

“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

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ABSTRACT

The year of 1948 witnessed two elections that pushed race relations in the United States and South Africa in dramatically opposite directions. In November, the victory of Harry S. Truman placed the White House on the side of domestic civil rights and against racial oppression and segregation. His was the first presidential administration to publicly and privately embrace the struggle for racial justice in the United States. Five months earlier in South Africa, the victory of the Nationalist-Afrikaner coalition heralded the onset of the apartheid era. In this paper I explore the rationale behind the decision of President Truman in developing closer ties with Pretoria during the later 1940s and early 1950s. I specifically highlight the fact that despite the radically different racial trajectories of the two nations, the White House developed a policy of closer relations with the practitioners of apartheid due to their vehement anti-communism, support for Western actions against during the early Cold War era and a willingness to provide enriched uranium for the US atomic programme.

KEYWORDS: US foreign policy; South Africa; Cold War geopolitics; racial equality

Introduction

The year of 1948 proved to be a political landmark in both the United States and South Africa. In the space of six months, the world witnessed two elections that would change the trajectory of race relations in both nations and move Washington and Pretoria in diametrically opposite directions on one of the key issues of the history of the twentieth century, the question of racial equality.

On November 2, President Harry S. Truman, who had previously, ascended to the Oval Office from the Vice-Presidency following the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt, defeated Thomas E. Dewey in the presidential election of 1948. Truman who had advocated a strong stance on civil rights, also faced a third party challenge from “Dixiecrats” made up of disillusioned Southern Democrats determined to protect states’ rights to legislate racial segregation in the South. The “Dixiecrat” ticket, though, led by Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, only carried four Deep South states. The victory of Truman in the fall of 1948 placed the White House on the side of domestic civil rights and against racial oppression and segregation.

Five months earlier, however, in South Africa, on May 26, 1948, the National Party (HNP) led by Daniel Francois Malan ousted long term South African leader Jan Christian Smuts in an election that proved a turning point in South African history and heralded the onset of the strict system of racial discrimination, known as apartheid, that would become the prevailing theme in South African politics and society for the following half century. As noted by T.R.H. Davenport, the “strength of the Nationalist’s manifesto lay in its simplicity, and in its appeal to

the voters' desire for security in world which seemed to be moving too fast in a liberal direction and turning its wrath against South Africa as it did so."¹

While the sphere of international diplomacy is rarely, if ever, guided by a single determining factor, it could have been expected that given the wholly opposing views on the question of domestic race relations and white supremacy, Washington would have sought to avoid any overt association with Pretoria. The tenets of the apartheid regime clearly stood against the principles of freedom and justice espoused by the United States and domestically could harm Washington's efforts to resolve its own racial problems.

In the post-World War II era, however, for the Truman administration, the moral issue of racial equality in southern Africa, was overshadowed by the geopolitics of an increasingly 'hot' Cold War. In a world that was becoming dangerously polarized between the Western nations and the communist bloc, the presence of a solidly anti-communist government in a key strategic location on the tip of Africa and possessing vast mineral reserves deemed essential to United States interests, trumped any concerns the White House may have had regarding racial injustice in South Africa.

Historiography

At the broadest level there exists a vast range of literature offering diverse perspectives that purport to explain American foreign relations with southern Africa during the decolonization era. Nevertheless, there is a comparative paucity of research regarding direct United States policy towards Pretoria, in the early Cold War era, especially in terms of examining relations through the lens of the specific presidential administrations and the unique challenges and opportunities that apartheid South Africa provided for Washington both domestically and internationally.

U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, by Alex Thomson offers an excellent overview of United States-South Africa relations throughout the apartheid era. The book, however, does not exclusively focus on the early Cold War era and principally examines policy through the lens of a clash between human rights and strategic and economic interests. *An African Volk* by Jamie Miller explores, through the lens of South African foreign policy, the role of Washington in seeking a settlement 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 postcolonial world in Africa and moreover examines considers United States policy in the 1970s not the 1950s.

The Cold War and the Color Line by Thomas Borstelmann highlights the struggle faced by successive U.S. administrations in balancing Cold War considerations with the rising movement for racial justice both in U.S. South and southern Africa. *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle* also by Borstelmann, does provide a broad explanation of U.S. support for the white regimes in southern Africa during the 1950s. Borstelmann contends that during the Truman era and that of his successor in the Oval Office, Dwight D. Eisenhower, an informal alliance developed between Washington and Pretoria. He argues that this arrangement arose from a number of factors including a shared history of frontier expansion, the inherent racism of many elements in the Truman administration, growing economic ties and the threat of communism.

The recent book by Gerald Horne, *White Supremacy Confronted*, traces the close links between key South African and U.S. anti-apartheid figures including Nelson Mandela 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 United States. While a

¹ T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, (London: 1977), 253.

fascinating account of the parallel struggle against white supremacy it does not specifically focus on the Truman or indeed the apartheid era and it is not primarily concerned with the bilateral relationship between Pretoria and Washington during the early Cold War.

In this article, I seek to clarify and add to the previous scholarship especially the work of Borstelmann and Thomson. In *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, Borstelmann highlights not only Cold War geopolitics and the need for uranium as factors shaping United States policy towards Pretoria but also the growing economic ties and the inherently racist or Eurocentric world viewpoint of leading figures in the Truman White House and Congress as strong influences guiding relations with Pretoria. While it would be naïve to overlook the impact of cultural or economic determinants, my research has brought to the fore a slightly different perspective. I suggest that the Truman administration did in fact express a genuine concern for racial equality, as reflected by steps towards ending white supremacy domestically, but despite this policy towards South Africa was shaped by the hard geopolitical realities of the early Cold War. Economic interest in the nascent apartheid state, at least at this point, was also of less importance than the ideological struggle with Moscow.

In the case of Thomson, I suggest that while there certainly existed a struggle between the moral issue of human rights and pragmatic interests whether strategic or economic, at least in the Truman era, and almost certainly for subsequent presidential administrations, there was also a geopolitical advantage in advancing the cause of racial equality, both domestically and overseas, in part as it countered Soviet propaganda portraying the United States as an imperialist state especially among the newly independent countries of the Third World. Thus when weighing up decision making on South Africa it was not a clear cut question of pragmatism or morality but also required considering the different pragmatic consequences of U.S. actions. Indeed, the White House viewed Pretoria's policies as a dangerous course of action that would lead to greater instability. In the context of the early Cold War, however, Pretoria was able to position itself as an important geopolitical ally and combined with a willingness to sell South African uranium to Washington this firmly planted the apartheid state in the good graces of the Truman administration.

Race

Under the Presidency of Harry Truman, the White House became a powerful advocate for the cause of civil rights and opponent of racial discrimination. In December 1946, Truman appointed an Advisory Committee on Civil Rights and upon receiving the report observed that it was an "American charter of human freedom and a guide to action." In response to the committee's findings, in a special message to Congress, on February 2, 1948 Truman called for a federal ban on lynching, an end to the poll tax, creation of a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee and safeguards for the right to vote.²

The White House, equally significantly, also issued Executive Orders 9980 and 9981, which respectively abolished racial discriminatory employment within the federal government and desegregated the armed forces. In the words of Robert Shogan, Truman was the first president to "make the struggle for racial justice as part of the national agenda, to define discrimination against African-Americans as an evil that violated the Constitution" and

² Statement by the President making public a report by the Civil Rights Committee, Public Papers 1945-1953, Harry S. Truman Library Website (hereafter TL Website), <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1872&st=&st1=> and Robert Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, (Lawrence: Kansas, 2013), 102.

“ultimately to define segregation, as distinguished from discrimination, as a component of that evil.”³

In many ways Truman was an unlikely candidate to champion the cause of civil rights. Born and raised in the Jim Crow era of rural small town Missouri at the turn of the twentieth century the pervasive racism of that world left its mark on the future president. All four of Truman’s grandparents had owned slaves and his uncle had served in the Confederate Army. Another uncle by marriage had ridden with the notorious pro-Confederate band led by William Quantrill that was responsible for numerous atrocities including the infamous massacre of Unionists at Lawrence, Kansas in 1863.⁴

For many members of Truman’s family, including his mother and grandmother, the legacy of the Civil War remained a raw and open wound and they remained bitter over the victory of the Union. When a young Harry Truman proudly wore his dress blues of the National Guard in her presence, his grandmother Harriet Louisa Young, emphatically told him; “Harry, this is the first time since 1863 that a blue uniform has been in this house. Don’t bring it here again.” He didn’t make the same mistake twice.⁵

Given the rural bigotry of his early life, it is perhaps unsurprising that Truman, albeit for political rather than ideological reasons, flirted with joining the Ku Klux Klan during a tight electoral race for district judge in Pemiscot County. He met with a Klan organizer, paid the \$10 joining fee and may have even taken a membership oath. Truman was also no stranger to the use of racial epithets, in a letter from the 1930s, addressed to Bess Truman, his wife, the future president wrote that he had just killed a cockroach that had walked out onto the arm of his chair as “impudent as a Nigger”. Even during his time in the White House, Truman was still known to speak privately of African-Americans as “nigs” and “niggers”.⁶

As President, however, Truman took a strong stance for the cause of civil rights. On June 29, 1947, he became the first president to address the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). A crowd of ten thousand gathered at the Lincoln Memorial for the historic event. As noted earlier, Truman endorsed the report of the Civil Rights Committee, entitled, *To Secure These Rights*, whose recommendations included anti-lynching legislation, the abolition of the poll tax, a Fair Employment Practices Committee and civil rights division for the Justice Department. In 1948, Truman issued Executive Orders 9980 and 9981 which abolished racially discriminatory hiring practices within the federal government and desegregated the armed forces respectively.⁷

³ Executive Order 9980, Executive Orders 1945-1953, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=29&st1=>; Executive Order 9981, Executive Orders 1945-1953, TL Website,

<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=869&st=&st1=> and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 180.

⁴ Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, (Oxford: 1993), 38; Alonzo Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman*, (Oxford: 1998), 4-5 and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 15-17.

⁵ Hamby, *Man of the People*, 5, 11 and 22 and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 17.

⁶ Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 38; Hamby, *Man of the People*, 5 and 114 and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 38 and 68.

⁷ Address before the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Public Papers 1945-1953, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=2115>;

Statement by the President making public a report by the Civil Rights Committee, Public Papers 1945-1953, Harry S. Truman Library Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1872&st=&st1=>; Executive Order 9980, Executive Orders 1945-1953, TL Website,

<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=29&st1=>; Executive Order 9981, Executive Orders 1945-1953, TL Website,

<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/executiveorders/index.php?pid=869&st=&st1=>; Hamby, *Man of the People*, 433-434 and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 100.

During his second term in office, Truman continued to use the power of the White House to advance a civil rights agenda. On December 3, 1951, he issued Executive Order 10308 which established the Committee on Government Contract Compliance (CGCC). The specific aim of the CGCC was to ensure that federal government contractors did not discriminate on the basis of race. As observed by Truman, while for nearly a decade federal contractors and subcontractors had been obligated to abide by a clause in their contracts which forbade discrimination on the basis of race before the creation of the CGCC there had been no system of uniform inspection or regulation to ensure compliance.⁸

The Truman administration was also cognizant of the role of the White House in aiding the civil rights advances made at state level and in the courts by spurring the continued debate at the federal level on the issue of racial equality. As early as 1949, a White House report noted that the number of states adopting Fair Employment Practices, prohibiting segregation in the National Guard and school systems was increasing. Even in the Deep South, Alabama outlawed the wearing of masks in public and Texas adopted an anti-lynching bill. The Department of Justice for the first time questioned the validity of the long-standing doctrine of “separate but equal” and lower federal and state courts began to accept the principles of law as relating to civil rights.⁹

It is important to note just how radical and controversial the actions of Truman were in the racially charged atmosphere of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Throughout the states of the Old Confederacy segregation was the not only the de facto but also the de jure law of the land. Discrimination and violence, including lynching, of African-Americans was still commonplace and often occurred with the connivance of local law enforcement. Presidential correspondence reveals the anger and outrage of the white Southerners at what they saw as an attack on their institutions, culture and way of life. Southern resentment to the White House stance on civil rights was the defining factor in causing the “Dixiecrat” rebellion of 1948 which nearly cost Truman the election.¹⁰

It is also clear that Truman’s public actions reflected his changing private convictions on the issues of racial discrimination and civil rights. He was a firm believer in what he termed “equality of opportunity” and felt strongly that every American, regardless of race, deserved a fair chance to achieve success that as an American he was entitled to seek. Indeed, in September 1946, following a meeting with civil rights leaders, Truman appeared to be genuinely shocked and horrified at the extent of racial oppression in the Southern states. Racial violence, which plagued the South in the post-World War II era was a particular anathema to Truman. In a letter to an old friend from Missouri, Ernie Roberts, he expressed revulsion over a particularly horrific attack in South Carolina where a mayor and city marshal in South Carolina assaulted an African-American U.S. Army Sergeant and blinded him in one eye. Truman observed that

⁸ Executive Order 10308, Executive Orders 1945-1953, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/executive-orders/10308/executive-order-10308> and Statement by the President on Establishing the Committee on Government Contract Compliance, Public Papers 1945-1953, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/299/statement-president-establishing-committee-government-contract-compliance>.

⁹ "Civil Rights Are Not Standing Still", Harry S. Truman and Civil Rights, White House File, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/research-files/civil-rights-are-not-standing-still?documentid=NA&pagenumber=1>

¹⁰ Letter to President Truman from Weston S. Newton, August 2, 1948, Civil Rights I, Box 10, Public Opinion Mail File, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Harry S. Truman Library; Letter to President Truman from Dr. R.I. Shirley, December 19, 1951, Civil Liberties, Official File, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL Website, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/trumancivilrights/documents/index.php?documentdate=1951-12-19&documentid=3-9&pagenumber=1; Hamby, *Man of the People*, 434

the very fact that the State authorities had taken no action demonstrated that something was “radically wrong” with the system.¹¹

The White House, in addition to moral concerns, also supported civil rights for an important pragmatic rationale. As pointed out by Borstelmann, both the White House and the State Department were well aware that taking a strong stance against domestic racial discrimination burnished the image of the United States abroad especially among newly independent African and Asian nations. This was particularly important in the context of the Cold War as it was feared that Moscow would seize every propaganda opportunity to portray Washington in a negative light.¹²

Indeed, in October, 1947, when W.E.B. Du Bois, Director of Special Research of the NAACP, submitted to the United Nations (UN) a 155 page indictment of the United States Government on the charges of widespread racial discrimination and injustice aimed at African-Americans, the USSR was quick to ask the UN to investigate the issue. As pointed out by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), “Soviet objectives are not promoted solely by the seizure of territory but by any development that saps the strength of the non-Communist world. The Kremlin will exploit every opportunity, probe every weakness, and every dissension it can discover.”¹³

It was therefore perhaps unsurprising that Truman chose his address to the NAACP in 1947 as an opportunity, indeed, the first public occasion, to unequivocally link together the domestic fight for civil rights to the broader global contest against the forces of communism. In the speech he stated that “Our case for democracy should be as strong as we can make it. It should rest on practical evidence that we have been able to put our own house in order.”¹⁴

During his time in the Oval Office, Truman, despite his personal prejudices, placed the power and prestige of the White House firmly behind the cause of civil rights. He was first president to that point to fully embrace the struggle for racial justice and both publicly and privately condemn the racial discrimination and violence suffered by African-Americans. His actions were not lost on the African-American community.¹⁵

In November 1952, ten days after the electoral victory of Dwight Eisenhower, the National Newspapers Publishers Association which represented every important black newspaper of gave to Truman a plaque inscribed “To Harry S. Truman, 33rd President of the United States who has awakened the conscience of America and given new strength to our democracy by his courageous efforts on behalf of freedom and equality of citizens.” In January 1953, civil rights leader Roy Wilkins, wrote to Truman; “You have achieved many accomplishments but none more valuable to our nations and its ideals than your outspoken championing of equality of

¹¹ Letter to Ernie Roberts from President Truman, August 18, 1948, Personal File, Box 258, President’s Secretary’s File’s, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter TL); Assorted Newspaper Clippings, Civil Rights III, Box 10, Public Opinion Mail File, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 66; Hamby, *Man of the People*, 365-366 and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 89

¹² National Intelligence Estimate, Soviet Capabilities and Intentions, November 15, 1950, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; National Intelligence Estimate, The world situation over the next decade, December 29, 1952, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 221, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL.

¹² Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 38-39.

¹³ National Intelligence Estimate, The world situation over the next decade, December 29, 1952, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 221, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 101-102.

¹⁴ Address before the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Public Papers 1945-1953, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=2115> and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 10

¹⁵ Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 38 and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 180

opportunity for all Americans without regard to race, color or national origin...As you leave the White House you carry with you the gratitude and affectionate regard of millions of your Negro fellow citizens who in less than a decade of your leadership, inspiration and determination, have seen the old order change right before their eyes.”¹⁶

In South Africa, however, under the leadership of Prime Minister Malan race relations were moving in an entirely different direction. The Nationalist-Afrikaner coalition which won a majority of seats was elected on a platform of Afrikaner nationalism and strict racial segregation in all spheres of living. The Nationalists termed this system of social organization ‘apartness’ or ‘apartheid’ in Afrikaans.¹⁷

The electoral victory of the Nationalist-Afrikaner coalition was largely inspired by the fear and anxiety of white South Africans, especially Afrikaners, who felt threatened by black political aspirations. The white population, which numbered approximately 2.6 million, viewed with trepidation the possibility of being swept from the pedestals of political power and by extension economic privilege by the vastly largely black African population which numbered around 8 million. The opposition United Party (UP), led by Smuts, while committed to white political dominance, was portrayed as soft on the racial question as the UP argued for a vague and gradual reforming of the political system that would eventually allow black South Africans to exercise some degree of power in a racially integrated South Africa. In contrast, the National Party (NP) played on and amplified white anxieties through the use of overtly racist slogans such as the “*Swart Gevaar*” (Black Peril) and “*Die kaffer op sy plek*” (The kaffir in his place).¹⁸

The proposed policy of apartheid laid out by the NP also appealed on an economic level to the interests of key voting groups among white South Africans. The farming community, especially from the northern regions, along with the mining industry relied on the continuous and strictly controlled availability of inexpensive black African labor as a tool to minimize expenditure and maximize profits. In the cities and towns, blue collar white workers feared the competition from black artisans and laborers, especially as wages for black workers was considerably lower and therefore fiercely opposed an influx of black Africans into urban areas.¹⁹

The Nationalists, once in power, moved swiftly to enact their apartheid agenda. The Population Registration Act of July 1950 forced all South African residents to be classified and registered into one of three basic racial groupings; white, black and coloured (mixed race). Indian residents of South Africa were later added as separate classification. The Group Areas Act, also passed in July 1950 empowered the Governor-General to declare geographical areas, including urban residential and business neighborhoods, to be for the exclusive occupation of specific racial groups.²⁰

¹⁶ Letter to President Truman from Roy Wilkins, January 12, 1953, Civil Liberties, Official File, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL Website,

https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/trumancivilrights/documents/index.php?documentid=3-3&pagenumber= and Shogan, *Harry Truman and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 179.

¹⁷ CIA Review of the World Situation as it relates to the United States, NSC Meetings June 17, 1948, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 177, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948, Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1948, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V, Part 1.

¹⁸ NSC Report on the Current Policies of the United States of America Relating to the National Security, Vol I Geographical Area Policies, National Security Policies (2 of 2), President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 170, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; and David Aikman, *Great Souls: Six Who Changed the Century*, (Lanham. Maryland: 2003), 81.

¹⁹ Martin Roberts, *South Africa 1948-2000: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, (London: 2001), 26.

²⁰ 1950. Population Registration Act No 30, Apartheid Legislation 1948-1990, O’Malley Archive, Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory (hereafter NMCM).

<https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01828/05lv01829/06lv01838.htm>

The South African Government also passed legislation that would enforce what became known as petty apartheid. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, notable for being among the first pieces of legislation to be passed by the new ruling party, forbade marriages between white people and people of other races. This was followed in 1950 by the Immorality Amendment Act, which amended the Immorality Act of 1927 (which had banned sexual intercourse between whites and blacks) to prohibit extramarital sex between whites and individuals of any other race.²¹

It is important to note that the apartheid legislation was not only aimed at the black African population. In June 1951, the Separate Representation of Voters Act removed Coloured voters in the Cape from the common voters' roll and placed them on a separate roll. It was part of a deliberate process by the National Party to remove all non-whites from the common voters' roll. In the words of J.G. Strydom, the Minister and Lands and Irrigation, "If the white man does not abolish the Coloured franchise on the common voters' roll, the white man will not remain master in South Africa." While it was initially invalidated by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in South Africa, due to the legislation being passed by a simple majority in the Senate, as opposed to the required two-thirds majority, it was later validated by the South Africa Act Amendment Act in 1956. On the level of petty apartheid, as noted previously, the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and Immorality Amendment Act were aimed to prevent relations between the white population and those classified as Asian or Coloured as well as Black.²²

The anger and frustration of the non-white groups, towards white political and economic supremacy, was exacerbated by their increasingly restrictive and repressive treatment under the Nationalist government leading to domestic protests and unrest. As early as November, 1948, the State Department warned that unless the NP Government moved away from a "substratum of fear and hate" in seeking to resolve its racial question, the progress and development of South Africa would be hindered.²³

Indeed the first months of 1950 witnessed serious rioting by black Africans in the townships of Newclare and Sophiatown outside of Johannesburg. The U.S. Consul General Sydney Redecker observed that the unrest stemmed from the grievances of the blacks against established white rule, especially the increasingly stringent police control, and was the

Union of South Africa Act, Provide for the establishment of group areas, for the control of the acquisition of immovable property and the occupation of land and premises, and for matters incidental thereto, No.41 1950, Box A1485, Department of Historical Papers, Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand.

²¹ Union of South Africa Act, Prohibit Marriages between Europeans and non-Europeans, and to provide for matters incidental thereto, No.55, 1949, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation, (1 of 2), Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL and Union of South Africa Act, Amend the Immorality Act, 1927, so as to prohibit illicit carnal intercourse between Europeans and non-Europeans, and to provide for matters incidental thereto, No.21, 1950, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation, (1 of 2), Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL.

²² Union of South Africa Act, Prohibit Marriages between Europeans and non-Europeans, and to provide for matters incidental thereto, No.55, 1949, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation, (1 of 2), Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL; Union of South Africa Act, Amend the Immorality Act, 1927, so as to prohibit illicit carnal intercourse between Europeans and non-Europeans, and to provide for matters incidental thereto, No.21, 1950, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation, (1 of 2), Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL; 1951 - Separate Representation of Voters Act No 46, Apartheid Legislation 1948-1990, O'Malley Archive, NMCM,

<https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01828/05lv01829/06lv01843.htm>; Pretoria Times August, 29, 1951, Afrikaner Policies-South African Press Commentary 1949-1952, Box 2, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, Harry S. Truman Library and 1956. South Africa Amendment Act No 9, Apartheid Legislation 1948-1990, O'Malley Archive, NMCM,

<https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01828/05lv01829/06lv01872.htm>;

²³ Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948, FRUS, 1948, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V, Part 1.

continuation of “a wave of violence and lawlessness by natives” in recent months. On May 1, 1950, during the so called Freedom Day Riots, clashes between protesters and the police in the Johannesburg area led to the deaths of at least eighteen black Africans and the wounding of nearly forty. The political officer at the U.S. Embassy, Joseph Sweeney, informed Secretary of State Dean Acheson that the May Day disturbances were part of a pattern of racial disturbances threatening the stability of South Africa.²⁴

In August, the African National Congress (ANC) issued a public statement demanding “unqualified fundamental rights” for all Africans and warned of a “racial explosion” if apartheid discrimination continued. On June 26, 1952 a Defiance Campaign began of nonviolent civil disobedience that posed a serious threat to the stability of the nation. In September alone nearly 2500 volunteer activists were arrested and jailed. The campaign slowed in the fall but not before violent clashes occurred in Port Elizabeth and East London. During the latter, a Dominican nun was murdered and possibly cannibalized by a violent mob.²⁵

The racial policies of the South African Government were also creating problems for Pretoria at the UN. On September 12, 1952, thirteen Afro-Asian member states, including India and Pakistan, requested that the UN General Assembly consider the question of racial conflict in South Africa resulting from the policies of apartheid. Despite the protestations of the SA Government, which contended that such action constituted a violation of Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter which forbade intervention in the domestic affairs of member states, the UNGA included the item of its agenda. On December 5, the UNGA adopted Resolution 616 (VII) which established a three member commission to examine the racial situation in South Africa.²⁶

Since 1946, during the Smuts era, the South African Government had already been under attack at the UNGA on two fronts. The first related to the treatment of Indians or those of Indian descent in South Africa. The second issue related to the question of South West Africa which Pretoria had governed under a League of Nations mandate. South Africa had refused to submit the territory to a UN trusteeship or abide by an International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion that it should submit reports to the UN.²⁷

The Truman administration, adopted a balanced position at the UN that sought to mediate between Pretoria and its critics and avoid any overtly hostile resolutions that would further alienate South Africa from the global community of nations and fragment the nascent anti-communist alliance. Regarding South Africa’s domestic racial policies, the United States accepted that the UNGA had the legal competency to discuss South African policies but any action or recommendation for action on the question of apartheid would constitute an intervention in the domestic affairs of a member state which the UN did not have the authority

²⁴ The Consul General in Johannesburg (Redecker) to the Department of State, February 17, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; The Charge in South Africa (Connelly) to the Secretary of State, June 8, 1950, Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL and A Retrospective Summary, 1974, Freedom Day Riots on the Rand, Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL and Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 151.

²⁵ Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 151 and 172-174 and Mignonette Breier, “The Death that Dare(d) Not Speak its Name: The Killing of Sister Aidan Quinlan in the East London Riots of 1952”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 41 (6) 2015, 1151-1165.

²⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Secretary of State for UN Affairs (Hickerson), October 8, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1; Memorandum of Conversation, October 14, 1952, Memoranda of Conversations File October 1952, Box 71, Dean Acheson Papers, TL and Editorial Note, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1.

²⁷ Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948, FRUS, 1948, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V, Part 1; National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Department of State Policy Statement, March 28, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V and Memorandum by Armistead M. Lee and Musedorah Thoreson of the Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs, September 16, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1.

to engage in. Washington also sought to mediate between Pretoria, New Delhi and Lahore over the treatment of those of Indian descent in South Africa and wished to avoid UN resolutions that would lead to greater discord between the non-communist nations. In the case of South West Africa, the Truman administration believed that Pretoria should submit the territory to a UN Trusteeship but if not should abide by the ICJ opinion. Washington hoped, however, to moderate UN actions to ensure South Africa continued to participate at the UN as a strong supporter of Western objectives.²⁸

The concerns of the United States were heightened, however, in the view of policymakers in Washington, by the intransigence of the Nationalists on the racial question and their sensitivity to any perceived interference in their domestic affairs. When U.S. officials expressed concern to their South African counterparts over racial unrest, noting the adverse effect of such disturbances on the willingness of U.S. investors to bring capital to South Africa, the concerns were dismissed out of hand. In terms, of the domestic disturbances, Pretoria insisted that a moderation of racial policy would not solve the issue and typically blamed any unrest on communist agitators.²⁹

At the UN, the Nationalists also displayed an extreme obduracy and irritation at any external advice to moderate their position. As noted by the CIA, Smuts who was conscious of world opinion had at least sought to make token gestures to placate the international community. In contrast, the National Party leadership was angered at UN meddling in its racial question and in the fall of 1951 temporarily withdrew from the UNGA in protest at UN interference in its domestic matters. Indeed, the “jiggling” approach of the United States, in the words of SA Minister of External Affairs D. D. Forsyth, led to disappointment and resentment in Pretoria. Indeed, Nationalists and the Afrikaans press highlighted South African backing for U.S. initiatives at the UN compared to the lack of support Washington received from the former colonial states.³⁰

²⁸ National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, March 6, 1950, 1950, March, Box 2, Papers of George C. McGhee, TL; Editorial Note, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; The Ambassador in the Union of South Africa (Erhardt), to the Dominion Affairs Officer, Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs (Shullaw), January 30, 1951, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V; Department of State Policy Statement, March 28, 1951, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V Memorandum by Armistead M. Lee and Musedorah Thoreson of the Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs, September 16, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1; Memorandum of Conversation, by the United Nations Adviser, Bureau of European Affairs (Allen), October 14, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1; Memorandum of Conversation, November 7, 1952, Memoranda of Conversations File November 1952, Box 71, Dean Acheson Papers, TL and Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, p.142.

²⁹ National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, March 6, 1950, 1950, March, Box 2, Papers of George C. McGhee, TL; Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into acts of violence committed by Natives at Krugersdorp, Newlands, Randfontein and Newclare, Union of South Africa, March 22, 1950, Freedom Day Riots on the Rand, Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL; The Charge in South Africa (Connelly) to the Secretary of State, June 8, 1950, Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, by the First Secretary of the Embassy in South Africa (Connelly), September 27, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; Memorandum by the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs (Perkins) to the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern, South Asian and African Affairs (Berry), April 10, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1.

³⁰ Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948, FRUS, 1948, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V, Part 1 National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry S.

Given the opposing trajectories of the United States and South Africa on the issue of race relations, coupled with the extreme obduracy and prickliness of the National Party regarding any criticism, however mild, of their domestic policies, one might have expected a calculated distancing of Washington from the practitioners of apartheid. The question of racial equality, however, was side lined by the geopolitics of an increasingly ‘hot’ Cold War.

Cold War

The Communist danger loomed large in the strategic thinking of the Truman administration. In September, 1948, the CIA warned the White House that the USSR was the only global power with the capability and willingness to threaten the United States security and national interest. In its intelligence report, the agency warned that for the foreseeable future, Moscow would wage political economic and psychological warfare against Washington seeking to undermine U.S. power and security at every opportunity. Subsequent CIA reports continued to highlight the extreme hostility of Moscow towards the United States and observed that the Kremlin would “exploit every opportunity, probe every weakness and every dissension it can discover.”³¹

In the view of the White House, global communist expansion, not only constituted a threat to the United States but also the broader Western alliance and the stability of a world still shaken and rebuilt in the aftermath of World War II. In March 1947, Truman, guided by a framework developed by George Kennan, laid out the so called Truman Doctrine, a global policy of the containment of communism. The administration portrayed the contest as a struggle between the free world and an alliance of “terror and oppression”. The Truman Doctrine established that Washington would provide political, military and economic assistance to all democratic nations under threat from external or internal authoritarian forces. It represented a significant shift in foreign policy away from withdrawal from regional conflicts not directly involving the United States. In his inaugural address of January 20, 1949, Truman reiterated that the “false philosophy” of communism posed a threat not only to the United States but to also to “world recovery and lasting peace”.³²

Truman, TL; Department of State to the Embassy of the Union of South Africa, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; Memorandum of Conversation, March 6, 1950, 1950, March, Box 2, Papers of George C. McGhee, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, December 8, 1950, Memoranda of Conversations File December 1950 Box 68, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; Department of State Policy Statement, March 28, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V; Summary from the Afrikaans Press, Union of South Africa File, Southwest Africa Trusteeship, Press Comment, Box 4, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Secretary of State for UN Affairs (Hickerson), October 8, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1; The Charge in the Union of South Africa (Robertson) to the Department of State, October 28, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1 and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 76-78, 121-122, 142, 161-162 and 188.

³¹ National Intelligence Estimate, Threats to the Security of the United States, September 28, 1948, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; National Intelligence Estimate, Soviet Capabilities and Intentions, November 15, 1950, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; National Intelligence Estimate, The world situation over the next decade, December 29, 1952, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 221, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and NSC Report on the Current Policies of the United States of America Relating to the National Security, Vol I Geographical Area Policies, National Security Policies (1 of 2), President's Secretary's Files, Box 170, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL.

³² Address of the President to Congress, March 12, 1947, Elsemy Papers, Harry S. Truman Administration, TL Website, https://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/doctrine/large/documents/index.php?documentdate=1947-03-12&documentid=5-9&pagenumber=1; Inaugural Address, Public Papers 1945-1953, TL Website,

While the defence of Europe and Asia assumed primary importance in U.S. strategic thinking, as demonstrated by the Marshall Plan and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the White House was not unaware of the importance of South Africa in the context of the global Cold War. The Cape sea route was of particular significance, especially in the event of the Mediterranean falling under enemy dominion, as had been the case in World War II. South Africa was also seen as the only state in Africa with the power, stability and military potential to mount a defence of the African continent in the event of the global conflict with Moscow.³³

South Africa also possessed vast and strategically significant mineral resources including amosite asbestos, chrome, diamonds, gold and manganese. Chrome and manganese imports from South Africa were deemed by the State Department as vital for the defence of the United States and the security of the free world. Indeed, South Africa produced 12 of the 23 strategic minerals listed by the National Security Resources Board as so critical that stockpiling was deemed essential. Significantly, as noted by the National Security Council (NSC) a quarter of the global supply of chromite (including practically all chemical grade chromite ore) and manganese as well as the entire Western supply of amosite asbestos originated in South Africa.³⁴

The White House was therefore pleased by the fiercely anti-communist stance taken by Pretoria. South African officials both publicly and privately stridently opposed the spread of communism onto the African continent. In terms of legislation, on June 26, 1950 the Suppression of Communism Act formally outlawed the Communist Party of South Africa. In the view of policy makers in Washington the fervent anti-communist and anti-Soviet stance adopted by the National Party government made Pretoria an increasingly precious ally in the context of the Cold War.³⁵

While the National Party Government, and indeed most white South Africans, opposed the spread of communism, it should be noted, however, that there were clearly self-serving motivations behind their rationale. Geopolitically, it was advantageous for Pretoria to continue its alignment with Washington especially when seeking fiscal or military assistance. Furthermore by framing all domestic unrest, especially racial clashes, as organized or led by

<https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=1030> and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 57

³³ National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; NSC Report on the Current Policies of the United States of America Relating to the National Security, Vol I Geographical Area Policies, National Security Policies (2 of 2), President's Secretary's Files, Box 170, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, p.50.

³⁴ Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948, FRUS, 1948, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V, Part 1; National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; The Secretary of State to the Embassy in the Union of South Africa, December 29, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V; Preliminary Estimate on Africa south of the Sahara, July 15, 1952, Africa, Psychological Strategy Board Files, Box 5, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; National Intelligence Estimate, Probable Developments in the Union of South Africa, October 20, 1952, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and NSC Report on the Current Policies of the United States of America Relating to the National Security, Vol I Geographical Area Policies, National Security Policies (2 of 2), President's Secretary's Files, Box 170, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL.

³⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, March 29, 1949, Memoranda of Conversations File March 1949, Box 65, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; Union of South Africa Act, Declare the Communist Party of South Africa to be an unlawful organization; to make provision for declaring other organizations promoting communistic activities to be unlawful and for prohibiting certain periodical or other publications; to prohibit certain communistic activities; and to make provision for other incidental matters, No.44, 1950, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation, (2 of 2), Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 4 and 51-52.

communist elements sought to deflect international and domestic criticism away from the question of the racial discrimination and injustice inherent in South African society. Indeed, the Suppression of Communism Act created the offence of statutory communism which covered all extra-legal activities on behalf of social and racial change.³⁶

In October, 1948, the U.S.S. Douglas H. Fox and the U.S.S. Huntington docked at both Durban and Cape Town as a goodwill visit to South Africa. The naval visit not only exhibited the importance of the Cape sea route in U.S. military planning but also highlighted, albeit on a micro level, the overarching importance of Cold War geopolitics in policy making. In the report by Rear Admiral James H. Foskett, he emphasized that South Africa was a reliable ally in struggle against global communism and recommended that U.S. naval vessels call at South African ports at least annually. He stated that “There are probably no better liberty ports in the world for the American bluejacket than in South Africa, where he finds an extremely cordial welcome from people who literally “speak his language””.³⁷

The issue of the African-American and Filipino naval personnel being subject to apartheid legislation while on shore leave appears not to have troubled Foskett. He commented that that the color bar and racial segregation posed no problem for the non-white servicemen who were better entertained and made more friends in Durban and Cape Town than any other port since leaving the United States. While official naval policy was to obey all the domestic laws of the countries visited, nonetheless, the glossing over of the issue of subjecting active duty U.S. military personnel to racially discriminatory laws is demonstrative of the lack of importance senior military figures attributed to the question of apartheid when compared to the Soviet threat.³⁸

At the broader diplomatic level, the State Department also adopted a similar approach. On November 1, 1948, the department issued a policy statement which highlighted the fundamental objectives of U.S. policy towards Pretoria. The statement acknowledged that the racial question was the major issue in South Africa and would hinder progress and development until resolved by an approach other than a “substratum of fear and hate”. Nevertheless, the primary goals identified by the State Department were the maintenance of close and friendly ties between Washington and Pretoria and perhaps more importantly the need to continue the existing geopolitical alignment of South Africa with Western nations and the broader Western cause. The statement further highlighted that it was in the interest of the United States to avoid

³⁶ Natal Mercury October 12, 1948, Subject File Clippings, Box 1, James H. Foskett Papers, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Webb), August 17, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI; Memorandum of Conversation, March 6, 1950, 1950, March, Box 2, Papers of George C. McGhee, TL; Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into acts of violence committed by Natives at Krugersdorp, Newlands, Randfontein and Newclare, Union of South Africa, March 22, 1950, Freedom Day Riots on the Rand, Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL; The Charge in South Africa (Connelly) to the Secretary of State, June 8, 1950, Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL; Union of South Africa Act, Declare the Communist Party of South Africa to be an unlawful organization; to make provision for declaring other organizations promoting communistic activities to be unlawful and for prohibiting certain periodical or other publications; to prohibit certain communistic activities; and to make provision for other incidental matters, No.44, 1950, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation, (2 of 2), Box 3, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL and Translation of the address given by Minister of Native Affairs Dr. H. F. Verwoerd in opening the 11th session of the Natives Representative Council, December 5, 1950, Apartheid Policy, South African Press Comment 1950-1952, Box 2, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, TL.

³⁷ Report to Commander in Chief Atlantic and U.S. Atlantic Fleet from Foskett, November 5, 1948, Reports on cruise of the U.S.S. Huntington, Box 2, James H. Foskett Papers, TL.

³⁸ Report to Commander in Chief Atlantic and U.S. Atlantic Fleet from Foskett, November 5, 1948, Reports on cruise of the U.S.S. Huntington, Box 2, James H. Foskett Papers, TL.

the National Party government sliding into an isolationist stance diplomatically and geopolitically.³⁹

On November 24, 1948, at the request of Pretoria, President Truman approved the elevation of the Legation of South Africa to the level of an embassy. The Legation of the United States in South Africa was likewise raised to embassy status. In urging Truman to suggest approval, Under Secretary of Defence Robert A. Lovett observed that Washington maintained “friendly relations” with Pretoria and noted that the United States had embassies in the other two southern British dominions of Australia and New Zealand. The issue of South African racial policies was not even considered as a factor in the decision making.⁴⁰

During the early Cold War era, Pretoria demonstrated to the White House a firm commitment to the Western cause in both word and deed. On June 24, 1948 the Soviet Union blocked the rail, road and canal access to the sectors of Berlin under the control of the Western powers. Moscow, irritated at the introduction of a new Deutsche Mark currency that along with the Marshall Plan appeared to have the potential to rebuild West Germany, sought to force the Western allies to abandon Berlin.⁴¹

In response, the United States, along with the other Western powers, organized a massive airlift, beginning on June 26, to provide essential food and materials for the civilian and military population of West Berlin. In the first year of the airlift the allied forces flew over 200,000 sorties delivering up to nearly 13,000 tons of food and fuel in a day. By April, 1949, the airlift was delivering more supplies than had previously been transported by rail. On May 12, 1949, the USSR lifted the blockade and in July the NSC recommended the phasing out of the airlift. The airlift formally ended on September 30, 1949.⁴²

The Berlin Airlift symbolized the increasing division between the Western allies and Moscow on the future of Europe and indeed the world. It also demonstrated to the White House, the National Party’s credentials as a viable partner in the fight against communism. The South African Air Force (SAAF) flew approximately 1,200 missions to West Berlin over the course of the airlift and delivered around 4,100 tons of cargo. In a military arena far from southern Africa, Pretoria had proven the willingness and capability to support the Western nations.⁴³

Over the course of 1949 and 1950, South Africa continued to gratify Washington with its support for the Western cause. In June, 1950 the South African Minister of Defence, Frans Christiaan Erasmus informed Louis A. Johnson that in the event of a global war between the West and the Soviet Union, Pretoria would provide South African Defence Force (SADF) troops to defend the continent of Africa from communist aggression. In October, Erasmus confirmed to Secretary of State Acheson that Pretoria would make one armored division and one combat air squadron available for deployment in such a scenario.⁴⁴

³⁹ Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948, FRUS, 1948, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V, Part 1

⁴⁰ Memorandum for President Truman from Robert A. Lovett, November 23, 1948, Union of South Africa File, Box 1444, Papers of Harry S. Truman Official File, TL and To Acheson from Matthew J. Connelly, March 5, 1949, Union of South Africa File, Box 1444, Papers of Harry S. Truman Official File, TL.

⁴¹ The Berlin Crisis, Department of State Report, Foreign Affairs, Box 150, President’s Secretary’s File’s, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL.

⁴² Memorandum for Truman, July 23, 1949, NSC Memorandum Approvals 236, President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 169, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Harry S. Truman Library and The Berlin Crisis, Department of State Report, Foreign Affairs, Box 150, President’s Secretary’s File’s, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL.

⁴³ The Berlin Crisis, Department of State Report, Foreign Affairs, Box 150, President’s Secretary’s File’s, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; South Africa: A Country Study, (Washington, D.C. : Federal Research Division, Library of Congress 1997), 338, <https://www.loc.gov/item/96048983/> and Alex Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, (New York: 2008), 18-19.

⁴⁴ The South African Minister of Defence (Erasmus) to the Minister of Defense (Johnson), June 15, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V and Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, October 5, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V.

Fourteen months earlier, on April 4, 1949, the United States along with eleven other European and North American nations, including Canada, France and the United Kingdom, signed the North Atlantic Treaty creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization or (NATO). This military alliance was designed as a system of collective defence against whereby the member states agreed to mutual defence in response to an attack by the Soviet Union or indeed any other external threat.⁴⁵

As early as August, 1949, South African officials indicated an eagerness to join NATO or a similar alliance. Indeed, in a conversation with Under Secretary of State James E. Webb, Minister of Defence Erasmus even implied a degree of disappointment that Pretoria had not been invited to participate the establishment of NATO. During the visit of Under Secretary of State George C. McGhee to Cape Town in March 1950, NP leaders including Prime Minister Malan reiterated the South African desire to join NATO or link Pretoria to Washington in a comparable alliance. While NATO membership was not offered to South Africa, the alliance remained comprised of European and North American nations, in October, 1951 the United States included South Africa in the Mutual Security Act which provided military economic and technical assistance to friendly nations in the interest of containing communism.⁴⁶

The Korean War further established South Africa as an important partner in the Western alliance against the global communist threat. On June 24, 1950, while at home in Independence, Missouri, President Truman received a phone call from Secretary of State Acheson informing him that the North Koreans had just invaded South Korea. While Truman initially publicly dismissed the attack as a “bandit raid” that would be dealt with by a UN “police action”, it swiftly became clear that the well trained North Korean troops supplied with Soviet armor and weaponry were far superior to their poorly equipped South Korean adversaries.⁴⁷

On June 27, 1950, the UN Security Council passed UNSC Resolution 83 recommending member states provide military assistance to the South Koreans. That same day the White House committed United States air and naval forces to the defence of South Korea. In August, Truman and Acheson obtained the agreement of Congress to appropriate \$12 billion for military action in Korea. The Korean War, proved to be far more consequential than a mere “bandit raid”. The UN “police action” comprised of nearly one million troops from over a dozen countries, the United States alone contributed nearly three hundred thousand military personnel, and after three years of bitter fighting between the UN command and the North Koreans along with Chinese and Soviet forces an armistice was signed which established a Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and essentially ended the war as a stalemate.⁴⁸

During the Korean War, South Africa, once again proved to be a dependable ally of the United States. At the United Nations, Pretoria supported the United States call for action against the North Koreans and while initially circumspect about dispatching combat personnel to Korea, South African Ambassador G.P. Jooste informed Acheson that this was due to the limited equipment available to the SADF and concerns over the weakening the forces available to defend Africa, on August 4, 1950, the National Party government decided to send an air squadron to join the UN forces. The Second Squadron of the SAAF known as the Flying

⁴⁵ Origins, A Short History of NATO, NATO Website,

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm

⁴⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Webb), August 17, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI; To Department of State from Bernard C. Connelly Charge d'Affaires, Embassy South Africa, March 5, 1950, 1950, March, Box 2, Papers of George C. McGhee, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, March 6, 1950, 1950, March, Box 2, Papers of George C. McGhee, TL and Statement by the President Upon Signing the Mutual Security Act, October 10, 1951, Public Papers of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1953. TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=466>

⁴⁷ Hamby, *Man of the People*, 533 and 537-540.

⁴⁸ United Nations Security Council Resolution 83, June 27, 1950, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/document/chap-vii-sres-83.php> and Hamby, *Man of the People*, 537

Cheetahs flew over 12,000 missions as part of the U.S. Air Force Eighteenth Fighter-Bomber wing. The White House was gratified by the South African participation and on June 24, 1952, Acting Secretary of State David K. E. Bruce and Ambassador Jooste signed an agreement whereby the United States would provide, on a credit basis, the South African forces in Korea with the material, supplies, services and facilities which Pretoria was unable to furnish.⁴⁹

In the early Cold War era, a time of increased hostility and militarization between Washington and Moscow, the anti-communism of the National Party combined with the steadfast support of Pretoria in the various crises of the period firmly established South Africa as if not a key player in the Western alliance then certainly an important and dependable friendly nation in the struggle against the communist threat. While concerns existed that Pretoria's racial policies could lead to instability or lead to communist meddling, these issues were not seen as posing an immediate danger to either white political control in South Africa or to the strategic interests of the United States. The close ties between Pretoria and Washington were further solidified by the South African decision to sell uranium to the United States.

Uranium

On August 6, 1945, the *Enola Gay*, a United States Air Force B-29 detonated a uranium bomb, known as Little Boy, of unprecedented power over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, on August 9, a second bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. The two explosions, the only use of nuclear weapons in the history of armed conflict, ended World War II and shepherded in the atomic age.

The White House was well aware of the strategic significance of the nuclear weapons both for the post World War II global balance of power and for the defence of Western Europe against any potential Soviet military aggression. On October 3, 1945, in a special message to Congress, Truman requested the establishment of the United States Atomic Energy Commission with full control over atomic research and broad authority to engage in scientific research and development. After passage through Congress the President signed the Atomic Energy Act on August 1, 1946.⁵⁰

The spectre of a nuclear armed Soviet Union hovered over the White House. This threat materialized in the fall of 1949 with the successful production by Moscow of its own atomic weapon. The nuclear arms race had truly begun. On January 31, 1950 Truman officially approved a military program to develop a thermonuclear hydrogen bomb but Washington was rocked, only three days later, by the news that the British atomic scientist Klaus Fuchs, who

⁴⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, July 3, 1950, Memoranda of Conversations File July 1950 Box 67, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, July 24, 1950, Memoranda of Conversations File July 1950 Box 67, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; Memorandum of Conversation, by the First Secretary of the Embassy in South Africa (Connelly), September 27, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; Memorandum of Conversation, April 20, 1951, Memoranda of Conversations File April 1951, Box 68, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; Editorial Note, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1; Memorandum of Conversation, September 16, 1952, Memoranda of Conversations File September 1952, Box 71, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; South Africa: A Country Study, (Washington, D.C. : Federal Research Division, Library of Congress) 1997, 338, <https://www.loc.gov/item/96048983/> and Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 18-19.

⁵⁰ Special Message to the Congress on Atomic Energy, October 3, 1945, Public Papers of Harry S. Truman, 1945-1953. TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=165>; President Truman signs atomic energy bill, Truman Library Photographs, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/photographs/view.php?id=14381>; Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 91 and Hamby, *Man of the People*, 367-368.

had worked on the Manhattan Project, had been arrested for passing classified information about atomic weapon design to the Soviets by British authorities.⁵¹

As the nuclear arms race heated up this heightened the need for a reliable and secure source of uranium for the United States nuclear program. Since the beginning of the Manhattan Project in 1942, the Shinkolobwe mine in the Katanga region of the Belgian Congo had produced the vast majority of United States uranium supplies. Indeed, the fissionable material in the bombs that had exploded over Japan in 1945 had originated from the mines of the Belgian Congo. By 1948, the year the National Party came to power in South Africa, ninety percent of uranium imports into the United States came from the Congolese Shinkolobwe mine.⁵²

The White House was concerned by the potential implications of United States dependence on Congolese uranium for national security. Belgian nationalization of the mines, political or social unrest in the Congo and the threat of Soviet sabotage worried policy planners. In addition, as noted by Borstelmann, U.S. Atomic Energy Commission Chairman David Lilienthal and other figures expressed reservations over the extent of the uranium supply at the mine.⁵³

As early as 1944, surveys undertaken by geologists working for the mining company Union Carbide, which was acting as a subcontractor for the Manhattan Project, that South Africa possessed the largest undeveloped uranium ore reserves in the world available for rapid commercial development. Importantly, South Africa not only contained mineable reserves of uranium but large quantities of uranium in low concentrations occurred in the gold ores of the mining industry on the Witwatersrand near Johannesburg. Following the removal of the gold the uranium could also be extracted.⁵⁴

The Truman administration was well aware of the strategic importance of the presence of vast uranium deposits in vehemently anti-communist South Africa. In November 1948, the policy statement of the Department of State towards South Africa emphasized the promotion and development of natural resources, especially those important to the domestic program of stockpiling strategic minerals such as uranium, as a fundamental objective of the United States. CIA and NSC reports also highlighted the fact that South Africa would become a major supplier of uranium for the United States. On March 2, 1949, the NSC Special Committee on Atomic Energy Policy informed Truman that in terms of uranium imports “South Africa probably will be an exceedingly important source for the long run, and most probable, presently known replacement for the supplies now received from the Congo”.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 137 and Hamby, *Man of the People*, 529.

⁵² Report to the President from the NSC Special Committee on Atomic Energy Policy with Respect to the United Kingdom and Canada, March 2, 1949, Atomic Energy (1 of 2), President's Secretary's Files, Box 175, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 45-46 and 91.

⁵³ Report to the President from the NSC Special Committee on Atomic Energy Policy with Respect to the United Kingdom and Canada, March 2, 1949, Atomic Energy (1 of 2), President's Secretary's Files, Box 175, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Memorandum for John Sherman from Bill Korn, October 9, 1951, Atomic Energy Commission, Psychological Strategy Board Files, Box 2, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 91-94 and 163.

⁵⁴ National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Report to the President from the NSC Special Committee on Atomic Energy Policy with Respect to the United Kingdom and Canada, March 2, 1949, Atomic Energy (1 of 2), President's Secretary's Files, Box 175, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 50 and Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 20.

⁵⁵ Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948, FRUS, 1948, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V, Part 1; National Intelligence Estimate, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, President's Secretary's Files, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and Report to the President from the NSC Special Committee on Atomic Energy Policy with Respect to the United Kingdom and Canada, March 2, 1949, Atomic Energy (1 of 2), President's Secretary's Files, Box 175, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL.

On November 23, 1950, following extensive negotiations, representatives of the Combined Development Agency (CDA) which comprised of the United States, United Kingdom and Canada reached an agreement with the South African Atomic Energy Board regarding the procurement of uranium. Two thirds of the cost of the uranium extraction project, approximately \$35 million, was funded by the United States Export-Import Bank and the remaining third was paid for by United Kingdom Ministry of Supply. It was further agreed that the SA Atomic Energy Board would deliver the uranium to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and UK Ministry of Supply by the SA Atomic Energy Board at fixed prices.⁵⁶

In November 1951, the South African Atomic Energy Board agreed to undertake uranium ore production at a larger number of mines than previously established. Eleven months later, in October 1952, the first of uranium extractor plant, designed to extract uranium oxide from the residue of gold mines, came into production at the West Rand Consolidated Mine at Krugersdorp near Johannesburg. Pretoria, albeit with substantial financial assistance from Washington and London, had fulfilled its promise to provide uranium ore to the United States. It is also worth noting that South Africa, in tandem with the principal negotiations, also successfully demanded to become part of the “inner circle” of the atomic energy field, a so called, “associate membership”, as termed by Theophilus E. Donges, the South African Minister of the Interior.⁵⁷

On January 8, 1951, in his State of the Union address, President Truman highlighted the importance of uranium to the United States. It was, in the words of Truman, “the basis of our atomic power.” The President also underlined the danger to Washington if Moscow was able to acquire or destabilize the African sources of the raw materials notably uranium that were vital to U.S. national security. The White House therefore was not only gratified by the South African decision to sell large quantities of uranium ore to the United States but also well aware that given the importance of a reliable supply of uranium from a strongly anti-communist source that close ties between the United States and South Africa were more important to Washington than Pretoria. It was therefore the clear imperative to keep South Africa firmly entrenched in the Western alliance and avoid actions that might jeopardize the developing friendship with the National Party government.⁵⁸

A Cementing of Ties: Financial and Military Assistance

The vehement anti-communism of Pretoria, as demonstrated by a track record of tangible support for global actions taken by Washington, combined with the South African decision to

⁵⁶ Report to the President from the NSC Special Committee on Atomic Energy Policy with Respect to the United Kingdom and Canada, March 2, 1949, Atomic Energy (1 of 2), President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 175, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL; Editorial Note, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; The Consul General at Johannesburg (Redecker) to the Department of State, April 19, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V and Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 21.

⁵⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, December 8, 1950, Memoranda of Conversations File December 1950 Box 68, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; Memorandum by Armistead M. Lee and Musedorah Thoreson of the Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs, September 16, 1952, FRUS, 1952-1954, Africa and South Asia, Volume XI, Part 1; Editorial Note, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 186 and Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 21.

⁵⁸ Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union, January 8, 1951, Public Papers, Harry S. Truman 1945-1953, TL Website, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=202>; NSC Report on the Current Policies of the United States of America Relating to the National Security, Vol I Geographical Area Policies, National Security Policies (2 of 2), President’s Secretary’s Files, Box 170, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL and Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle*, 186 and 192.

sell uranium to the United States, swiftly led to both financial and military aid to the apartheid regime following the conclusion of the uranium agreement. In January 1949, the South African Government had made a formal application for a \$50 million loan from the United States Export-Import Bank. It should be noted that the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im Bank), operates as a federal government corporation and was and still is the official export credit agency (ECA) of the United States Government.⁵⁹

According to the South African Minister of Finance Nicolaas Havenga, the loan was intended to be used for the purchase of capital goods from the United States for the Electricity Supply Commission (ESCOM), the South African Iron and Steel Industrial Corporation (ISCOR) and South African Railways and Harbours, all of which were parastatal entities operated by the South African Government. Both Havenga and the Minister of Economic Affairs and Mines Eric Louw met with Ex-Im Bank officials of the course of 1949 to discuss the details of the loan notably the crucial financial guarantees.⁶⁰

The proposed loan, however, fell through as the South African Government was not willing to accede to the Ex-Im Bank's conditions which included an inspection of the end use of the funding and the requirement of gold security deposits. Pretoria argued that South Africa as a sovereign country in a sound financial position and an excellent credit record should not be forced to accept what it viewed as overly onerous conditions. For its part, at this point, the Ex-Im Bank was not prepared to be flexible on the terms of such a loan. The failure to obtain the loan led to resentment towards the United States among South African officials. Indeed, in October 1949, a "testy and resentful" Havenga informed U.S. Ambassador North Winship that Pretoria would not be seeking any more public loans from the United States.⁶¹

Following the committal of South African forces to the war in Korea and the signing of uranium agreement it appears that Washington was more willing to be helpful in terms of the procurement of loans for Pretoria. On January 23, 1951, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) concluded two loans totalling \$50 million to the South African Government. The bank loaned \$30 million to ESCOM to develop power facilities and a further \$20 million directly to the South African Government to improve transportation infrastructure.⁶²

It is noteworthy that at the meeting of the National Advisory Council on International Monetary and Financial Problems, held on December 28, 1950, that a representative of Atomic Energy Commission was unofficially present and highlighted the importance of the loans to the AEC. It is also highly unlikely to be co-incidental that on exactly the same day as the IBRD offered its loans to the South Africa Government, eight major commercial U.S. banks also

⁵⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, February 28, 1949, Memoranda of Conversations File January-February 1949, Box 65, Dean Acheson Papers, TL; Memorandum by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Hickerson) to the Under Secretary of State (Webb), May 16, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI and The Ambassador in the Union of South Africa (Winship) to the Secretary of State, October 14, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI.

⁶⁰ Memorandum by the Director of the Office of European Affairs (Hickerson) to the Under Secretary of State (Webb), May 16, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI and The Ambassador in the Union of South Africa (Winship) to the Secretary of State, October 14, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI.

⁶¹ The Ambassador in the Union of South Africa (Winship) to the Secretary of State, October 14, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI; Memorandum of Conversations, March 6, 1950, 1950, March, Box 2, Papers of George C. McGhee, TL and Department of State Policy Statement, March 28, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V.

⁶² Cross Reference Sheet, February 27, 1951, Union of South Africa File, Box 1444, Papers of Harry S. Truman Official File, TL and Department of State Policy Statement, March 28, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V.

announced a further loan of \$30 million to Pretoria. Five months later the Ex-Im Bank offered a \$35 million loan to South African mining companies to finance the production of uranium.⁶³

Funding from Washington for arms and other military equipment reflected a similar pattern. On August 17, 1949, in a meeting with Under Secretary of State Webb, South African Minister of Defence Erasmus and General Len Beyers the Chief of Staff of the SADF requested tanks and bombers from the United States to upgrade the South African defence forces. Erasmus stated, though, that due to a lack of funds, including a shortage of U.S. dollars, Pretoria would have to defer payment. The South Africans were left disappointed, however, as Webb informed them that under existing legislation Washington was unable to provide arms on a deferred basis to Pretoria.⁶⁴

In October 1950, however, following the South Africa decision to provide a squadron of airmen for Korea and as talks continued over a uranium deal the White House was more willing to consider providing financial support to modernize the SADF. During discussions with Secretary of State Acheson and Secretary of Defence George Marshall, Erasmus found the U.S. officials far more amenable to his requests. While neither Acheson nor Marshall made a firm commitment that the United States would provide funding, it was pointed out to Erasmus that revisions to the Military Defense Assistance Act had amended the legislation which could allow Washington to assist Pretoria in arms procurement. It was reiterated by both Acheson and Marshall that a determination would still need to be made to determine South African eligibility. A less than subtle hint given the ongoing negotiations over uranium.⁶⁵

Indeed, on December 15, 1950, less than a month after the signing of the uranium agreement, the Secretary of State wrote letters to the appropriate chairmen of the committees of Congress which stated that Pretoria was eligible to receive military assistance under Section 408 (e) of the Military Defense Assistance Act of 1949. Despite receiving a CIA assessment that South African military planning focused on internal security, Acheson informed Ambassador Jooste on February 5, 1951 that his government was eligible to receive reimbursable military assistance from the United States. On November 9, Acting Secretary of State Webb and South African Charge Basil Jarvie exchanged notes which constituted an agreement regarding the sale of military equipment to the apartheid state.⁶⁶

During the final years of the Truman administration, Washington continued to be concerned by the racial policies of the apartheid state and indeed was well aware, in part through reports from the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria that the repressive treatment of the non-white groups led to a fertile breeding ground for communist influence. The White House policy towards Pretoria, however, remained dominated by the broader geopolitics of the Cold War. Indeed, the State Department highlighted the importance of retaining close ties with South Africa to ensure and strengthen Pretoria's alignment with the anti-communist world and expedite the use of South African raw materials, especially uranium, to aid the strengthen the

⁶³ Record of Meeting No.169 of the National Advisory Council on International Monetary and Financial Problems, December 28, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 165.

⁶⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Under Secretary of State (Webb), August 17, 1949, FRUS, 1949, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume VI and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 165.

⁶⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, by the Secretary of State, October 5, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V and Memorandum of Conversation, by the Director, Office of Military Assistance, Department of Defense (Lemnitzer), October 5, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V.

⁶⁶ Editorial Note, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; The Secretary of State to the Ambassador of the Union of South Africa (Jooste), February 5, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V; Agreements between the United States and the Union of South Africa, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V; Editorial Note, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V and Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 164.

West in the geostrategic conflict with Moscow. Indeed, in July 1952 the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) in a report on sub-Saharan Africa reaffirmed that in the present circumstances the United States should recognize the primacy of white rule in South Africa and seek to achieve its objectives by dealing with those who currently held the levers of power.⁶⁷

Conclusion

The year of 1948 witnessed two elections that pushed race relations in the United States and South Africa in dramatically opposite directions. During the Truman era, the President, despite his own prejudices, was a strong supporter of the cause of civil rights and his was the first presidential administration to fully embrace the struggle for racial justice and both publicly and privately condemn the racial discrimination and especially the violence suffered by African-Americans. Under Truman, the White House issued executive orders abolishing racial discriminatory employment within the federal government and desegregating the armed forces.

In South Africa, however, under the Nationalist-Afrikaner coalition, race relations were moving in an entirely different trajectory. The newly elected government moved swiftly to implement its electoral platform of white supremacy and strict racial segregation. The Population Registration Act of July 1950 classified and registered South Africans into one of three basic racial groupings and the Group Areas Act, allowed for geographical areas to be for the exclusive occupation of specific racial groups. The South African Government also enacted petty apartheid legislation including Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and the Immorality Amendment Act.

Despite their differing paths on the issue of race relations, diplomatic ties between the United States and South Africa grew closer during the Truman era. Indeed in November 1948, Washington elevated the South African Legation to embassy status. The key determinant shaping United States policy was the geopolitics of the early Cold War. The vehement anti-communism of the Nationalists, combined with the strategic position of South Africa on the Cape sea route and its steadfast support for Western actions against the global communist threat, notably during the Berlin airlift and the Korean War, placed Pretoria firmly in the good graces of the Truman administration.

The friendly relations between Pretoria and Washington were further reinforced by the South African decision, in November 1950, to sell large quantities of enriched uranium to the United States. As tensions began to escalate between the Western nations and the Soviet bloc the Truman administration was keenly aware of the vital strategic importance of access to a secure non-communist supply of uranium. Following the uranium agreement, Washington moved swiftly to assist in providing financial and military aid to the apartheid regime.

The policy of Cold War geopolitics trumping the objective of racial equality in Africa was of course not limited to the case of the apartheid regime in Pretoria. The Portuguese colonial

⁶⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, by the First Secretary of the Embassy in South Africa (Connelly), September 27, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; The Ambassador in South Africa (Erhardt) to the Secretary of State, October 3, 1950, FRUS, 1950, The Near East, South Asia and Africa, Volume V; The Ambassador in the Union of South Africa (Erhardt), to the Dominion Affairs Officer, Office of British Commonwealth and Northern European Affairs (Shullaw), January 30, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V; Department of State Policy Statement, March 28, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V; The Third Secretary of the Embassy in the Union of South Africa (Dembo) to the Department of State, August 2, 1951, FRUS, 1951, The Near East and Africa, Volume V and Preliminary Estimate on Africa south of the Sahara, July 15, 1952, Africa, Psychological Strategy Board Files, Box 5, Papers of Harry S. Truman, TL.

empire in Africa included Angola, Mozambique and Guinea Bissau. The *Estado Novo* regime of Antonio Salazar in Lisbon opposed decolonization and was determined to maintain its control of its African territories. The Truman White House however, maintained tacit support for Lisbon's colonial rule and sold arms and supplies to Portugal at favorable rates. Washington was well aware of the vehement anti-communism of the Salazar government and its importance as a member of NATO. Furthermore, the Portuguese Azores, located at a strategic mid-Atlantic location, hosted a U.S. military base, on a lease basis under the Santa Maria Agreement of 1944.

Following the outbreak of the anti-colonial Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the United States while aware that the rebellion illustrated the potential for greater racial violence if white populations continued retain political control in sub-Saharan Africa, nonetheless, quietly supported Britain in its efforts to suppress the uprising. Washington not only wished to support a key Cold War ally and NATO member but also was concerned over the potential communist ties of the Mau Mau leadership.

It was the relationship between Washington and Pretoria, however, which most succinctly revealed the clear decision to prioritize Cold War considerations over the cause of racial equality. For the Truman administration, the relationship between the United States and South Africa was dominated by pragmatic geostrategic rationale. As observed in the Balkan proverb; "My children, you are permitted in time of great danger to walk with the Devil until you have crossed the bridge", the White House was prepared to offer a hand of friendship to the apartheid regime as a bulwark against the greater danger of the global communist threat. Despite the development of apartheid, Pretoria's anti-communism stance and demonstrable record of support for the United States in confronting Moscow meant that it was the Nationalist's international rather than domestic policies that would become the key dynamic shaping relations between the two nations.