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"I Have Concluded That the US Government Will Adopt a New Focus in Its Policies Towards the Government of South Africa." President Jimmy Carter and Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the shift in the bilateral relationship between the United States and South Africa that occurred during the period of the Carter administration. The White House, guided primarily by Carter's deep commitment to humanitarian principles made a progressive transformation of South African society and the ending of racial discrimination a major foreign policy objective. Both publicly and privately the Carter administration took a tough stance against Pretoria including supporting a mandatory UN arms embargo. Ultimately, however, Carter failed in his goal of dismantling apartheid and his opposition to commercial sanctions led to a deepening of economic ties between Washington and Pretoria. His administration was also unable to stop South Africa from joining the nuclear club.

Introduction

On 9 March 1977, President Jimmy Carter issued Presidential Directive 5. The directive represented a major tilt in the approach of the White House regarding the bilateral relationship between Washington and Pretoria. The folksy candidate and former peanut farmer instructed his administration that the United States Government would adopt a new focus in its policies towards apartheid South Africa with the objective a progressive transformation of South African society and the ending of racial discrimination.

This article will demonstrate that both publicly and privately the Carter administration did indeed take a tougher and more hostile line against the practitioners of apartheid. The White House took a series of actions including the removal of the US missile tracking station, a reduction in government personnel, both diplomatic and military, stationed in South Africa and reducing the maximum time period that the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im Bank)

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could offer loans and guarantees for the South African market. The White House also tightened significantly the voluntary US arms embargo and supported United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 418 which imposed a mandatory ban on arms sales to Pretoria,

While the stance taken by the White House against led to chagrin and anger among the National Party leadership in Pretoria it failed, however, to achieve its stated aim of the gradual dismantling of apartheid or fundamentally weakening the South African state. In the broader context of confronting white minority in southern Africa the Carter administration enjoyed greater success by exerting pressure on South Africa to help resolve the vexed question of Rhodesia although a resolution of the Namibian issue remained elusive.

In the case of South Africa itself the White House was unwilling to escalate the level of confrontation to include economic sanctions. Indeed, during Carter's term in office trade with South Africa, both in term of exports and imports, grew significantly and US investment in the apartheid state rose to nearly $2.5 billion dollars. Furthermore, despite Carter's efforts and on his watch, the South Africa nuclear weapons program advanced to the point that in September 1979 that South Africa, in collaboration with Israel, may well have demonstrated its capability by conducting a nuclear test in the south Atlantic.

Historiography

There is a wealth of existing literature that offers a range of arguments that purport to explain US foreign policy towards southern Africa during the Cold War and de-colonisation eras. *The Cold War and the Color Line* by Thomas Borstelmann underlines the struggle faced by successive US presidential administrations in balancing Cold War concerns with the growing movement for racial justice both in the US and southern Africa. *Cold War and Black Liberation* by Thomas Noer explores US 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.[1]

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 US 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 Carter years.[2]

In fact there exists a paucity of literature directly examining relations with Pretoria through the lens of the Carter administration or analysing the success or failure of the approach adopted by the White House. *US Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa*, by Alex Thomson offers an impressive overview of US-South Africa relations throughout the apartheid era. The book, however, does not exclusively focus on the late 1970s, and principally examines policy through the lens of a clash between human rights and strategic or economic interests.[3]

Jimmy Carter in Africa by Nancy Mitchell, provides a perceptive account of Carter's approach towards the threat of communist expansion in Rhodesia and the Horn of Africa. 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 Africa and the contentious issue of domestic race relations. The work, however, remains primarily an examination of White House policy towards Salisbury and not her neighbour south of the Limpopo.[4]

The difficulties in obtaining official archival documents in South Africa relating to government policy and foreign relations during the apartheid era also forces historians of the relationship between Washington and Pretoria to rely on records originating from archives based in the United States. While this poses a challenge to any traditional bilateral narrative it is far less problematic when analysing the rationale behind the changing nature of Washington's approach towards the apartheid state through the lens the Carter years and the actions taken by his administration.

In this article, I seek to clarify and add to the previous scholarship especially the work of Thomson. I propose that under the leadership of President Carter, primarily due to his deeply held commitment to human rights, Washington took a tougher and more aggressive stance than any of his predecessors in seeking an end to apartheid in South Africa. The Carter administration, however, was not prepared to engage in punitive economic sanctions on Pretoria and despite lengthy talks and repeated warnings was unable to prevent the continued development of the South African nuclear weapons program.

Background

On 26 May 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 neighbourhoods, 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.[5]

In the global arena, long before Carter assumed the Presidency in 1977, 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 5 December 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.[6]

Over the course of the next three 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 7 August 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 African Unity (OAU) on 23 May 1963, the organisation 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 US response to apartheid was far less clear cut.[7]

In the early apartheid era, geopolitical considerations and economic ties dominated US 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.[8]

During the subsequent John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations, however, 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. Kennedy adopted a posture of public criticism of and limited cooperation with Pretoria as well as the imposition of a bilateral arms embargo, albeit with

loopholes, but sought to avoid tangible actions that would lead to a dangerous level of friction with a de facto Cold War ally. In the Johnson era, the differing racial trajectory of the US and South Africa led to a series of vexing diplomatic clashes between the two nations, including over the multi racial receptions hosted at the US Embassy, but economic interests and geostrategic concerns prevented the establishment of an overly hostile policy towards the National Party government in Pretoria.[9]

Following the election of Richard Nixon the US shifted towards a closer relationship with South Africa. For Nixon, who was also apathetic to the cause of black liberation, the military strength and vehement anti-communism of Pretoria combined with the close economic ties, US businesses had invested approximately one billion dollars in South Africa and Washington enjoyed a highly favourable balance of trade payments, trumped any concerns the administration may have had over apartheid. Under Nixon, Washington also relaxed the 1963 arms embargo as it related to the sale of dual-purpose civilian/military equipment, termed 'gray area' exports, to South Africa.[10]

His successor in the Oval Office, President Gerald R. Ford, followed a more moral approach, tempered by pragmatism, in his administration's relationship with Pretoria. Ford took a stricter line on the grey area arms sales and refusing to lift the Ex-Im policy of direct bank loans for US corporations investing in the apartheid state. The White House, however, opposed stronger actions such as the removal of Pretoria's membership from international organisations as counterproductive to the goal of ending apartheid. Ford was also prepared to actively engage with South Africa, both diplomatically and through covert military support, to combat communist expansion in the southern African region.[11]

President Jimmy Carter (1977–81)

The closely fought electoral triumph of Carter over Ford in November 1976 marked a major change in the relationship between Washington and Pretoria. The vehement opposition of Carter to the apartheid regime was shaped primarily by his deeply held ideological belief in the importance of democracy and human rights. As early as his inaugural address, Carter stated that 'commitment to human rights must be absolute' and that Washington had a special obligation to take on these moral duties which are invariably in its own best interests.[12]

The background of the new president was also of key importance in shaping his approach to foreign affairs. Carter grew up in rural Georgia during the depression era 1930s and witnessed the injustices of Jim Crow segregation in the Deep South. As a member of the 'New South' generation he came to the Washington with a sense of responsibility and a degree of guilt over the treatment of African-Americans. For Carter, there was a direct correlation

between the Civil Rights movement and black liberation struggle in southern Africa.[13]

Carter's ideological commitment to human rights, racial equality and majority rule was shared by many leading figures in the White House including Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and US Ambassador to the UN Andrew Young. The new administration attached central importance to human rights when formulating foreign policy. This was demonstrated by the establishment of an Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs and concern over human rights abuses led the president to end or reduce aid to a number of vociferously anti-communist regimes including Argentina, Chile, South Korea and the Philippines.[14]

This policy shift had especially profound implications for the white dominated governments of southern Africa. In the view of the White House, the refusal of the National Party government to grant equal rights to all its citizens and its obduracy in rejecting majority rule was a flagrant example of racial discrimination and a violation of the basic human rights of the non-white South African population. Indeed as early as 8 February 1977, at a policy review meeting it was agreed by all representatives present, including from the traditionally more conservative departments' of Defense, Treasury and the CIA, that due to the continuance of apartheid US policy was reaching a 'watershed' regarding South Africa and unless significant improvements were made in the field of race relations then it would no longer be 'business as usual' with Pretoria.[15]

The new president was also concerned by the geopolitical Cold War realities of the late 1970s especially the increasing spread of Soviet and Cuban influence in southern Africa. The Cuban presence in Angola was of particular concern. While previous administrations, including that of his immediate predecessor in the Oval Office, Gerald Ford, had considered the vehemently anti-communist regime in Pretoria as a bulwark against Moscow in the region, Carter considered the continued presence of apartheid and broader white minority rule as providing a dangerous rationale for further communist meddling.[16]

Indeed, in a meeting with the South African Ambassador in Washington Roelof 'Pik' Botha on 28 January 1977, only weeks after Carter's inauguration, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski emphasised to Botha that if the struggle between whites and black in southern Africa becomes a 'red-white conflict' then it would be a 'disaster'. He further warned that Washington would not intervene to support South Africa in the event of such a situation.[17]

Domestically, the White House was also swayed by the electoral necessity of maintaining the increasingly important African-American vote. In the presidential election of 1976, Carter had won 94% of the black vote which proved critical in his electoral triumph. While Carter won every southern state except Virginia, the majority of white voters in those states had opted for Ford and

the Democratic victory had been achieved on the back of the black vote. It is also important to note that black Civil Rights figures, including those close to the White House, were some of the most implacable foes of the apartheid state.[18]

While the White House gave short shrift to the argument concerning the military importance of South Africa on the Cape sea route or for missile and satellite tracking the Carter administration was well aware of the strategic and economic need for continued access to the mineral wealth of South Africa notably including critical minerals such as chromium, manganese, vanadium and platinum group metals. Washington also possessed deep bilateral economic ties with Pretoria. By 1976, around 300 US corporations invested in South Africa included Ford and General Motors and the total value of US investment in South Africa had risen to $1.7 billion. In terms of trade, US exports to South Africa were approximately $1.1 billion with a favourable balance of payments. The Carter administration was well aware, therefore that any broad economic sanctions against Pretoria could have damaging economic and strategic ramifications for the United States itself.[19]

Presidential Directive 5

President Carter, within days of taking office, made clear his intentions to shape a new approach regarding South Africa. On January 21, Carter issued Presidential Review Memorandum 4 which instructed the Policy Review Committee under the chairmanship of the Department of State to undertake a review of policy towards white regimes of southern Africa. In particular, the committee was asked to propose and analyse options for a future US posture towards South Africa.[20]

In early February the Policy Review Committee submitted its report. The members of the committee argued that a major objective of the United States must be seeking an end to apartheid and racial discrimination in South Africa both on humanitarian grounds and also to prevent the intensified unrest and violence that would encourage communist infiltration into the region. This recommendation alone represented a major change from the focus on strategic and economic interests which was a large policy determinant for the previous administrations.[21]

The report warned, however, that the US had significant reasons to maintain ties with Pretoria including the large economic investments, the favourable balance of trade and the need to maintain access to the strategically important minerals sourced in South Africa. The committee further noted that it was in the US interest that the South African nuclear program be used solely for peaceful purposes. Nevertheless, the report stated that the relative importance attached to these interests, must be set against the moral issue of apartheid and as well as its impact on the US relationship with the rest of

Africa as well at the UN where the 48 nations of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) formed a formidable voting bloc on issues of importance to them.[22]

On March 3, the National Security Council (NSC) met to consider the findings of the Policy Review Study in what Carter himself described as 'one of the most important NSC meetings of the year'. It was broadly agreed that Washington should warn Pretoria that the bilateral relationship was reaching a watershed and that the US should continue to find ways to press South Africa to change its apartheid policies. Significantly there was no opposition to this approach whether on strategic or economic grounds although National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski warned that the US possessed 'limited leverage' with South Africa.[23]

Both Carter and Young drew a direct parallel between the success of the domestic civil rights movement in Georgia and the question of human rights, in southern Africa. It was further proposed that, in a similar fashion to in Atlanta, the administration speak with US corporations doing business in South Africa to encourage greater black African participation in the economy and thereby stimulate a stake in greater political involvement. In the words of Young, 'It would then be conceivable to keep the political system while abandoning apartheid. That is what we did in the South. The whites control the money and the blacks control the votes'.[24]

Six days later, Carter issued Presidential Directive 5. The directive clearly represented a considerably more hostile approach in US policy towards South Africa. Carter called for a new focus in foreign policy regarding relations with Pretoria and explicitly stated that 'Our aim will be to promote a progressive transformation of South African society'. Carter further requested that Secretary of State Vance and Ambassador to the UN Young draw up proposals to implement this new approach. In response, it was agreed that in addition to public statements Washington would 'forcefully' warn South African Prime Minister B. J. Vorster that the bilateral relations would suffer unless South Africa rapidly moved away from apartheid and that the US would take a series of steps to distance itself from Pretoria.[25]

The Carter administration swiftly ensured Pretoria was made well aware of this new approach. At a meeting in the White House on 23 March 1977, Botha and his number two at the South African Embassy Jeremy Shearar, were warned that there would be a serious deterioration in relations with Pretoria unless there was major progress towards the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa itself including movement towards greater economic, social, and political participation for the black African population. On April 19, US Ambassador William G. Bowdler delivered a similar message to Prime Minister Vorster in Cape Town.[26]

Vorster-Mondale Meeting

Vorster had already been sufficiently concerned by the signals from Washington to write a personal letter to Carter asking 'Why must we confront one another, why must we quarrel with each other?' He proposed a meeting with a special envoy from the President to discuss the problems of southern Africa and resolve the differences between Washington and Pretoria. He further suggested that this was necessary as he believed the 'normal channels of communication' were 'inappropriate' for issues of such a grave magnitude.[27]

The White House was amenable to such a meeting. Carter believed that it could be 'mutually profitable for a US emissary to have a full and candid exchange of views with Vorster' regarding the future evolution of South Africa as well as the issues of Rhodesia and Namibia. The State Department therefore instructed Ambassador Bowdler to inform Vorster of Washington's agreement to such a meeting. In terms of the rank of the emissary Carter believed that Vice President Walter Mondale would be an appropriate choice. Given the high profile of such a meeting and the inevitable global scrutiny combined with the fact Pretoria was unlikely to offer any major concessions on apartheid then a meeting in South Africa itself was deemed inappropriate. It was therefore agreed that the meeting would take place in the neutral venue of Vienna, Austria.[28]

From the perspective of the White House the principal purpose of the summit was to 'convey authoritatively' to Vorster that Washington sought a progressive transformation of South African society as well as a constructive South African role on Rhodesia and Namibia. The administration sought to emphasise its grave concerns over the situation in southern Africa and highlight that all parties, including the United States, had a stake in ensuring progression to resolve the current situation in the region. It was deemed imperative that Pretoria understood, however, that a lack of a positive South African response would inevitably negatively impact bilateral ties.[29]

On 19 May 1977, the talks began at the historic Hofburg Imperial Palace in central Vienna. Vorster entered the talks in a defiant mood telling the Austrian press that 'We will never surrender. We will fight for our land'. He further commented that South Africa was an independent country and that 'nobody from the outside can dictate' how it should run its internal affairs. Indeed, the summit itself turned into an acrimonious and bitter affair where little additional progress was made on any of the points of discussion.[30]

In discussions over the future direction of South Africa itself, Mondale made it clear that if Pretoria continued to adhere to its system of institutionalised racial discrimination and deprivation of political, economic and social rights for the majority of its population then its relationship with Washington would deteriorate. Mondale also stated that in absence of positive moves in

dismantling the apartheid system then the United States would reconsider its opposition towards mandatory sanctions. Vorster remained unmoved and insisted that Pretoria never received the credit for the progress that it had already made. He further accused Washington of meddling in the domestic affairs of South Africa and observed that Pretoria did not 'interfere' with the internal structure of society in the United States.[31]

Regarding Rhodesia, the South African delegation reiterated that Pretoria was willing to cooperate with Washington to continue to exert pressure on Salisbury to come to seek an end to minority rule. 'Pik' Botha, now serving as South African Foreign Minister, warned Mondale though, that whether the US liked it or not the Rhodesian Front government represented a central authority in Rhodesia and must be considered in negotiations.[32]

Vorster also confirmed that Pretoria sought to end its de facto rule over Namibia but clashed with Mondale over the nature of the independence government, especially whether the so-called Turnhalle delegates, **a grouping initiated and backed by South Africa**, would remain the central authority in the new nation. The Vice President stated that such a solution would not only be internationally rejected but also opposed by the United States and further aggravate rather than improve relations between Washington and Pretoria. Vorster responded that 'Over the years, the UN demanded independence for South West Africa as a whole, "come hell or high water". If this then is not acceptable, it is not our problem'.[33]

Personnel Reduction and the Arms Embargo

While Mondale and Vorster verbally jousted in Vienna over the future of South Africa, back in Washington the Carter administration was already prepared to reduce its ties with Pretoria. On May 20, National Security Adviser Brzezinski issued a memorandum to the heads of all executive departments and agencies requesting a listing of agreements, contracts, and formal or informal ties between the US and South African governments. Brzezinski subsequently advised Carter that only ten agencies or departments maintained 'heavy' or 'very heavy ties' with South Africa including the Export-Import Bank, the Department of State and the Department of Defense. He advised the President that cutting formal contacts from these agencies or departments would send a 'strong signal' of US displeasure with Pretoria but cautioned that the White House should be careful not to rupture ties that were in the US national interest to maintain or violated existing legal obligations.[34]

By July 1977, it was decided that the Washington would move to close the Air Force missile tracking station at Hartebeesthoek, near Johannesburg, a mostly symbolic gesture as it had been inactive for several years and merely maintained in stand-by mode. It was viewed, nevertheless, as a gesture of

dissociation from Pretoria. At a Policy Review meeting on July 22, it was further decided that the State Department would examine 'desirable ways' to reduce the number of US military, diplomatic, and commercial personnel based in South Africa.[35]

This process was accelerated in the fall of 1977 following the National Party's decision on October 19, under Section 10 of the Internal Security Act, to ban two anti-apartheid newspapers and a church journal as well as around eighteen organisations representing the Black Concsciousness Movement. A number of journalists were also detained. This move, just over a month after the death of anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko in police custody led to outrage in both the United States and the broader international community. Indeed, in a personal letter to Vorster, Carter informed the him that recent events had 'shocked the American people' and understandably produced a 'strong adverse reaction elsewhere in the world, too – and not only in states hostile to South Africa'.[36]

In response, on November 2, Secretary of State Vance expressed disapproval of the South African actions and publicly stated that Washington had ordered the immediate withdrawal of the US Naval Attache from Pretoria and further recalled the Johannesburg based Commercial Officer. Several days earlier, on October 28, the National Security Council ordered an inter-agency request for proposals for further staff reductions that could be made to US government personnel in South Africa. The Department of Defense also agreed to the closure of the missile tracking station and the withdrawal of the remaining Air Force personnel.[37]

The Carter administration took a similar position regarding arms sales. In July 1977, the White House tightened the arms embargo to include all types of equipment sold to the South African military or police and ended the grey areas exemption that had justified the sale of certain types of military equipment during the previous administrations. A small value exception that had provided a loophole allowing the export of low value items such as shotguns and shells to South Africa was also closed. As noted by Thomson, the administration also prohibited the sale of a number of non-lethal items including bullet proof vests, gas masks and psychological stress analysis devices.[38]

The death of Steve Biko and the banning of the Black Consciousness media outlets, once again, further stimulated stronger measures. On November 4, Washington both encouraged and voted for UN Security Council 418 which imposed a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. Significantly this represented the first occasion that a UN member had been subject to Chapter VII measures. On November 28, Carter issued a presidential directive instructing the Departments of Commerce and State to uphold the ban of arms sales and further tighten the arms embargo to close any last remaining loopholes. The directive specifically prohibited the export of 'any commodities' or

'technical data' from the United States for the delivery of use of the South African police or military.[39]

Broader economic ties

While prepared to impose stricter measures regarding arms sales the Carter administration was not willing to countenance the imposition of broader economic sanctions on South Africa. On occasion, US diplomats would use the threat of a trade embargo to encourage South Africa to take more tangible action in reforming the apartheid system, as Mondale did in Vienna, but Carter was not prepared to actually take such a radical bilateral action or support such a step at the UN. The White House opposition to economic sanctions stemmed from both the damaging consequences of such a move on the United States itself and also a belief that in a similar fashion to the Deep South, commerce itself could act as a tool for political reform.[40]

By the late 1970s, while trade between Washington and Pretoria had dropped to under 13% of the total US trade with Africa US exports to South Africa remained over $1 billion with a favourable balance of payments. In the event of an economic war, a 'major retaliation' by South Africa to sanctions would lead to serious dislocation of the US economy and thus an adverse effect on the domestic policy goals of the Carter administration. The White House was also well aware that the loss of South African minerals, especially chromium, would also be damaging to US industry.[41]

A CIA report further warned that any disruption to South African trade with world markets would lead to major foreign exchange gains for the Soviet Union due to the similar exports from both nations. The report estimated that even a 10% decrease in Pretoria's global exports would yield Moscow a windfall of $400 million in foreign exchange gains. As observed by NSC staffer Tom Thornton if Washington imposed economic sanctions it could be a unwise strategic move as it could lead to a 'windfall' for a principal geopolitical Cold War adversary.[42]

As noted by Thomson, Carter himself favoured a different approach. He believed that US corporations could be an important force in eroding apartheid by demonstrating that racial segregation was hindering rather than helping the South African economy. The White House therefore encouraged US businesses to act as example for their South African counterparts by improving employment conditions and opportunities of their black workers and ideally demonstrate the fiscal benefit of a more enlightened business environment.[43]

On 1 March 1977, with the support and backing of the Oval Office, twelve US businesses with large stakes in the apartheid economy, including General Motors and Ford, signed the Sullivan Principles, named after General Motors board member Reverend Leon H. Sullivan. The corporations agreed, to the extent possible under apartheid legislation, to treat all their employees in

South Africa equally regardless of race and take actions to improve the lives of the individuals and their families. By 1980 nearly 137 US companies had signed the principles and nearly $20 million had been spent on affiliated humanitarian programs.[44]

In terms of punitive financial measures, the strongest action that the Carter administration took was to reduce the maximum time period that US corporations could receive Ex-Im Bank loan and guarantee facilities from 10 years to 42 months. The White House, however, opposed the Evans Amendment to the Ex-Im Bank Act which required US corporations in South Africa to demonstrate equitable employment practices in order to qualify for Ex-Im Bank assistance. Despite the opposition of the White House, on 14 October 1978, the Senate approved legislation which included the Evans Amendment.[45]

It was perhaps at the UN the Carter administration revealed most dramatically its profound opposition to any economic sanctions against Pretoria. In October, as a result of the banning of the Black Consciousness newspapers and the mounting deaths of detainees in police custody the UN sought to impose an economic embargo on the apartheid state. While the White House was prepared a support a resolution which called on all member states to review their commercial relations with South Africa it rejected the imposition of punitive economic sanctions. On 31 October 1977, at a UNSC meeting covened to discuss Pretoria's actions, Washington issued three successive vetoes on the proposed UN trade embargo against South Africa.[46]

Overall, during the Carter era commerce between the United States and South Africa continued to thrive and expand. US corporate investment increased to well over $2.3 billion due to the high profit margins while exports doubled to around $2.5 billion. During approximately the same period South African imports to the United States more than tripled from around $840 million to over $3.3 billion giving Pretoria a favourable balance of payments in its trade relationship with Washington. While the Evans Amendment reduced US government exposure in South Africa many US businesses simply turned to alternative sources for credit insurance or loan guarantees As pointed out by Anthony Vance, the level of US trade with Pretoria, even by companies formerly using the Ex-Im Bank's services, was largely unaffected by the Evans Amendment.[47]

Nuclear issues

The Carter era also encompassed a period of increasing concern regarding the intentions of South Africa's nuclear program. In response Washington pressed Pretoria to publicly reassure the international community that South Africa was not considering the acquisition or development of nuclear weapons. White House efforts to prevent Pretoria joining the nuclear club, however, were to ultimately end in failure.

Washington had long been concerned about the military implications of the South African atomic energy program. Indeed, 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.[48]

Under the Nixon and Ford administrations, however, despite Pretoria's refusal to sign the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) or to place its enrichment plant at Valindaba under international safeguards, it was nevertheless believed that continued bilateral cooperation with Pretoria in the atomic field represented a logical approach as it allowed Washington to ensure that International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regulations were adhered to at least in terms of the facilities and transactions that the United States was involved in.[49]

On 6 August 1977, however, the Soviet Charge d'Affaires Vladillen Vasev delivered to the White House a diplomatic demarche from General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev stating that Soviet satellites had identified a facility in the Kalahari desert designed for the underground testing of nuclear weapons. The facility located around 100 km south of Botswana and 150 km east of Namibia included an airstrip, drill rig, square lattice tower and around a dozen other buildings. Following the demarche the Soviet **news** agency TASS published an article alleging that Pretoria was about to test a nuclear bomb and linked Israel to South Africa in the manufacture of nuclear arms.[50]

In Washington, the Carter administration requested an inter-agency assessment on the likelihood that Pretoria possessed the capability and the will to test a nuclear weapon. The report, received on August 18, judged that the South Africa Government planned to proceed through the various stages of a nuclear weapons program, including the eventual testing of a weapon and that domestic politics and military considerations would lead Pretoria to do so. The assessment, though, observed that there existed no 'over-riding pressure on South Africa's leaders to rush to test a weapon in the immediate future'.[51]

In light of the Soviet allegations and subsequent inter-agency assessment, the Carter administration instructed Ambassador Bowdler to inform Foreign Minister Botha that despite Pretoria's assurances that its nuclear program was exclusively peaceful Washington now possessed evidence to the contrary. Bowdler also issued a stern warning to Botha that the detonation of a nuclear device by South Africa would have the 'most serious consequences for all aspects of our relations'. Vance, via Bowdler also requested that Pretoria publicly state that South Africa does not have or intend to develop nuclear explosives and will not engage in nuclear explosive testing of any kind.[52]

The initial reaction of the South African government was one of outrage, Botha stated his shock at the 'arrogance of the message' and demanded that Washington provide 'proof of the assertion'. Nevertheless, on August 24,

Vorster acceded to Washington's demands and in a public statement affirmed that Pretoria did not have and was not seeking nuclear arms and would not conduct any testing of nuclear explosives. Pretoria also agreed to substantive talks with a US nuclear team headed by Special Presidential Representative for Non-Proliferation Matters Gerard C. Smith. A settlement, however, including Pretoria's agreement to join the NPT proved elusive.[53]

The White House was also troubled by the possibility of Israeli cooperation with South Africa in the field of nuclear weapons technology. The State Department advised Carter that Israel and South Africa regularly exchanged information on conventional weapons and while its Intelligence Bureau could find no hard evidence of collaboration in the area of nuclear weapons it could not be ruled out. The US Ambassador to Israel, Samuel W. Lewis was instructed to warn Tel Aviv that any Israeli-South African cooperation involving nuclear weapons technology or materiel would hold grave political consequences. In response, Prime Minister Menachem Begin, in a private message to the Carter administration, stated that his government has had no contact with nor has it ever cooperated with the Government of South Africa in developing or producing nuclear weapons.[54]

On 22 September 1979, however, technicians at Patrick Air Force base in Florida monitoring Vela satellite 691 l observed a double flash characteristic of an atmospheric nuclear explosion near the South African territory of the Prince Edward Islands. The suspected detonation caused consternation at the White House which immediately assumed that Pretoria was responsible. On October 11, Jerry Oplinger of the NSC staff informed Brzezinski that 'outside technical experts' believed that an atmospheric nuclear explosion had taken place. On the evening of October 23, the news of the event went public when US media outlets reported evidence of the test and suggested that South Africa was the most likely culprit.[55]

When confronted by Ambassador William G. Edmondson regarding the incident on October 26, Botha, ridiculed the allegations and stated that Washington should not 'panic so easily' and 'appeared weak' by being so nervous over the matter. Botha also declined to issue a categorical denial that Pretoria had not been responsible. The cause of the double flash captured by the Vela satellite remained hard to pindown for the Carter administration although evidence pointed towards a South African detonation. The event remains officially unknown but the CIA believed that it was likely a joint undeclared nuclear test conducted by Israel in collaboration with South Africa. It is also revealing that on September 25, three days after the double flash, Pieter Willem Botha, **a more openly defiant and confrontational political figure who had replaced the diplomatically pragmatic Vorster as prime minister in 1978**, stated publicly that 'South Africa's enemies might find out we have military weapons they do not know about'.[56]

Despite concluding that the double flash could indeed have been a nuclear test conducted by South Africa the White House nevertheless continued to seek

negotiations with Pretoria. At the IAEA Conference in 1979, the United States also unsuccessfully opposed the rejection of South Africa's credentials. The following month, Washington proposed a nuclear agreement whereby the United States would provide fuel for the Safari and Koeberg reactors in exchange for South Africa acceding to the NPT, developing a safeguards program at Valindaba and reducing uranium enrichment at the Safari reactor to 20%. The proposals, however, failed to lead to a settlement and as the Carter era drew to a close South Africa remained outside of the NPT and may well have also joined the nuclear club.[57]

Rhodesia and Namibia

The White House was somewhat more successful in working with South Africa in seeking to bring an end to white minority rule in the broader southern African region specifically in the case of Rhodesia. In November 1965, the Rhodesian Government led by Prime Minister Ian Smith had unilaterally declared its independence from Britain in an effort to maintain the political and economic position of the white minority and avoid what it considered the inevitable disaster of black majority rule. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) was met with hostility both in London and at the UN. Under President Johnson, Washington had supported Britain in its efforts to end the UDI and supported UN sanctions against Salisbury in 1966 and 1968.[58]

As noted by Sue Onslow, Pretoria while quite prepared to offer economic and military support to Rhodesia was also traditionally ambivalent about the unilateral action taken by Salisbury and wary about the impact and cost to South Africa itself. Indeed, in 1976, in an effort to prevent the spread of communist influence in southern Africa, President Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had engaged in a diplomatic initiative with Pretoria to bring an end to minority rule in Rhodesia which culminated in all party talks in Geneva. While the negotiations proved unsuccessful this laid the groundwork for future collaboration between Washington and Pretoria in bringing about majority rule during the Carter era.[59]

The Carter administration was eager to take up the challenge of slaying the Rhodesian dragon. Indeed, even before taking office Carter had determined that he would not only seek to bring about majority rule to but actively use US power to achieve this objective. The White House worked with Congress to effectively repeal the Byrd Amendment which had permitted the importation of Rhodesian minerals in violation of UN sanctions and in partnership with London pressed Salisbury to accept the Anglo-American Plan (AAP) which proposed immediate majority rule. Carter's decision not to recognise the Rhodesian Internal Settlement or remove sanctions following the election of Bishop Abel Muzorewa was an important factor in Salisbury's participation in

the Lancaster House Agreement in late 1979 which led to the elections leading to majority rule.[60]

The White House had worked closely with South Africa in achieving a resolution to the long standing Rhodesian problem. In spite of the increasing tension between Washington and Pretoria the National Party remained committed to ending the conflict on its northern border and installing a moderate black government in Salisbury. The Carter administration was also been well aware that only South Africa possessed the necessary political and economic leverage over Rhodesia to bring about a settlement. Washington therefore consulted with Vorster regarding the AAP and Pretoria continued to press Salisbury to reach an agreement. Indeed, at Lancaster House South African influence was instrumental in getting Muzorewa's acceptance of the agreement.[61]

The Carter administration, however, was less effective in convincing Pretoria to abandon its course on Namibia. The large primarily arid territory with a small population of around nine hundred thousand including just under a hundred thousand whites had been under South African administrative control since 1920 when Pretoria had been granted a League of Nations mandate to administer the former German colony in the aftermath of World War One. Following the dissolution of the League of Nations and creation of the UN South Africa had refused submit the territory to a UN trusteeship or abide by a subsequent ICJ advisory opinion that it should submit reports to the UN. Pretoria administered the Namibia as a de facto fifth province including the expansion of apartheid racial policies into the territory.[62]

The Carter administration adopted a two pronged approach to resolve the Namibian question. The White House, rejected the legitimacy of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance Party (DTA), a group backed by Pretoria which favoured minority rights and ethnically based representation, and opposed any 'internal solution'. In April 1977, the United States, along with the four other Western members of the UN Security Council formed the Western Contact Group (WCG) chaired by the US Deputy Representative to the United Nations Security Council Donald McHenry. The WCG was designed as a 'parallel negotiating forum' to offer Pretoria an alternative to the Turnhalle plans which it was hoped lead to free and fair elections under UN supervision.[63]

Washington also sought to press Pretoria to accept the WCG proposals by repeatedly warning that unless South Africa was prepared to cooperate on Namibian independence then further action would be taken against it at the UN. Indeed, prior to the first meeting between the South African government and the WCG, the White House warned Vorster in an aide memoire that strong measures, the implication was that this meant economic sanctions, would be imposed if Pretoria did not end its occupation. While Vorster agreed to meet with the WCG in Cape Town he expressed irritation at the 'obnoxious'

position taken by Washington while Foreign Minister Botha described the aide memoire as a 'veiled threat' against Pretoria.[64]

Carter's approach did bring some minor successes including Pretoria's decision not to enact the Turnhalle Constitution which had been approved by the white Namibian population in a referendum in May 1977. In July 1977, however, to the 'surprise and disquiet' of Washington, Pretoria announced the appointment of an Administrator General for Namibia. Seventeen months later, in December 1978, in defiance of the UN, multi-racial elections, but excluding the South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), the principal black liberation movement, were held under South African supervision in Namibia. The elections were comprehensively won by the DTA which then formed a government but remained dependent of Pretoria's approval to pass legislation. While the WCG continued to provide a forum where all parties including SWAPO were able to continue the protracted diplomatic wrangling, at the end of Carter era, the territory remained firmly under South African control.[65]

Conclusion

In conclusion, the election of Carter to the Oval Office led to an important shift in the approach that Washington took towards apartheid South Africa and white minority rule in the southern African region. Guided primarily by his deeply held moral belief in the importance of democracy and human rights Carter and his administration made a progressive transformation of South African society and the dismantling of apartheid a major foreign policy objective.

Both publicly and privately the White House made it clear to Pretoria that if it continued to adhere to its apartheid system then its relationship with Washington would worsen with major repercussions for bilateral ties. When Vorster remained unmoved by these threats the Carter administration took a series of steps to demonstrate its displeasure including a reduction in the number of US Government personnel stationed in South Africa, the removal of a military missile tracking station and supporting a mandatory UN arms embargo on Pretoria. Carter, however, was unwilling to impose broader economic sanctions due to the potentially injurious impact such a move would have on the US economy itself and also believed that business itself could be used to stimulate political change.

While the White House left no doubt among the National Party leaders that Pretoria now faced a more hostile presidential administration in Washington, Carter's diplomatic efforts to force South Africa to undo the apartheid system ended in failure. His administration was able to achieve a limited success by assisting in bringing about majority rule in Rhodesia but a Namibian

settlement remained elusive and in South Africa itself, when Carter left office in January 1981, the white minority remained in total political control.

Indeed, on Carter's watch, while political and military ties diminished, the economic relationship between Washington and Pretoria expanded extensively and his administration failed abjectly in its effort to curb the growing threat of the South African nuclear program. It would take another thirteen years, and another three presidential administrations, before Carter's hope for racial transformation in South Africa would finally take place.

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