

Ulm

Thomas Karis

July 11 , 19 81

' . kWh?)

Updating, for new edition of Southern Africa: The Continuing Crisis, edited by Gwendolen M. Carter and Patrick O'Meara (Indiana University Press, 1979).

Material from line 18 on page 356 through page 362 to be deleted and replaced by the following:

The Carter administration's conciliatory approach to South Africa contained veiled threats of confrontation. It held out the possibility of "the warmest of relations" if only South Africa made a "beginning" of basic change; otherwise, it warned, relations would deteriorate. Yet coercive economic measures were never in the cards. Not only were political constraints powerful, especially as the mid-term Congressional elections and later the presidential election came closer, but harsher policymakers shared a fundamental belief that American business could be a benign influence. Despite South Africa's continuing failure to "begin," the administration did not intensify pressures during the last two years of its term; the hallmark of its policy was reliance on the Sullivan code. Namibia, on the other hand, because of its unique international and legal status, remained a potential source of confrontation if South Africa did not adhere to its agreement for free elections. Under the agreement, accepted by the South-West African People's

Karis - 2

Organization and endorsed by the UN Security Council, the territorial administration would conduct elections under UN supervision and control. In September 1978, South Africa confronted the United States and its western allies with its intention to proceed unilaterally with ethnic-based elections.

In response, Secretary Vance himself and his four counterparts in the "contact group" converged on Pretoria to meet with P. W. Botha, the new prime minister, on October 16-18. South Africa may have had a lingering apprehension that the western states might threaten selective economic or communications sanctions if it did not withdraw or change its plans. But its calculation that pressure would amount to little more than rhetoric proved correct. Indeed, the Carter administration was so intent on conciliating South Africa that Vance reportedly brought with him a handwritten letter from the President -- apparently Carter's own idea in the afterglow of Camp David -- inviting Botha to visit Washington and promising a "more normal relationship" if the Namibia dispute was settled. The carrot of acceptance at the White House seemed worth expending since resolving the Namibia dispute was a crucial stage toward resolution of the South African problem.

The administration persevered diplomatically, encouraged by success in Zimbabwe in 1980. Here the administration earned high marks for its steadfastness in support of British policy, resulting

Karis - 3

in Robert Mugabe's election, and for withstanding American right-wing pressure in behalf of the internal settlement. Hopes for similar progress on Namibia rose in October 1980, shortly before the American presidential election; when South Africa agreed to negotiate a general timetable for a cease-fire and elections. The coming together of the South African government, SWAPO, and all other interested parties at a UN-sponsored conference in Geneva in mid-January, on the eve of Ronald Reagan's inauguration, was a historic occasion and opportunity. To what extent perceptions of the new administration may have contributed to South Africa's insistence on the need for more time, and the consequent failure of the conference, is impossible to say.

The 1980s: Reagan and After

With Ronald Reagan's election as president and the right-ward swing in American politics, the United States appeared poised to embrace the white South African regime. There was no doubt that the new administration would be less attuned to African nationalism than was the Carter administration and more disposed to see South Africa as a strategic ally, than as a liability, in the global contest with the Soviet Union. Five years earlier, twenty-one senators had signed a letter to President Ford urging an end to the

arms embargo and a fundamental shift in policy. Now in the new Republican-controlled Senate, important committees were chaired by seven of these men: Jesse Helms, John Tower, Barry Goldwater, Strom Thurmond, Jake Garn; Peter Domenici, and James McClure. Another signer of the letter was Paul Laxalt, a close friend of the President. Yet in formulating policy, the administration would have to take into account U.S. interests in black Africa, notably Nigeria, and the Third World, the divergent interests of the Western allies, and potential opposition at home. Furthermore, South Africa's black majority opposition could hardly be ignored, especially as developments in South Africa and the region affected the relative strength of "moderate" and revolutionary elements. Observers who hoped that African realities would moderate the policies of the new administration were encouraged shortly before the inauguration when Reagan wrote to a conference in Sierra Leone that he would "strengthen our African ties." Soon afterwards, however, his comments in a televised interview on March 3 underscored expectations of a "tilt" toward white South Africa. Reagan asked, "Can we abandon a country that has stood beside us in every war we've ever fought (thus overlooking the fact that Prime Minister Vorster, among others, had resisted participation in World War II), a country that strategically is essential to the free world?" Reagan's remarks about "friendly" South Africa elicited a predictable

Karis - 5

reaction. Later he re-affirmed traditional rhetoric by terming apartheid "repugnant."

Although the administration could be expected to move cautiously in order to minimize discontinuity, Reagan's personal outlook was clearly aligned with that of the Senate's right-wing. This was evident in a Rand Daily Mail Interview on September 29, 1978. Reagan opposed the UN arms embargo against "a long-time ally" "just as I am opposed to the continuation of sanctions against Rhodesia" and U.S. pleas to "take those murdering guerrillas into the fold and give them power." Reflecting South African propaganda, he spoke of the "multinational" nature of the Republic's "true situation." Members of Congress had not sufficiently studied the situation, he charged; they were "very definitely immensely sensitive to Black America." Reagan suggested integration of the Coloureds and, with reference to the African "homelands," spoke positively of "the idea of independent states." Regarding black Africa, he disparaged Carter's trip to Nigeria; "as for the places he picked to travel -- the most knowledgeable people in public life just wonder how the hell he picked them."

For more sophisticated insights into the conservative position, one could turn to L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan of the Hoover Institution and "South Africa: Strategy for Change" by Chester A. Crocker in Foreign Affairs (Winter 1980/81). Crocker's was a

Karis - 6

particularly skillful prescription for a pragmatic policy of "constructive engagement." A supporter of George Bush's presidential candidacy, he became the new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs but only after Senator Helms had delayed his confirmation for several months.

Crocker and similar critics of the Carter administration stressed the realities of white power in South Africa. In their thinking, change that would make South Africa palatable as a strategic ally -- removal of the most embarrassing features of racism and some form of "power-sharing" -- would have to be "white-led." Furthermore, the whites could only be encouraged and persuaded, not threatened and coerced. What was heeded, more than the Nixon-Ford policy of "communication," was a new policy of "constructive engagement" that aligned the United States publicly and actively with ruling Nationalist Party elements who favored evolutionary negotiations with "moderate" blacks. But no timetable could be imposed. Universal franchise and majority rule were unmentionable. And anything that abetted revolution was to be discouraged in every way.

Opponents of the emerging policy who saw it as one of all carrots, with nothing substantial in return, and no sticks were not far wrong. The shift in emphasis, in contrast to that of the Mondale-Vorster meeting, was evident in Pretoria on April 15-16, 1981 when Crocker and Alan Keyes, a conservative black officer in

Karis - 7

the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, met for five-and-a-half hours with Egreign Minister Roelof (Pik) Botha and Defense Minister Magnus Malan. A memorandum of that conversation was among the secret documents leaked to TransAfrica, a black pressure group on African issues, at the end of May 1981. Such a memorandum is relatively crude, lacking the nuances of Crocker's Foreign Affairs article. Presumably, also; the meeting was only one step in a process of dialogue. Nevertheless, the following brief extracts, virtually all verbatim but without ellipses shown, are revealing, especially with regard to the absence of U.S. concern about the beginning of a change in direction, as Opposed to governmental reform, within South Africa itself.

Botha opened first day's discussion by expressing unhappiness over what SAG (gouth African Government⁷ perceives as backsliding from high expectations produced by Reagan campaign statements. U.S. handling of visit by military officers example of this. Zghortly after Reagans' televised interview, the Chief of South African military intelligence and several senior officers visited Washington after circumventing U.S. policy against such visits by obtaining diplomatic visas. Only after they had met at least one cabinet member and other high officials did the Africa Bureau become aware of their presence, it was said, and request their departure;⁷

Crocker noted that he hadn't, come to discuss internal affairs, but U.S. ability to develop full relations depends on success of the Prime Minister's program and broadening of domestic support. Botha cautioned against making success of program a condition of improved relations. Crocker responded that this is not a condition but reflects U.S. desire to
' . 'Ijk'j. v

Karis - 8

support positive trends.

Botha gave reasons for deep distrust of U.S. Crocker replied that present administration would have more backbone in face of pressure than previous one. Reagan election victory represents enormous change in U.S. public opinion on foreign policy, reversing trend of post-Vietnam years. Botha said SAG doesn't expect U.S. support for apartheid but hopes there will be no repeat of Mondale's "one man, one vote" statement. SA goal is survival of white values, not white privileges. Crocker stressed that top U.S. priority is to stop Soviet encroachment in Africa. U.S. wants to work with SAG, but ability to deal with Soviet presence severely impeded by Namibia.

Malan declared that SAG does not rule out an internationally acceptable settlement in Namibia but could not live with a SWAPO victory that left SWAPO unchecked power. Crocker said USG recognized need to build SA confidence and security.

Botha said SAG's bottom line is no Moscow flag in Windhoek. We're convinced SWAPO is Marxist. Nujoma will nationalize the whole place and cause upheaval and civil war, involving South Africa. We will have to invade Namibia and other countries as well. It would be better to have a low-level conflict there indefinitely than to have a civil war escalating to a general conflagration.

Crocker accepted the premise that Soviet domination is the danger. But as long as Namibia issue subsists, we cannot reach a situation where U.S. can include South Africa in our general security framework. Simmering conflict is not acceptable.

Botha said the internal parties don't want to let go until they have sufficient power to control the situation. We want an anti-Soviet black government.

Crocker said the U.S. understands concern with constitutional rights. We see a panel of experts, consulting all parties, drafting a constitution (Before an election rather than afterwards as in the agreed-upon plan), and then selling it through the Contact Group. Crocker stressed need for SAG to decide cooperation with U.S. was worth it before accepting invitation

Karis - 9

to the Prime Minister to visit the U.S. in May. Botha resisted setting any conditions for visit and said he would prefer not to come if conditions were set. Crocker said there were no conditions, just a question of clarifying the spirit in which the visit would take place.

Pressures were implicit in the new administration's policy.

Thus Crocker in another leaked document proposed to Secretary of State Haig that he tell Pik Botha the United States would "opt out of the negotiation process" on Namibia if South Africa showed that it "had no intention of pulling out of the territory under circumstances reasonably acceptable to the international community at large."

u .

Jgst what this amounted to was not clear, and whether it was credible was doubtful. A longer-range imponderable is what the Reagan administration will do if its gamble on domestic reforms does not pay off. It assumed that a process of change was going on that would defuse black demands for political power and that the United States could encourage the process. Mondale had warned Vorster not to rely on "any illusions that the United States will in the end intervene to save South Africa from the policies it is pursuing." Would "constructive engagement," on the other hand, end up as military intervention?

Sean Gervasi expressed a common radical opinion when he predicted in Southern Africa (January-February 1981) that this would be the case "in the late stages of the South African revolution." His

Karis - 10

analysis was not based on "the personalities of the new foreign policy makers" but on "institutional forces" that generated "deep-seated fears of a growing threat to the very survival of capitalism."

Such fears may have been shared by a broadly liberal study commission on U.S. policy, funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and chaired by Franklin Thomas, the black president of the Ford Foundation. But its important report (South Africa: Time Running OutI The Report of the Study Commission on U.S. Policy toward Southern Africa) issued on May 21, 1981, saw the South African government as an opening for communism rather than as a "bulwark" against it. The commission hoped that "fundamental political change" through reform could avert revolution. As pressure, it called on the U.S. government to broaden both the arms and the nuclear embargoes and for corporations voluntarily to refrain from expanding in South Africa or, if not already there, to stay out. On the other hand, it opposed disinvestment and other economic sanctions "under current circumstances" and recommended many forms of constructive engagement.

The report was politically to the right of the Kennedy wing of the Democratic Party, which in mid-1980 had succeeded in adding to the party platform a call for diplomatic and economic sanctions. against South Africa. On June 5, 1981, the Democratic National

Karis - 11

Committee spelled out what this meant: "a ban on new investments . . . 3 the development of a plan for disinvestment . . .'; an embargo against South Africa; a ban on air transportation . . . 3 a reduction of diplomatic relations with South Africa until majority rule is established."

The unfolding of Reagan's policy, on the other hand, will be marked by steps and questions such as the following. Economic policy. Official neutrality on trade and investment has given way to active encouragement. Probable: encouragement of bank loans, lifting of restrictions on the Export-Import Bank and Commodity Credit Corporation, and tax changes to encourage corporate assistance to black development. But unlikely: legislation requiring adherence to the Sullivan code.

Diplomacy and public relations. P. W. Botha is the first Nationalist prime minister to be invited to Washington since 1948. Will independent homeland leaders be invited? Will the next U.S. ambassador be Helms-like or a professional? Will Reagan, like Garter, make a point of sending black diplomats to South Africa? Will official sports contacts be resumed? The administration will encourage the South African white public by praising ameliorative change, but will it make the U.S. public aware of the dangers of continued white rule?

Military relations. (1) Lifting the arms embargo is considered "unrealistic." But the "grey area" is likely to be more relaxed

Karis - 12

than it was under Carter. Another hole in the embargo is approval given by the new administration to Israel to sell military equipment containing U.S.-made components to South Africa, among other states.

. annual

(2) Just before Carter left office, he renewed the executive order which went beyond the 1977 arms embargo by prohibiting the sale of all items, including sought-after computers, to the South African military and police. Will Reagan renew the order? (3) The State Department has re-affirmed the policy of forbidding official visits by high-ranking South African military officers, but Crocker has confidentially recommended "the normalization of our military 'attache relationship." And U.S. military and Coast Guard training for South Africans? (4) The O.S. is unlikely soon to seek naval base rights at Simonstown, but will American warships resume calls at South African ports? (5) CIA cooperation with South African security officials is likely to improve and expand.

Nuclear policy. South Africa insists that it has not tested according to

a nuclear device but 3/ a leaked document argues that signing the non-proliferation treaty, which provides for inspection, would "set the mind of its would-be-attackers at rest," that is, "the USSR and its associates." Nevertheless, it hopes the new administration will relax its embargo on enriched uranium, needed for two nuclear plants under construction, or allow it to be supplied "through France."

United Nations. On April 30, 1981, the United States continued its past practice when, along with Britain and France, it vetoed sanctions against South Africa on the Namibia issue. But a new tone was evident earlier when Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick refused to join a Security Council resolution urging clemency for three young A&C guerrillas whose execution for treason would be the first for actions in which no one was killed.

Black opposition. Blacks "do not possess the means for a direct assault on white power," wrote Crocker in Foreign Affairs, "and there is little likelihood that this will change soon." Yet blacks have the capacity to change radically the climate for foreign business and to disrupt the flow of minerals. In part because of concern for "long-range access" to these minerals, Carter policymakers stressed the importance of developing "a meaningful relationship with the black South African majority," which one day would have political power. The Reagan administration, on the other hand, does not seem disposed to cultivate contacts with black leaders in South Africa, especially those who oppose the government from outside officially-sponsored institutions.

In any event, the administration is sharply at odds with black perceptions and prescriptions. Thus, Bishop Desmond Tutu, a pre-eminent spokesman, said on a visit to the United States in March 1981 that foreign businessmen were "investing to buttress one of

the most vicious systems since Nazism" and appealed for international economic pressures. Speaking later in Westminster Abbey in London, Tutu warned: "Black people will despair if they see leaders such as the U.S. President hobnobbing with their oppressors and they will turn to the communists for weapons to fight for freedom."

To what extent, if at all, will the new administration follow recent practices? Will its officials attend political trials and join the mourners at funerals like Steve Biko's? Or protest and dissociate the United States from oppressive South African policy? The State Department spokesman said publicly after Tutu returned 'home that lifting his passport was "not helpful." One wonders if American officials have been engaged in any "quiet diplomacy" of protest and warning regarding less prominent blacks subjected to the crackdown of mid-1981, which has been drawn-out and less dramatic than that of October 19, 1977.

Under Carter there were at least erratic contacts with the ANC and the PAC. Will there be any under Reagan? (By July 1981, State Department officials had still made no contact with SWAPO leaders outside Namibia.) To white South Africans, Secretary Haig's strictures on "terrorism" on January 28, 1981 may have appeared a legitimization for South Africa's overland (and "terrorist") attack two days later on ANC houses in Maputo.

Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe. President Carter refused to establish diplomatic relations with Angola because of the presence

of Cuban troops. The new administration adopted an even more conservative line, linking Cuban withdrawal to a Namibia settlement and calling in March 1981 for repeal of the CI%% Amendment, which bars covert aid to anti-government guerrillas. Relations with Mozambique suffered in the same month when U.S. officials were labelled CIA agents and expelled on charges of assisting South Africa in locating ANC houses. In retaliation, and perhaps stimulated by the arrival of Soviet naval vessels in Maputo, the administration used food as a weagon, suspending an aid program. On the other hand, it pledged \$225,000,000 in economic aid over three years for Marxist Zimbabwe, which it saw as independent rather than pro-Spviet. Under Reagan as under Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Ford, the United States has failed to identify itself fully and credibly with the aspirations for equality of the black majority. Over three decades, the complexion of states in the region has been politically transformed, and the challenge of the black majority within South Africa has mounted. The specter of revolutionary violence has haunted American policymakers, anxious about stability in the international economic system, racial repercussions, and East-West rivalry. Yet their reliance on "white-led" change gives substance to the specter. The most
9
interesting challenges to U.S. policy lie ahead.