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ANC Deserves Support By United States

By MONROE GILMOUR JR.

Oliver Tambo, president of the African National Congress, met with Secretary of State George Shultz this week amid controversy over whether our government should hold such a meeting.

To many, it indicated that the Reagan administration finally is coming to terms with the realistic power relationships in South Africa. To others, it represented another unfortunate contact with a "terrorist" organization.

In 1983, my wife and I had the opportunity to meet Tambo at a diplomatic reception in New Delhi where we were working at the time. Our conversation took place shortly after the South African Defense Force had invaded the border country of Lesotho, murdering 42 people whom South Africa claimed were ANC "terrorists."

Until that time, the ANC had been meticulous about its own attacks, going to extremes to avoid taking human life. This ANC policy had grown out of the fact that Tambo, Nelson Mandela and others who established the military wing of the ANC in the early 1960s had themselves been students of non-violence. The ANC was formed in 1912 and worked under a non-violent banner for almost 50 years — until the 1960 Sharpeville massacre, where South African police gunned down 69 peaceful demonstrators in cold blood.

Against this backdrop, we asked Tambo if the recent attack on Lesotho would cause the ANC to change its policy regarding acts against South Africa. I will never forget the pained look on his face as he quietly replied, "How long can I allow the blood to be only ours?"

His reply reflected both an external strategy consideration and

the internal reality that the "young bloods" in the ANC were clamoring for more decisive action. Many of them were beginning to look upon the old guard of the ANC, those like Tambo raised in the non-violent tradition, as out of touch with the intransigence of the South African government and the need for violence to bring about the dismantling of apartheid.

Subsequent events have demonstrated that the ANC did become more violent and has caused white blood also to run in South Africa's streets.

Yet, before we accept too quickly the charges of "terrorism" from the right, we should consider the structural violence, terrorism if you will, committed by the South African government for decades against the 24 million black majority population.

Government torture, letter bombs, imprisonment of children and attacks on refugees in surrounding countries aside, one statistic reveals more about apartheid and the real violence it entails than all the rest. In South Africa the infant mortality rate for white children is 13 per thousand, about the same as in this country. For black children, however, the infant mortality rate is 90 per thousand and as high as 250 per thousand in some of the homelands where, for years, the white minority government dumped unwanted black families.

The murderous disparity in infant mortality rates did not just happen. It is a direct result of the system of apartheid, which provides wealth for white privilege at the expense of the majority black population. Paul Kruger, patriarch of white Afrikaners and after whom the Krugerrand is named, summed it up this way in the late 1800s: "The black man had to be taught that he

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came second and that he belongs to the inferior class that must obey."

Who then in South Africa is the terrorist? Who represents real violence and the stumbling block to negotiations? Quite simply, the terrorism in South Africa emanates from the South African minority government and those who support it. Oliver Tambo and the ANC resorted to violence only after 50 years of trying to achieve political equality the non-violent way.

Who are we, who have been feeding arms into the slaughter between Iran and Iraq and who resorted to violence on much shorter notice in Grenada, Libya and Nicaragua, to pontificate about the need for the ANC to pursue a non-violent course?

Our pressure for non-violence and negotiations should be directed toward the government of P.W. Botha. Imprisoned ANC leader Nelson Mandela himself has said that the ANC would renounce violence as soon as the South African government has done so. To date, South Africa's government has demonstrated only an interest in further violence and repression. And that, unfortunately, is a recipe for even greater bloodshed and tragedy in what is surely one of the most beautiful countries of the world.

Our nation's goal in contributing to the dismantling of apartheid should be first to determine the strongest and most effective action we can take to put pressure for change on the South African government, and then to take that action.

If such action involves support-

ing the ANC, we should do so. Having been inspired by our Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights, the ANC came to us in the early 1960s asking for help in their own freedom struggle. We turned them down, and they turned for help to the Soviets.

We should not allow that same moral and strategic mistake to happen again. The Western world may not get another chance.

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