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SOUTH AFRICAN ATTITUDES TO  
EXTERNAL (AND PARTICULARLY EUROPEAN) INVOLVEMENT  
IN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE NAMIBIAN DISPUTE

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1. The purpose of this background paper is to sketch popular South African attitudes towards European involvement in the settlement of the Namibian dispute. My perception of such attitudes is based upon newspapers, radio and TV reports - and upon discussions with fellow South Africans. Inevitably the focus will fall upon the "Western Five" or the Contact Group - which comprises two non-European Powers. Although I shall concentrate on "European involvement" it will not be possible to avoid mention of the United States and Canada.
2. The position of the Western Five is unenviable. Essentially they stand as mediators between South Africa and a hostile UN. They have offered their good offices to attempt to reach a peaceful settlement of the Namibian issue in order to block resort to coercion. However, in South Africa they are largely seen as agents of an antagonistic UN, rather than honest brokers; while in the UN they are seen as agents of the South African Government determined to maintain their trade relations with South Africa.

White South Africans do not adequately appreciate the important role of the Western Five and the extent to which they have averted coercive sanctions against South Africa on account of the Government's failure to respond to UN resolutions demanding South African withdrawal from Namibia. As they are perceived as UN agents many white South Africans transfer their antagonism towards the UN onto the Western Five.

I suspect that the Black South African perspective is very different. Black South Africans (and some Whites opposed to the Government) see the Western Five as being engaged in a diversionary exercise. The main problem in Southern Africa is not Namibian independence. It is racism in South Africa and Namibia, and it is impossible to separate the interests of Namibian blacks and South African blacks in this regard. By concentrating all their energies on a Namibian settlement the Western Five are neglecting repression and discrimination in South Africa itself. This is sometimes perceived on a

deliberate strategy on the part of the West. Urgent matters, such as police brutality, denationalization (now the proposed denationalization of Swazis in South Africa) and the failure of the South African Government to introduce meaningful reform in South Africa are shelved indefinitely in the interests of a Namibian settlement. Worse still, the Western Five are seen to be treating the South African Government with extreme care in order not to antagonize it while Namibian talks continue. In some quarters it is even believed that the Western Five and Pretoria are using the Namibian issue as an excuse for neglecting South Africa's own problems and that both parties welcome the delays in negotiations for this reason.

Also, black South Africans find it hard to understand the West's soft line on South African invasions of Angola. They find it difficult to reconcile the West's strong response to aggression on the part of Argentina with its moderate response to South African aggression directed at Angola. They ask what possible legal or moral justification there can be for such raids? How the West can condone acts of aggression launched from an illegally occupied territory?

3. While anti-Government South Africans adopt a cynical approach towards the western initiatives and construe quiet diplomacy as a form of collaboration, Government supporters and the average white South African have responded differently to the respective roles of the individual States comprising the Western Five.

4. West Germany

West Germany is seen as the most "anti-South African" of the Western Five since the departure of the Carter administration. It is seen as being unduly unsympathetic to "German interests" in an ex-German colony and unprepared to support the interests of German-speaking white Namibians. In addition, the Foreign Minister has welcomed Sam Nujoma in an open and cordial manner on occasions and made remarks that have been construed as pro-SWAPO.

Although Blacks have traditionally expected little from Germany as Britain and the United States have taken the lead in human rights issues, it seems that Blacks are increasingly sensitive to this new German concern and appreciate this more away from the traditional West German approach.

5. France.

Fears that the new French Government would adopt a hostile, anti-South African stance on Namibia (or apartheid) have not materialized and for this Government supporters are grateful. Generally France is seen as determined to maintain a low profile on Southern Africa. Cynics contend that France's traditional, formal diplomatic style and its concern for trade links, preclude France from adopting an activist role - whatever the ideology of its Government.

French diplomats in South Africa have always prized themselves on their low profile. At no time have they visibly identified themselves with Black leaders in South Africa. Blacks have few expectations from France and are probably not surprised at the present response.

6. United Kingdom.

The Conservative Government has not lived up to the expectations of most White South Africans. It was widely believed that it would pursue a softer line on Namibia - particularly after the change of Government in the USA. However, it has not done so. This is to a large extent attributed to the "wet" approach of Lord Carrington, who, since the independence of Zimbabwe, has been identified as too sympathetic towards Blacks. As yet Mr Pym has had no opportunity to reveal his position on Southern Africa, but it is confidently anticipated that he will be more well disposed towards the South African Government and will prove to be a worthy ally of the Reagan administration.

7. USA and Canada.

I do not wish to comment on attitudes towards these non-European powers. Suffice it to say that Canada is still seen to be activist on the Namibian issue; while the USA is seen to be well disposed towards Pretoria. This is not the place to discuss the merits of the quiet diplomacy employed by the USA. (See Dugard, "Silence is not Golden" (1982) 46, Foreign Policy 37). It can however confidently be stated that most White South Africans see the Reagan administration as friendly towards South Africa; as extremely patient over Namibia; and as attentative to Pretoria's arguments about mineral wealth, strategic sea routes and the threat of Communist expansion. There is a clear feeling of relief that the Carter administration is no longer and a hope that the USA will influence Western States in respect of Namibia. Conversely, anti-Government South Africans are disappointed, to put it mildly, with the policy of quiet diplomacy and the undue emphasis placed on a Namibian settlement. This is seen as collaboration with Pretoria in many quarters.

8. The Netherlands.

South African attitudes towards the Netherlands require special mention, although not with particular reference to Namibia. Over the past years the Dutch Government has taken a hard line on apartheid and has "distanced" itself from South Africa politically and culturally. It has indicated its opposition to the South African military effort in Namibia very strongly by granting asylum to "draft evaders". This has, not surprisingly, angered white South Africans who regard the Netherlands as having a special association with South Africa for historical reasons. Conversely, there is a new empathy between black South Africans and the Netherlands - particularly in respect of church affairs.

9. Traditionally the South African Government has sought to ally itself with Western Europe. Western Powers have increasingly found this association embarrassing. The new militancy of the human rights policies pursued by some Western Powers has further

alienated Pretoria. While Pretoria accepts that it must continue to rely on the West for support on Namibia - either in the form of an acceptable settlement or further delays - it appears to be looking for friends elsewhere for other purposes. This is illustrated by Pretoria's strictly neutral approach towards the Falklands conflict - despite the hostile attitude of the EEC and the USA towards Argentina. Ideologically Pretoria is probably more at home with the regimes of South America and one can expect further flirtations with these regimes in the future. Generally I believe that Pretoria is reassessing its role in the international community and that after Namibia becomes independent one can expect new alliances with non-European powers.