, the U.S. was increasingly troubled by the nuclear aspirations of the South African regime. While CIA reports indicated that Pretoria was not yet capable of developing nuclear weapons, its refusal to sign the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty combined with the clear and publicly acknowledged indication that South Africa intended to pursue the manufacture of nuclear bombs, forced the Ford administration to be wary in its atomic energy dealings with the National Party government.<sup>19</sup>

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Black Caucus – Meeting with the President, August, 1974, Memo from Stan Scott, August 21, 1974; "Exit Earl, Not Laughing", Time Magazine, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,946703-1,00.html>; Cannon, *Gerald R. Ford*, 431-432.

<sup>16</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 4 TA 1, Letter to Florence Lauckner from Ron Nessen, June 30, 1976;

The American Presidency Project Online, Gerald R. Ford: "Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session, Tyler, Texas.," April 28, 1976, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=5886>; GFL, NSA/NSC Meeting File, Box 2, 1974-1977, Minutes of NSC Meeting, May 11 1976.

<sup>17</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 45, South Africa 12/1/75-2/29/76, Letter to Ford from George F. Harkins, October 28, 1975; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 1/16/76-2/29/76, Letter to Ford from Congressman Diggs Jr., February 25, 1976; ; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 4/1/76-6/30/76, Letter to Ford from Senator Clark et al., March 4, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 12/1/75-2/29/76, Letter to Senator Kennedy from William T. Kendall, March 6, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 8/9/74-6/30/76, Letter to Ford from Congressman Rangel, June 11, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 8/9/74-6/30/76, Letter to Ford from Mary H. Goode, August 2, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 8/9/74-6/30/76, Letter to Ford from Congressman Collins, August 9, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 10/1/76-1/20/77, Letter to Ford from Richard Gordon Hatcher, September 17, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 10/1/76-1/20/77, Letter to Ford from Mrs. Cyrus Vance, September 24, 1976.

<sup>18</sup> South Africa: A Country Study, (Washington, D.C. : Federal Research Division, Library of Congress 1997), 338, <https://www.loc.gov/item/96048983/>; GFL, WHCF, Box 45, South Africa 6/1/75-11/30/75, Briefing Memorandum for Ford; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> The National Security Archive (hereafter NSA), CIA Weekly Surveyor, July 22, 1974,

The vast mineral wealth of South Africa was also significant for the U.S. both strategically and economically. Pretoria controlled the world supply of diamonds and produced over 70% of gold output from the free world. It also possessed significant reserves of uranium, a key component in atomic and nuclear weapons. The thriving South African economy also offered lucrative opportunities for trade and investment. By the time that Ford took office direct U.S. capital in South Africa totaled around \$1.25 billion including investments by over three hundred different corporations including General Motors and Chrysler.<sup>20</sup>

Domestically, South Africa, and the other white minority-controlled states in southern Africa, enjoyed considerable support among the U.S. public, notably white Americans, and on Capitol Hill among conservatives notably influential long serving Republican Senators such as Barry Goldwater, Strom Thurmond and John Tower who held important committee positions including on the Senate Armed Services Committee. The White House was therefore cognizant of the fact that any actions taken against Pretoria, while popular among liberals and African-Americans, could have serious electoral consequences by alienating the conservative wing of the Republican party. Indeed, as observed by Watts, Ford's commitment in 1976 to achieving majority rule in Rhodesia became an electoral albatross giving a major boost to Ford's opponent in the Republican primaries, former California Governor Ronald Reagan.<sup>21</sup>

The White House, though, took a moral stance, tempered by realism, in its relations with Pretoria. The Ford administration strictly adhered to the 1963 arms embargo, especially concerning dual-use or gray area items, refused to allow conservative Congressional and business pressure to modify Ex-Im Bank policy and downgraded ties with the South African nuclear program. Ford, however, opposed any actions that would lead to a growth in the diplomatic isolation of Pretoria as injurious to the goal of influencing change in South African policy and was quite prepared to engage with the practitioners of apartheid to prevent the spread of communism in the region or seek to a peaceful transition to majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia.

## United Nations

The stance of principled pragmatism adopted by the White House towards Pretoria was clearly demonstrated early in the Ford era on the question the expulsion of South Africa from the UN. On October 30, 1974, the UNSC considered a draft resolution submitted by Cameroon, Iraq, Kenya, and Mauritania that if passed would have recommended to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) the immediate expulsion of South Africa from the UN under Article 6 of the UN Charter due to its persistent the constant violation of the values of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; NSA, CIA Weekly Surveyor, April 25, 1975  
<https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; GFL, John Marsh Files, Box 5, CIA Political Briefings (1), Global Issues Confronting the United States, March 29, 1976; NSA, CIA Weekly Surveyor, September 13, 1976, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; Michel, "My children, you are permitted in time of great danger to walk with the Devil until you have crossed the bridge" 22; Z. Cervenka and B. Rogers, *The Nuclear Axis: Secret Collaboration between West Germany and South Africa*, (London: Julian Friedmann Books, 1978) 104 and 212; M. Van Wyk, "Ally or Critic? The United States' Response to South African Nuclear Development, 1949-1980," *Cold War History* 7 (2) (2007) 197-207.

<sup>20</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 45, South Africa 6/1/75-11/30/75, Briefing Memorandum for Ford.

<sup>21</sup> GFL, Gerald R. Ford Papers (hereafter GRF Papers), Box 5, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, South Africa (2), Letter to Scowcroft from Congressman Bob Wilson, May 21, 1975; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 3/1/76-7/31/76, Letter to Ford from Senator John Tower et al., January 22, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 8/9/74-6/30/76, Letter to Ford from Carl McIntire, May 3, 1976; ; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 8/9/74-6/30/76, Letter to Ron Nessen for De Lancey Provost, May 25, 1976; ; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 8/1/76-9/30/76, Letter to Ford from Edward B. Benjamin, July 13, 1976; Cervenka and Rogers, *The Nuclear Axis*, 288; Watts, "Dropping the F-bomb", 1, 8 and 15.



In Washington, the White House, while wishing to be seen as taking a strong moral stance against apartheid opposed the expulsion of South Africa from the UN as both a dangerous diplomatic precedent but also a strategic error as it would remove Pretoria from the pressures of international opinion. At the UN Security Council (UNSC) U.S. Representative John Scali condemned apartheid as “evil” and an “iniquitous and callous policy” that represented an “indefensible affront” to the principles of the UN and human dignity all around the world. Scali cautioned, however, that expelling South Africa from the UN would be a major mistake and it would be far more productive to use UN forums to press Pretoria to change its course. Along with London and Paris, Washington vetoed the draft resolution.<sup>22</sup>

In response, on November 12, 1974, the president of the UNGA, Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria, ruled that South Africa should be suspended from involvement in the work of the General Assembly. His decision was subsequently upheld by a UNGA vote of 91 to 22 with 19 abstentions. As a consequence, Pretoria remained a member of the UN although unable to participate at the UNGA. From the perspective of the Ford administration, the stance that the U.S. had taken demonstrated a clear principled condemnation of apartheid but a pragmatic recognition that the expulsion of South Africa would have removed one of the few arenas in which the world community could attempt to coerce Pretoria to modify its current racial policy.<sup>23</sup>

## Commercial Ties

This posture was also reflected in the Ford administration’s approach to the issue of dual-purpose arms sales. As noted earlier, in August 1963, during the Kennedy era, the U.S. had voted in favor of UNSC Resolution 181, a voluntary total arms embargo on South Africa. Washington had however, reserved the right to “interpret this policy in light of any future requirements for the common defense effort in assuring maintenance of international peace and security” as well continuing to provide dual military-civilian usage items and fulfil existing contracts. As noted earlier, during the Nixon administration, the U.S. adopted a more open liberal position on dual-use civilian military equipment including approving the sale of Lear jets and Cessna dual-engine 401s and 402s to Pretoria.<sup>24</sup>

Under Ford, however, Washington took a more principled stance despite the strategic and economic advantages. In April 1975, the State Department denied an export license to Weller Smith Aircraft for the sale of SSQ-47 Sonobuoys to the SADF. The SSQ-47 Sonobuoys consisted of a VHF transmitter and an acoustic pinger and could certainly be classed as a non-lethal gray area item but the application was refused by the State Department as falling under the embargo of U.S. Munitions List Articles to the SADF. The State Department similarly denied an application by Teledyne Ryan to sell target drones to the SADF as it would have constituted a breach of the UN comprehensive arms embargo.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, From Kissinger to Scowcroft, October 24, 1974; GFL Website, The Department of State Bulletin, Vol. LXXI No.1849, U.S. votes against expulsion of South Africa from the UN, December 2, 1974, <https://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/dosb/1849.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> New York Times Digital Archive, New York Times, November 13, 1974, <https://www.nytimes.com/1974/11/13/archives/south-africa-is-suspended-by-un-assembly-9122-un-session-barssouth.html>

<sup>24</sup> LBJL, CF, NSF, Box 76, Africa, General, Vol. 1 2/64-6/64, To Chairman of Operating Committee from State Department, August 30, 1963; RNL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-208, NSDM 81, Memo for Vice President Agnew et al. from Kissinger, August 17, 1970.

<sup>25</sup> GFL, GRF Papers, Box 5, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, South Africa (2), Letter to T. Weller Smith from William B. Robinson, April 1, 1975; GFL, WHCF, Box 45, South Africa 6/1/75-11/30/75 Letter from the White House to Barry Shilletts, October 12, 1975.

In June 1975, Lockheed Corporation approached the Counselor to the President John O. Marsh regarding the possibility of the sale of P-3C Orions to the South African Air Force (SAAF) to replace their existing obsolete British Shackleton maritime patrol aircraft. Lockheed highlighted the fact that the Orion was configured and equipped solely for the purpose of ocean surveillance and had no capability in overland warfare due to its vulnerability to ground fire. The transaction would have been worth around \$200 million and according to Lockheed could have resulted in another \$700 million in sales of U.S. manufactured wide bodied aircraft to South Africa. The potential transaction, however, was again not approved due to the arms embargo and the SAAF continued to use the ageing Shackleton aircraft until November 1984.<sup>26</sup>

In November 1975, however, Ford did approve cooperation with the South African Government in their development of an ocean surveillance system. The White House granted an exemption to the arms embargo to facilitate the issuance of munitions control licenses for equipment and data to allow Pretoria to upgrade its current monitoring system. The International Signals and Control Corporation was the prime U.S. contractor to undertake the survey which extended to sonar and radar surveillance of coastal areas, surveillance of harbor areas, radio and electromagnetic signals monitoring and analysis.<sup>27</sup>

Presidential approval of this limited exemption was clearly based both on pragmatic and moral arguments. The White House had been urged by the Department of Defense to approve the exemption on the grounds that the upgraded maritime control system would bring real tangible advantages to U.S. national security due to South Africa's key position astride the world's shipping lanes. While clearly serving a military intelligence function the ocean surveillance did not constitute arms or armaments and the U.S. role was considered to be limited to providing technical advice and facilitating the purchase of equipment from U.S. commercial sources. Ford was also aware that enhancing cooperation between the two nations in this area would allow Washington, in a minor way, the rare opportunity to influence attitudes among the traditionally conservative South African military leadership.<sup>28</sup>

On a more minor, yet symbolically important note, in early 1976 the Ford administration was also required to take a stance on the issue of the importation of Cape fur seal skins. Under the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, a moratorium was placed on the importation of the skins of the Cape fur seal herd, traditionally harvested in both South Africa and Namibia, but authorized the Secretary of Commerce to grant for a period of one year after its enactment, an exemption of "undue economic hardship". The Secretary was also permitted waive the moratorium if it was certified that the hunting and killing of the animals in the country of origin was consistent with the provisions and policies of the act.<sup>29</sup>

In July 1973, the Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service granted the Fouke Company Inc of Greenville, North Carolina, the sole fur seal processing company in the U.S. a hardship exemption to import 50,500 skins from the the Cape fur seal herd. In 1975, the issue become politicized when Congressman Diggs, together with the South West African Peoples Organization (SWAPO) took the Department of Commerce to District Court over its implementation of the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Diggs alleged that the actions of Commerce conflicted with obligations assumed by the U.S. Government under UNSC Resolutions 269 and 301 regarding commercial dealings with Namibia. On May 13, 1975 the

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<sup>26</sup> GFL, John Marsh Files, Box 30, South Africa, Memo to Brent Scowcroft from Jack Marsh, June 17, 1975.

<sup>27</sup> GFL, GRF Papers, Box 5, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, South Africa (3), Memo for Scowcroft from Clinton E. Granger and Hal Horan, January 29, 1976; GFL, GRF Papers, Box 5, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, South Africa (3), Memorandum for Ford from Scowcroft, February 2, 1976.

<sup>28</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memo from Clements to Scowcroft, September 9, 1975.

<sup>29</sup> GFL, Edward C. Schultz Files, 1974-77, Box 25, Seals (Namibian Fur), U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia No.75-1775.

case was dismissed when the District Judge concluded that the court did not have jurisdiction and the issues before it were within the foreign policy authority of the President and therefore were non-justiciable.<sup>30</sup>

The issue resurfaced in the autumn of 1975 regarding the question of whether to allow the Fouke Company a further waiver to import 70,000 skins annually for 10 years under the premise that the seals would be culled in a manner consistent with the provisions of the act. On February 12, 1976, the Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service, Robert W. Schoning waived the moratorium to allow Fouke to import approximately 20,000 fur seal skins from South Africa but on March 10 denied a waiver for seal skins harvested in Namibia. The split decision regarding the waiver had stemmed from strong pressure from the State Department which opposed any U.S. Government waiver on Namibian skins as it was contrary to U.S. international obligations under the UN resolutions.<sup>31</sup>

In terms of U.S. commercial ties with Pretoria, the most significant decision confronting the White House related to the question of changing the policy of the Ex-Im Bank to allow direct lending to U.S. companies doing business in South Africa. Since 1964, the Ex-Im Bank, the official export credit agency of the U.S. Government, had been instructed not to provide direct credit financing to support exports to South Africa and could only offer insurance, guarantee and discount loan facilities to support such companies. As observed by Ex-Im Bank Chairman William J. Casey this prevented U.S. exporters from meeting the terms offered by officially supported credits of third-country competitors.<sup>32</sup>

In 1975 the Fluor Corporation of California was awarded a \$2.5 billion contract by the South African Government for the overall design of SASOL II, a coal liquification plant which when built would satisfy virtually all South Africa's liquid fuel requirements. The Fluor Corporation, in tandem with Pretoria, subsequently began an intense campaign of lobbying on Capitol Hill and with domestic agencies to change Ex-Im policy to permit direct lending to U.S. companies doing business in South Africa. The Fluor Corporation itself requested an exemption to allow an Ex-Im loan of \$225 million to SASOL and argued that further Ex-Im loans were necessary for U.S. companies to win supply contracts for the plant.<sup>33</sup>

On January 16, 1976, Ford ordered NSSM 236, a review of U.S. policy towards Ex-Im loans for exports to South Africa. The White House emphasized that NSSM 236 should not only examine the economic costs and benefits of a change in policy but also the consequences of such a changed policy for U.S. relations with both Pretoria and other African governments. The NSSM, which was to be undertaken by an interdepartmental group including representatives from Commerce, Defense, State and Treasury as well as the CIA, was also to consider the danger that such an action could pose to the unstable situation in the southern African region.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> GFL, Edward C. Schults Files, 1974-77, Box 25, Seals (Namibian Fur), U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia No.75-1775; GFL, Edward C. Schults Files, 1974-77, Box 25, Seals (Namibian Fur), U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia No.74-1292.

<sup>31</sup> GFL, Edward C. Schults Files, 1974-77, Box 25, Seals (Namibian Fur), Letter to Rogers C. B. Morton from Robert S. Ingersoll, January 16, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South-West Africa, Memo for Brent Scowcroft from Robert T. Hormats, March 11, 1976; GFL, Edward C. Schults Files, 1974-77, Box 25, Seals (Namibian Fur), Memorandum for Richardson from J.T. Smith, March 11, 1976.

<sup>32</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 7/1/75-1/15/76, Letter to Senator Harrison A. Williams from William J. Casey, December 18, 1975.

<sup>33</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 7/1/75-1/15/76, Letter to Scowcroft from James A. Baker III, December 30, 1975; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 1/16/76-2/29/76, Letter to Ford from Congressman Charles C. Diggs Jr., February 25, 1976; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memo from Malcolm Butler and Harold Horan to Scowcroft, February 11, 1976.

<sup>34</sup> GFL, GRF Papers, Box 1, National Security Adviser-National Security Study Memoranda and Decision Memoranda, NSDMs File, NSSM 236, January 16, 1976.

In early February, the interdepartmental group produced their response to NSSM 236. The report highlighted that a change in Ex-Im policy would marginally increase U.S. exports to South Africa, that the change would be not only welcomed by the business community and conservative elements in Congress and the public but could also lead to greater cooperation from Pretoria in other areas such as nuclear non-proliferation and the removal of non-tariff trade barriers. The interdepartmental group cautioned, however, that in so far as Washington was seen as a leading advocate of racial and social justice in the global arena its leadership would be negatively affected by a such a change in policy.<sup>35</sup>

The White House also faced considerable Congressional pressure from both sides of the aisle. Conservatives figures including Congressmen Edward Derwinski, Jack Kemp and Robert Michel supported a liberalization of Ex-Im policy for fiscal reasons as well as demonstrating support for the anti-communist stance taken by Pretoria. Indeed, according to Derwinski a majority of the members Congress would support a change in policy. Liberals including Senator Edward Kennedy and African-American Congressional leaders such as Diggs and Rangel, however, were outraged and vigorously opposed the proposed change. On March 5, Ford received a letter from Congressman Joseph P. Addabbo and forty-two of his Congressional colleagues urging Ford not to relax the policy as it would be a symbolic victory for Pretoria and increase U.S. alignment with South Africa to the detriment of relations with black Africa.<sup>36</sup>

On May 6, Ford, after reviewing the response to NSSM 236 and on the advice of National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, issued NSDM 330 which stated that there would be no change in Ex-Im Bank policy towards South Africa. The White House, while cognizant of the small economic advantages and potential gains in other areas was not prepared to risk further association with Pretoria to the detriment of the burgeoning yet delicate relationship with black Africa and more significantly risk Washington's moral leadership within the free world.<sup>37</sup>

## **Nuclear Issues**

The Ford administration was also confronted by the threat posed by an increasingly isolated and potentially nuclear armed South Africa. By the mid-1970s, Washington was well aware of the threat posed by nuclear proliferation both to the U.S. itself but also broader global stability. As noted by the CIA, the nuclear arsenals held by the U.S. and the Soviet Union (USSR) alone were sufficient to destroy human civilization and the picture was further complicated by nuclear weapons development in other nations including China and India. Indeed, in November 1976 in a statement on nuclear policy, Ford himself warned that the global

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<sup>35</sup> GFL, U.S. National Security Council Institutional Files 1974-1977, Box 65, NSDM 330 (2), Response to NSSM 236, February 6, 1976; GFL, NSC Institutional Files, 1974-1977, Box 40, NSSM 236 (1) Memo for Scowcroft from Malcolm Butler and Hal Horan, February 11, 1976.

<sup>36</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 7/1/75-1/15/76, Letter to Scowcroft from Congressman Robert Michel, December 4, 1975; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 7/1/75-1/15/76, Letter to Scowcroft from Congressman Bill Frenzel, December 17, 1975; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 1/16/76-2/29/76, Letter to Jeanne W. Davis from Congressman Jack Kemp, January 12, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 3/1/76-3/31/76, Letter to Ford from Congressman Rangel, February 24, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 1/16/76-2/29/76, Letter to Ford from Congressman Charles C. Diggs Jr., February 25, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 4/1/76-6/30/76, Letter to Ford from Senator Clark et al., March 4, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 23, Alliance for Progress to Loans-Funds, FO 4-2 3/1/76-3/31/76, Letter to Ford from Congressman Joseph P. Addabbo et al. March 5, 1976; GFL, South Africa 12/1/75-2/29/76, WHCF, Box 46, Letter to Congressman Derwinski from Vernon C. Loen, March 9, 1976.

<sup>37</sup> GFL, U.S. National Security Council Institutional Files 1974-1977, Box 65, NSDM 330 (1), Memo for Ford from Scowcroft, May 4, 1976; GFL, U.S. National Security Council Institutional Files 1974-1977, Box 65, NSDM 330 (1), NSDM 330, May 6, 1976.

community could not afford to allow potential nuclear weapons material or the technology to produce it proliferate uncontrolled across the globe and that a mass nuclear arms race would lead to “a world in which the security of all is imperiled.”<sup>38</sup>

In the case of South Africa, however, it was becoming increasingly clear the Pretoria was determined to develop a nuclear weapons capability. As observed in a Special National Intelligence Estimate from September 1974, the apartheid state considered itself under siege from hostile neighbors which combined with its growing international isolation and desire for regional prestige led to Pretoria seeking nuclear weapons for national defense. Indeed, as early as July 1970, Prime Minister John Vorster stated that South African scientists had developed a unique method for enriching uranium and that Pretoria would build a pilot facility to test the new method.<sup>39</sup>

On July 10, 1974, as noted in the CIA Weekly Surveyor, Dr. Louw Alberts, Vice-President of the South African Atomic Energy Board had claimed that Pretoria now possessed the capability to construct an atomic bomb. By the end of 1974, following a report from the South African Atomic Energy Board, Vorster had authorized the construction of at least one fission device as a peaceful nuclear explosive (PNE). The South African Government also purchased a site in the Kalahari desert to be used for underground testing. By mid April 1975, the new pilot plant at Valindaba, a contraction of a Zulu expression meaning “we don’t talk about this at all”, had begun operations to enrich uranium through the new method.<sup>40</sup>

In Washington, both the White House and the intelligence community had long been concerned by Pretoria’s efforts to achieve a nuclear capability. As early as 1969, South African nuclear research facilities had been targeted for surveillance by Corona satellites equipped with KH-4A cameras. In the early 1970s CIA agents had also been dispatched, under diplomatic cover, in a concerted effort to find out the details of the South African enrichment process. The mid 1970s, however, witnessed a rift between the Ford administration and legislators on Capitol Hill over how to approach the growing South African nuclear capability.<sup>41</sup>

Ford, despite Pretoria’s refusal to sign the 1968 Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or to place the plant at Valindaba under international safeguards, nevertheless believed that continued bilateral cooperation with Pretoria in the atomic field represented a logical approach as it allowed Washington to ensure that IAEA regulations were adhered to at least in terms of the facilities and transactions that the U.S. was involved in. The White House was also fully cognizant of the fact that other nations, notably France, were considerably looser in their adherence to safeguarding its nuclear exports which would make any U.S. withdrawal from atomic ties with South Africa a far more dangerous path of action.<sup>42</sup>

In contrast, liberal figures on Capitol Hill including Congressman Diggs and Senator Clark strongly opposed any atomic energy collaboration with Pretoria. In May 1976, Diggs and Clark convened formal Congressional hearings on the prospective sale of two General Electric

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<sup>38</sup> GFL, John Marsh Files, 1974-77, Box 5, CIA Political Briefings (1), Global Issues Confronting the United States, March 29, 1976; Department of State Bulletin, November 22, 1976, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., Statement by President Ford, October 23, 1976.

<sup>39</sup> NSA, To Chairman Ray et al. from James G. Poor, Director, Division of International Security Affairs, U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, October 2, 1974, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; J. Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company 2006) 244 and 270.

<sup>40</sup> NSA, CIA Weekly Surveyor, July 22, 1974, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; NSA, CIA Weekly Surveyor, April 25, 1975, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; Cervenka and Rogers, *The Nuclear Axis*, 210 and Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb*, 244-245.

<sup>41</sup> Cervenka and Rogers, *The Nuclear Axis*, 274-275; Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb*, 263

<sup>42</sup> GFL, John Marsh Files, 1974-77, Box 5, CIA Political Briefings (1), Global Issues Confronting the United States, March 29, 1976; GFL, GRF Papers, Box 5, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, South Africa (4), Memo for Scowcroft from David Elliott, May 28, 1976; T. Cochran, "Highly enriched uranium production for South African nuclear weapons," *Science & Global Security* 4 (2) 1994 163.

commercial reactors to South Africa as part of a agreement with a Dutch, Swiss and U.S. consortium to build two 1000 MW nuclear power stations at Koeberg near to Cape Town. While the State Department saw no conflict between the sale of materials to Pretoria for peaceful power generation under stringent safeguards and the U.S. diplomatic goal of ending institutionalized racial inequity in South Africa this argument received little credence from Clark and was strongly criticized on Capitol Hill.<sup>43</sup>

The South African Government, unwilling to accept being pilloried in Congress, terminated the contract with General Electric for the provision of the two reactors. As observed by NSC Staffer David Elliott, Pretoria saw “no reason to accept our opprobrium when there are equally good reactors available from other countries who would be more than happy to make the sale and would consider it a boon rather than a burden.” Indeed, Paris was quick to take advantage and South Africa swiftly awarded the \$1 billion contract to a French led consortium. The Ford administration was irritated by the Congressional action as it was viewed as undermining U.S. diplomatic leverage in southern Africa, a further visible deterioration of the U.S. role as a reliable supplier of nuclear equipment and perhaps most troubling that it was counterproductive in terms of non-proliferation objectives as Pretoria would acquire more plutonium than the U.S. would have permitted due to France not possessing the same stringent requirements regarding the disposition of the plutonium produced in exported reactors.<sup>44</sup>

In 1964, Washington had permitted the delivery of an Allis-Chalmers experimental 20-megawatt reactor to the South African Atomic Energy Commission for the use of civil atomic energy and further approved a continued supply of enriched uranium fuel for the duration of the bilateral atomic energy agreement which was later extended to 1977. The fuel shipments of highly enriched uranium to the South African reactor, while part of a bilateral agreement and under IAEA safeguards, came under heavy Congressional criticism that the White House was acting imprudently given the South African refusal to sign the NPT or allow international safeguards at Valindaba.<sup>45</sup>

Ford was initially reluctant to unilaterally refuse further shipments of the enriched uranium which would have involved breaking a long-standing legal agreement with Pretoria. In 1975, however, Washington became a founding member of the International Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) which set minimum requirements regarding nuclear exports to countries that had not yet signed the NPT. These included the recipient’s assurance to subject the materials to IAEA safeguards, exclude the materials from use in a nuclear explosion and ensure the items were not exported to a third party unless they also met the first two requirements. In light of Pretoria’s continued refusal to sign the NPT, the development of its nuclear program and South Africa’s avowed intent to become a major exporter of enriched uranium the White House decided in late 1976 to withhold the export licenses for the shipments

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<sup>43</sup> The National Archives Website (hereafter NA Website), Electronic Telgrams 1976, From State Department to Embassy Bangui et al. May, 1976, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; Van Wyk, "Ally or Critic", 206.

<sup>44</sup> GFL, GRF Papers, Box 5, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, South Africa (4), Memo for Scowcroft from David Elliott, May 28, 1976; NSA, CIA Weekly Surveyor, June 14, 1976, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; Van Wyk, "Ally or Critic?" 206.

<sup>45</sup> LBJL, CF, NSF, South Africa, 11/63-10/64, Vol. 1, To Bundy from Brubeck, August 17, 1964; LBJL, Charles E. Johnson Files (hereafter CEJF), Box 17, NSF, NUCLEAR-South African Research Reactor, To Bundy from C. Johnson, December 3, 1964; LBJL, CEJF, Box 17, NSF, NUCLEAR-South African Research Reactor, To Harriman from Kretzmann, December 14, 1964; GFL, James M. Cannon Files, Box 60, Domestic Council, Nuclear Policy Review Analytic Outline, 8/6/76 (Nuclear Policy Review).

of enriched uranium until Pretoria signed the NPT and agreed to IAEA supervision of its research facilities.<sup>46</sup>

The Ford administration, however, adopting a similar position to the issue of the expulsion of South Africa from the UN, looked askance at efforts to exclude Pretoria from its continued membership in the IAEA. Such a move was viewed as counterproductive to obtaining international safeguards for the nuclear research facilities and dissuading South Africa from developing nuclear weapons.<sup>47</sup>

As early as June 1976, the White House was aware that a group of African nations, spearheaded by Nigeria, attending the upcoming September IAEA General Conference and the associated Board of Governors meetings in Rio de Janeiro were planning to seek the expulsion of South Africa or its removal from the designated seat on the Board of Governors which it occupied as the most advanced African nation in the nuclear field. In tandem with London, which also feared the implications of expelling Pretoria from the IAEA, Washington undertook a series of low key demarches in relevant capitals lobbying against such an extreme measure. The U.S. also pressed Pretoria to accept IAEA safeguards over its enrichment plants pointing out that such a decision would garner goodwill and support both at the IAEA and the broader global community.<sup>48</sup>

On September 28, the IAEA General Conference, while avoiding the issue of expulsion, adopted a resolution to review the annual designation of South Africa as the member for Africa due to the inappropriateness and unacceptability of the apartheid regime for such a purpose. At the subsequent IAEA Board of Governors meeting South Africa was denied its designated seat and was replaced by Egypt. While the IAEA action prompted an angry protest by South African representative Kurt von Schirnding, from the perspective of Ford the avoidance of the expulsion of Pretoria allowed the international community a continued forum to press the the South African Government to adhere to safeguards and sign the NPT.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> NSA, CIA Weekly Surveyor, May 5, 1975, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; W. Stumpf, "South Africa's Nuclear Weapons Programme" in K. Bailey ed. *Weapons of Mass Destruction: Costs Versus Benefits*, (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1994) 67-68; Van Wyk, "Ally or Critic?" 207.

<sup>47</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Telegram from the Department of State to Embassy London, August 26, 1976; NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Mission IAEA Vienna to State Department, August, 1976, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>

<sup>48</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Telegram from the Department of State to Embassy London, August 26, 1976; NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Mission IAEA Vienna to State Department, August, 1976, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, Action Memorandum for Kissinger, September, 1976,

<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Consul Rio de Janeiro to State Department, September, 1976, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>.

<sup>49</sup> IAEA Website, International Nuclear Information System (INIS), Examination of Delegates' Credential, Resolution adopted during the 191st plenary meeting September 28, 1976, IAEA General Conference, November 4, 1976,

[https://inis.iaea.org/search/search.aspx?searchoption=everywhere&orig\\_q=south%20africa%20November%204%201976](https://inis.iaea.org/search/search.aspx?searchoption=everywhere&orig_q=south%20africa%20November%204%201976); Cervenka and Rogers, *The Nuclear Axis*, 157 and J. van Wyk, "Atoms, apartheid, and the agency: South Africa's relations with the IAEA, 1957-1995," *Cold War History* (2014) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2014.897697>.

## Angola, Rhodesia and Namibia

The Ford era also witnessed, for the first time, a concerted initiative by the White House to use its influence with Pretoria to advance its own strategic and moral goals in the southern African region. Whether as in the case of Angola, Ford hoped that South African military force would prevent communist expansion or the subsequent White House efforts to use Pretoria's leverage in Rhodesia and Namibia to achieve majority rule, this diplomatic engagement with the pariah regime marked a significant pragmatic shift in U.S. relations with the apartheid state.

Following the April 1974 Carnation Revolution in Portugal, the revolutionary forces made an immediate announcement that the new government would pursue a negotiated path to independence for the Portuguese African Territories leading to a geostrategic transformation in southern Africa and intensifying Cold War rivalries in the region. In Washington, the White House feared that Moscow would view this as an opportunity to extend its influence, especially military power, into southern Africa. Angola was of particular concern as the MPLA, armed by the USSR and aided by Cuban military instructors was swiftly emerging as the dominant force on the ground.<sup>50</sup>

The Ford administration, notably Secretary of State Kissinger, was convinced that U.S. intervention was necessary in order to prevent the expansion of communist influence in southern Africa. The White House was also urged by a number of black African leaders including Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda to resist the Cuban and Soviet adventurism in Angola. On July 18, Ford approved a \$6 million CIA plan for covert assistance to the more Western leaning National Liberation Front of Angola (FNLA) and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) guerrilla movements. By November, Washington had contributed approximately \$32 million to ensure the failure of the MPLA.<sup>51</sup>

Pretoria was also troubled by the implications of a MPLA victory. The Portuguese Territories along with Rhodesia had helped South Africa to form a 'White Redoubt', including close military and intelligence collaboration, against the rising tide of Black Nationalism. The National Party now feared that the MPLA would provide a safe haven for SWAPO guerrillas to attack Namibia. In July, U.S. intelligence agencies began to work closely with their South African counterparts to thwart the MPLA. Washington also pressed Pretoria to intervene militarily to prevent a communist victory. On October 22, South Africa launched Operation Savannah which sought to eliminate the MPLA from the border region then move north to capture Luanda.<sup>52</sup>

Operation Savannah, however, was stymied by the sudden intervention of Cuban combat troops. While the possibility of Cuban intervention had not occurred to either the White

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<sup>50</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XXVIII, Memo for the Record, June 5 1975; FRUS 1969-1976 Volume XXVIII, Memo for the Record, July 14, 1975; H. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012) 794-798.

<sup>51</sup> GFL Website, Box 4, Tanzania-Presidential Correspondence with Foreign Leaders, Memo for George S. Springsteen Jr. from Jeanne W. Davis, May 8, 1975; FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XXVIII, NSSM 224, May 26, 1975; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa Paper, June 13, 1975; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, MemCon, June 20, 1975; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, Memo for the Record, July 14, 1975; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, MemCon, July 18, 1975; A. DeRoche, *Black, White and Chrome: The United States and Zimbabwe, 1953 to 1998*, (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2001)209; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 802-808.

<sup>52</sup> Cory Library (hereafter CL), Rhodesia-Zimbabwe Papers (hereafter RZP), Box 2/007 A, Cabinet Memoranda 1967 193-235, Note from G.B. Clarke, December 12, 1967; CL, RZP, Box2/009 (A), Cabinet Memoranda 1970 131-200, Memo from B.H. Mussett, July 17, 1970; Department of Defence Archives, South Africa (hereafter DODSA), HSI/AMI Group 5, Box 428, Z/26/18. *Johannesburg Star*, November 1, 1975; DODSA, HSI/AMI Group 5, Box 409, Z/23/13/4/2. Directorate of Operations, Evaluation: Operation Savannah; P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 259 and 276, 295 and 300-306.



House or the CIA, Havana possessed a history of military involvement in Africa, including Angola, dating back to the mid-1960s. On November 4, in response to the South African invasion, Cuban President Fidel Castro approved Operation Carlota which eventually dispatched 35,000-40,000 military personnel to Angola in support of the MPLA. The Cuban presence, along with a massive increase in Soviet arms deliveries boosted the resistance of the MPLA and halted the South African advance.<sup>53</sup>

On December 19, in response to leaked revelations concerning the covert collusion with Pretoria, the Senate passed an amendment to the Defense Appropriations Bill, which prevented any further clandestine support in Angola. The amendment was endorsed by the House of Representatives on January 27, 1976. While Ford described the legislation as “deplorable” and Kissinger later asserted that Congress had been well informed all along concerning Angola the political maneuvering in Washington did little to assuage the dismay in Pretoria at the Congressional decision.<sup>54</sup>

In December, faced by both an increasingly difficult military situation and the loss of U.S. support, the South African National Security Council decided to order the military to gradually withdraw from Angola. On March 27, 1976 following Angolan assurances not to sabotage the Cunene River hydroelectric project, the SADF crossed back into Namibia. Without the military backing of Pretoria, FNLA and UNITA resistance collapsed leaving the MPLA in control of Luanda and the majority of the country. The South African military indicated, however, that cross border insurgent operations would meet with a strong SADF response.<sup>55</sup>

For the White House, the covert intervention in Angola was viewed as a debacle that failed to prevent the establishment of a Marxist government while the exposure of cooperation with Pretoria undermined Ford’s desire to support racial change in southern Africa. In response, on April 21, Ford directed NSSM 241, a comprehensive review of U.S. policy in southern Africa including the likelihood of further Cuban or Soviet actions in the region and to examine the possible options to help in achieving peaceful transitions to majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia.<sup>56</sup>

The subsequent review highlighted that the consistent refusal of the white minority regimes of southern Africa to share political power with the black majority caused both global and domestic problems for the U.S. Government. The MPLA victory in Angola, backed by Soviet military equipment and Cuban combat troops had furthered exacerbated the situation by giving the communist powers a base of operations in the region from which to expand their influence. The report further observed that the situations in Rhodesia and Namibia were the

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<sup>53</sup> FRUS, Volume XXVIII, Report of Working Group on Angola, October 22, 1975; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, Memo for the Record, November 14, 1975; DODSA, HSI/AMI Group 5, Box 409, Z/23/13/4/2. Directorate of Operations, Evaluation: Operation Savannah; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 8, 88, 175-177, 187, 197, 228, 305-306, 316-317, 325 and 374-377; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 815-816.

<sup>54</sup> FRUS, Volume XXVIII, Minutes of NSC Meeting; DODSA, HIS/AMI Group 5, Box 429, Z/26/18/1, *Rand Daily Mail*, January 17, 1976; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 321 and 332; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 826-832.

<sup>55</sup> FRUS, Volume XXVIII, Memo from Director of Central Intelligence William Colby to Kissinger, December 23, 1975; DODSA, HSI/AMI Group 5, Box 428, Z/26/18 (2), HSAW/190, February 1976; GFL, GRF Papers, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, Box 6, South Africa - State Department Telegrams, From SECSTATE – NODIS, From Kissinger to Consulate Cape Town, March 1976; GFL, Dale Van Atta Papers (hereafter DVA Papers), Box 13, Intelligence Documents, National Intelligence Bulletin, March 3, 1976; DODSA, HSI/AMI Group 5, Box 429, Z/26/18/1, *Rand Daily Mail*, March 23, 1976; DODSA, HSI/AMI Group 5, Box 409, Z/23/13/4/2. Directorate of Operations, Evaluation: Operation Savannah.

<sup>56</sup> GFL, GRF Papers, National Security Adviser-National Security Study Memoranda and Decision Memoranda, Box 2, NSSMs File, NSSM 241, April 21, 1976; E. Michel, “Racial Justice and the Cold War: Gerald R. Ford, Rhodesia and the Geneva Conference of 1976”, *Safundi*, 20 (4) 2019 478.

most likely stimulate further Cuban and Soviet expansion due to both their disputed international legal status.<sup>57</sup>

The NSSM concluded that it was in the moral and strategic interests of the U.S. to engage in diplomatic initiatives designed to bring about majority rule in both Rhodesia and Namibia. In the case of South Africa, the report recommended that while maintaining a posture of hostility against apartheid itself but actively engaging with Pretoria to seek acceptable settlements to resolve the Rhodesian and Namibian questions. Indeed intelligence reports further indicated to the Ford administration that South Africa was the only actor who possessed the requisite leverage to force Salisbury or Windhoek to come to the negotiating table.<sup>58</sup>

Even before the publication of NSSM 241 Ford had concluded the rational necessity of diplomatic cooperation with South Africa in order to achieve the geopolitical and moral objective of attaining majority rule and racial equality in southern Africa. Indeed, on April 27, in an emotive speech in Lusaka, Zambia, Kissinger reaffirmed that Washington opposed minority rule and did not recognize the existing regimes in Rhodesia and Namibia. He further stressed that the U.S. was ready to work closely with both black African nations and South Africa to achieve a “rapid, just and African” solution to bring about majority rule.<sup>59</sup>

Kissinger, however, was careful not to antagonize the Afrikaner leadership in Pretoria. While he criticized the institutionalized racial discrimination inherent in apartheid the Secretary of State stressed that the white South Africans were not “colonialists” and historically were an “African people” who could show their commitment to Africa by using their influence in Salisbury and Windhoek to bring about independence and majority rule.<sup>60</sup>

Pretoria, engaged in its own exercise of détente with black Africa, was pleased by prospective U.S. participation in formulating internationally acceptable political settlements in Rhodesia and Namibia. South African Foreign Minister Muller noted with appreciation the increasing U.S. concern with “Russo-Cuban imperialism” in the region while Vorster in a speech before the Cape Town Press Club pledged himself “to be always willing...to play a positive part in promoting peace and understanding between peoples in southern Africa.” Indeed, as noted by Miller, Vorster was especially pleased by the prospect of U.S. involvement in the Rhodesian issue as Pretoria could fall into “Washington’s slipstream and let Kissinger make the running for him” as well as using perceived U.S. pressure for a settlement to neutralize domestic South African support for Rhodesia.<sup>61</sup>

Domestically, however, the White House decision proved to be highly controversial. While the Republican administration was commended by Democrats and diverse liberal groups, Kissinger’s actions also led to a torrent of criticism from conservatives. Republican presidential candidate Ronald Reagan decried the Ford policy as promoting a “massacre” in Rhodesia. Nevertheless, at the NSC meeting on May 11, while Ford himself acknowledged that

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<sup>57</sup> GFL, U.S. National Security Council Institutional Files 1974-1977, Box 44, NSSM 241 – United States Policy in Southern Africa (1), NSSM 241. Southern African Contingencies and Options; Michel, “Racial Justice and the Cold War”, 478.

<sup>58</sup> GFL, DVA Papers, Box 13, Intelligence Chron File, National Intelligence Bulletin, March 16, 1976; GFL, DVA Papers, Box 13, Intelligence Chron File, CIA Weekly Review, March 12, 1976; GFL, U.S. National Security Council Institutional Files 1974-1977, Box 44, NSSM 241 – United States Policy in Southern Africa (2), NSSM 241. U.S. Policy in Selected Areas of Sub-Saharan Africa, August 1976.

<sup>59</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 4, CO 1-1 Africa 1/1/76-1/20/77, Address by Kissinger, April 27 1976; E. Michel, *The White House and White Africa: Presidential Policy Towards Rhodesia During the UDI Era, 1965–1979*, (New York: Routledge 2018) 157-158.

<sup>60</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 4, CO 1-1 Africa 1/1/76-1/20/77, Address by Kissinger, April 27 1976.

<sup>61</sup> GFL, NSA Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-1977 Box 19, MemCon, April 15, 1976; GFL, National Security Adviser Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files, Box 24, South Africa, Extract from Statement made by Vorster, May 18, 1976; GFL, National Security Adviser Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files, Box 24, South Africa, Unofficial translation of an extract from statement made by Muller, May 18, 1976; Michel, *The White House and White Africa*, 158; Miller, *An African Volk*, 229.

the administration had suffered “political flack” due to its approach towards southern Africa which could even affect the outcome of Republican primaries the White House would “continue to do what is right”.<sup>62</sup>

On June 23-24, Kissinger met with Vorster and Muller in Grafenau, Germany. It was a historic moment as no Secretary of State had held talks with a South African Prime Minister since Edward Stettinius met with Jan Smuts in 1945. Vorster agreed that if the U.S. could put together a package with sufficient guarantees for the economic prospects of the white community then Pretoria would use its influence with Salisbury to push for a settlement. He warned, however, that white Rhodesian morale was very high and observed that Salisbury could still “liquidate the terrorists, and they’re doing quite well.” In terms of Namibia, Kissinger stated that a settlement which created either a unitary or federal state presented no problem for Washington provided it was acceptable to the international community and urged Pretoria to press the Turnhalle Conference, set up in 1975 and comprising of representatives of eleven ethnic groups but not including SWAPO, to move towards a rapid agreement to avoid further difficulties at the UN.<sup>63</sup>

Only a week before the historic meeting violence had erupted in the streets of Soweto a large black township outside of Johannesburg. While the unrest was sparked by the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in local schools the underlying cause, as noted by U.S. Ambassador William G. Bowdler, was increasing black South African anger and frustration at apartheid itself. The South African Government responded forcefully, indeed brutally, to the unrest dispatching large numbers of heavily armed police supported by helicopters leading to a number of civilian casualties.<sup>64</sup>

The Ford administration was quick to condemn the actions of Pretoria, indeed on June 19, at the UN Acting U.S. Ambassador Albert W. Sherer Jr. stated that “the tragic events occurring in South Africa are a sharp reminder that when a system deprives a people of the basic elements of human dignity and expression, only the bitterest results can be expected” and called on South Africa to abandon a system which was clearly not acceptable under any standard of human rights. It is noteworthy, however, of the measure of the importance of Kissinger’s meeting with Vorster that both European allies including Britain and France and a number of black African leaders urged the White House to go ahead with the talks despite the racial unrest.<sup>65</sup>

Following the talks in Grafenau, Ford pressed forward in his efforts to obtain a viable settlement in Rhodesia. In conjunction with the British, the de jure authority in Salisbury, the U.S. agreed a political blueprint comprising of a two tiered government and economic program which included a system of financial assurances for white Rhodesians to stay and benefits for the independence government to improve the economic position of the black population. The Anglo-American plan was broadly approved by Pretoria during a second meeting between

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<sup>62</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 43, CO 124 Rhodesia 8/9/74-5/31/76, Letter to Ford from Charles B. Rangel, March 15, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 4, CO 1-1 Africa 1/1/76-1/20/77, Letter to Ford from Harold P. Stern, April 28, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 43, CO 124 Rhodesia 8/9/74-5/31/76, Letter to Ford from Herbert J. Denton Jr., April 29, 1976; GFL, NSA Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976 Box 34, April 23-May 7-Africa TOSEC (13), Cable to Kissinger, May 1976; GFL, NSA/NSC Meeting File, 1974-1977, Box 2, Minutes of NSC Meeting, May 11, 1976; Michel, “Racial Justice and the Cold War”, 479-480.

<sup>63</sup> GFL, NSA Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-1977 Box 20, MemCon, June 23 1976; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, MemCon, June 24, 1976.

<sup>64</sup> NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Embassy Pretoria to State Department, July, 1976, <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; Michel, *The White House and White Africa*, 160.

<sup>65</sup> GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa 12/1/75-2/29/76, Statement by Acting USUN Ambassador Albert W. Sherer Jr., June 19, 1976; GFL, NSA Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976. Box 38, HAK Messages for the President, Memo for Ford from Scowcroft, June 23 1976; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 964 and 967-969.

Kissinger and Vorster at the Dolder Grand Hotel near Zurich, Switzerland. In fact, the South African Government had already begun to exert its leverage over Salisbury demonstrated by the withdrawal of South African helicopter crews from Rhodesia.<sup>66</sup>

On September 19, in Pretoria, after having obtained the agreement of the Front Line black African leaders, Kissinger presented the Anglo-American proposals to Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith. Vorster urged the Rhodesians to sign the agreement and in a veiled threat stated that Pretoria was no longer willing to continue to support Salisbury either financially or militarily. The Rhodesians recognized that they had little choice but to acquiesce. In the words of Smith, "Having a gun pointed at one's head leaves no room for equivocation." Five days later, the Rhodesian leader, in a broadcast to the nation, announced that his government had agreed the Anglo-American proposals including the acceptance of majority rule within two years.<sup>67</sup>

The subsequent conference in Geneva, though, convened by Britain in October to address the formation of an interim government, proved to be an abject failure. The White House blamed London for the failed negotiations due to its perceived catering to the demands of the radical Black Nationalists while ignoring the reality that any settlement would need to be accepted by all sides. The failure of the talks, however, was not entirely due to British ineptitude but also stemmed from an inherent unwillingness to compromise among both the Nationalist factions and the Rhodesian Government which was exacerbated by inflammatory conduct from all sides.<sup>68</sup>

In the case of Namibia, the Ford administration continued to urge Pretoria to press the Turnhalle delegates to move swiftly forward towards an internationally acceptable agreement on independence. The State Department was aware, however, that the real power in Windhoek lay with Vorster and by proxy nothing would happen at the conference that was not acceptable to Pretoria. Under pressure from Washington and other Western powers to demonstrate progress before the recurrent UNSC deadline at the end of August regarding potential sanctions on Pretoria over its occupation of Namibia, Vorster and Foreign Minister "Pik" Botha were able to persuade the delegates to agree on an independence date of December 31, 1978 and following the approval of a constitution an interim government would take over oversee the transition from South African rule.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> FRUS, Volume XXVIII, Memo from Scowcroft to Ford, August 5, 1976; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, MemCon, August 16, 1976; GFL, NSA Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976, Box 38, HAK Messages for the President, Memo for Ford from Scowcroft, September 5, 1976; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, MemCon, September 6, 1976; I. Smith, *Bitter Harvest: Zimbabwe and the Aftermath of its Independence*, (London: John Blake, 2008) 195-197.

<sup>67</sup> GFL, NSA Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976, Box 42, HAK Messages for the President, Memo for Ford from Scowcroft, September 15, 1976; GFL, NSA Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976, Box 42, HAK Messages for the President, Memo for Ford from Scowcroft, September 17, 1976; GFL, NSA Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976, Box 42, HAK Messages for the President, Memo for Ford from Scowcroft, September 18, 1976; CL, RZP, Geneva Files Informal Meetings (American), Record of Meetings, September 19, 1976; FRUS, Volume XXVIII, Telegram from Kissinger to Scowcroft, September 20, 1976; CL, RZP, Geneva Files, Background Information 2, Prime Minister's Address to the Nation, September 24, 1976; Michel, "Racial Justice and the Cold War", 482; Smith, *Bitter Harvest*, 201-207.

<sup>68</sup> GFL, NSA Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, Box 14, Switzerland-State Department Telegrams to SECSTATE-NODIS (11 and 12), Telegram to Kissinger from U.S. Mission Geneva, November 1976; GFL, NSA Presidential Country Files for Europe and Canada, Box 14, Switzerland-State Department Telegrams to SECSTATE-NODIS (23), Telegram to Kissinger from U.S. Mission Geneva, December, 1976; GFL, NSA Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-1977, Box 20, MemCon, December 16, 1976; Michel, "Racial Justice and the Cold War", 483-484.

<sup>69</sup> GFL, GRF Papers, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, Box 6, South Africa - State Department Telegrams, To SECSTATE - NODIS (1), From Embassy Cape Town to Kissinger, June 1976;

The autumn of 1976, however, witnessed little further progress in resolving the Namibian situation. Both the White House and many Turnhalle delegates had hoped, following Kissinger's September meeting with Vorster in Pretoria, that an international constitutional conference would be convened comprising of the representatives from Turnhalle, SWAPO, South Africa and the UN. While South Africa reluctantly agreed to participate in such a conference, in October, SWAPO adopted a more hardline position refusing to negotiate with the Turnhalle delegates and stated it would only deal directly with Vorster, an unacceptable condition for Pretoria.<sup>70</sup>

The gatherings of the Constitutional Committee proved to be equally fruitless. The conservative white delegates continued to insist on a system in which the bulk of legislative power would be granted to ethnically based regional administrations, which the other racial groupings discerned to be barely disguised form of apartheid, and instead sought a strong centralized government. Despite strong pressure by Vorster to force the Constitutional Committee to move faster in December the deliberations were adjourned until January 18, 1977, without having resolved any of the basic constitutional issues.<sup>71</sup>

While the diplomatic initiatives ultimately ended in failure the efforts were demonstrative of the stance adopted by Ford. The White House had enlisted the assistance of the practitioners of apartheid to achieve both its geopolitical and its moral objectives in southern Africa. Such collaboration did not mean, though, that Washington would give Pretoria a free pass on its own racial policies. Indeed, as Kissinger informed Vorster in September 1976, regardless of the success or failure of the diplomatic efforts there was "no quid pro quo" for South Africa.<sup>72</sup>

## Conclusion

Overall, during Ford era, the White House adopted a stance of principled pragmatism in its relations with the apartheid state. The President himself entered the White House with a genuine commitment to moral values, including racial justice, both domestically and globally. Indeed, Ford stated, both publicly and privately, his unequivocal opposition to continued white minority rule on the southern tip of Africa. The Ford administration, though, while wishing to demonstrate its disapproval of South African racial policies, nevertheless opposed measures that it viewed as

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GFL, GRF Papers, National Security Adviser-Presidential Country Files for Africa, Box 6, South Africa - State Department Telegrams, To SECSTATE – NODIS (1), From Kissinger to Embassy Pretoria, July 1976; GFL, NSA Presidential Agency File 1974-1977, Box 21, USUN (11) 8/1/76-12/14/76, Memo from Scowcroft; GFL, National Security Adviser Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files, Box 24, South Africa, Statement made by Muller, August 13, 1976; GFL, WHCF, Box 46, South Africa, Speech by Kissinger, August 31, 1976; J. Seiler, "South Africa in Namibia: Persistence, Misperception, and Ultimate Failure", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 20, 4 (1982), 694

<sup>70</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, MemCon, September 16, 1976; NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Embassy Pretoria to State Department, October, 1976,

<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Embassy Pretoria to State Department, December 1976,

<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; Seiler, "South Africa in Namibia", 694.

<sup>71</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, MemCon, September 16, 1976;

NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Embassy Pretoria to State Department, October, 1976,

<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; NA Website, Electronic Telegrams, 1976, From Embassy Pretoria to State Department, December 1976, From Embassy Pretoria to State Department, December 1976,

<https://aad.archives.gov/aad/displaypartialrecords.jsp?f=4412&mtch=1078&q=south+africa+1976&cat=PL35&dt=2082&tf=X&bc=sl>; Seiler, "South Africa in Namibia", 694.

<sup>72</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, MemCon, September 6, 1976.

counterproductive to ending apartheid by removing international or U.S. leverage over the Afrikaner leadership in Pretoria.

In terms of commercial ties, Ford took a tougher line than the previous occupants of the Oval Office in his interpretation of the arms embargo and despite strong domestic pressure refused to lift the ban on direct Ex-Im Bank loans to South Africa. While initially reluctant to reduce Washington's influence over the South African atomic energy program the continued refusal of Pretoria to sign the NPT and the growing evidence of its nuclear weapons program the White House chose to unilaterally end shipments of enriched uranium to South Africa. The Ford administration, though, sought to prevent Pretoria's expulsion from both the IAEA and UN on the grounds that further isolating South Africa from the global community was counterproductive to the goal of achieving racial equality by removing the already limited global influence over the South African Government.

Ford also took the pragmatic decision to use Washington's relationship with Pretoria as a tool to advance broader U.S. geopolitical and moral objectives. In Angola, the White House encouraged South Africa to intervene militarily in an effort to prevent the spread of communism and Soviet military influence and subsequently enlisted Pretoria as part of a broader diplomatic effort to bring about majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia. While in each case these efforts ended in failure, Ford's involvement in southern African issues set a precedent of high-level U.S. intervention which continued into the ensuing Carter era and equally importantly highlighted the practical benefits of engagement with South Africa to further Washington's own aims including the attainment of racial equality in the region.

Indeed, the Ford administration's relations with South Africa and the broader southern African region, guided by the principled pragmatism encapsulated in the political persona of the President himself, should be seen as more of a precursor to the ensuing Carter administration than a continuation of the previous Nixonian strategy. In terms of both its increased emphasis on the importance of morality in determining policy yet also a willingness to engage with the apartheid state in order to achieve its strategic and moral objectives, the Ford era is more reflective of the approach adopted by his Democratic successor in the Oval Office than the cold real politik and private racism that shaped the policy of his Republican predecessor.