Policy Alternatives in Southern Africa

Donald F. McHenry

I would like to indicate some of the things that we have been trying to accomplish in the U.N. and some problems we see on the horizon.

Historically U.S. policy toward Southern Africa has been developed in a multilateral context, and that is appropriate. With the exception of the Republic of South Africa, all southern African territories became a responsibility of the international community under Article 73, Chapter 11 of the U.N. Charter. The exceptions to this multilateral approach for U.S. policy were Angola and Mozambique, where relations with Portugal and NATO tended to determine policy.

I cite the multilateral background to show that we have changed our views of Southern Africa as we have changed our attitudes toward Africa in the U.N. Early in the history of the U.N., the U.S. was an enthusiastic backer of decolonialization. We even risked difficulties with our World War II allies, France and the United Kingdom. We were looked upon as a leader of the decolonialization movement.

As the number of independent African countries in the U.N. grew we found ourselves increasingly on the side of those who urged "caution," "moderation," "stability"—all code words that meant "slow down." To Africans this indicated that we supported the status quo.

We found ourselves out-voted in the U.N. We who had been a leader in bringing problems to the organization found ourselves becoming increasingly negative. More and more, everybody knew what we were against and few knew what we were for. We refused to participate in the apartheid committee and withdrew from the colonialism committee.

More recently there was another change. We decided that we were going to participate—but this time in order to shout out our opposition. That was the time when, to use British Ambassador Ivor Richards's words, we had representatives who thought they were involved in "shoot-outs at the O.K. Corral." I do not believe much was accomplished by that approach.

Thanks to Governor William Scranton's tenure as U.N. ambassador, we entered into a new phase, one that, to give credit where it is due, provided the transition for what we are trying to accomplish now. We are trying to lose our reputation of being the "abominable no-man," whereby everybody knows only what we are against, and we mainly seem to preach against the use of measures for change. We wish instead to emphasize firmly what we are for. We want not only to be able to criticize suggestions proposed by others, but also to assume responsibilities for resolving problems.

In Southern Africa, after the fall of the Portuguese empire, the three outstanding problem areas remaining were Southern Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa. One of our first efforts has been, so to speak, to "de-link" these problems; to say to the South Africans in no uncertain terms that there is no such thing as linkage here, since we believe that they are intimately involved in all three areas. That is, they cannot, in exchange for cooperation on Rhodesia and Namibia, expect us to moderate our criticism of apartheid, particularly after the events in Soweto.

This approach contrasts with the approach followed in Henry Kissinger's belated efforts in Southern Africa. He sought to exchange what he called South Africa's cooperation on resolution of the Namibia and Rhodesia questions for less active opposition to Pretoria's domestic policies. Thus, the U.S. was relatively silent when some six hundred students were dying in Soweto. We changed our arms embargo policy and began to sell South Africa light aircraft and to interpret the arms embargo very liberally. We felt that it was necessary to be supportive of the South Africans and withhold criticism of their internal situation because they held the key to the solution of the Namibia and Rhodesia questions. Not only was the linkage highly questionable, it produced no lasting result.

To say that we have sought to de-link these questions does not say we do not recognize that South Africa plays an integral role in the resolution of all three. As a matter of fact, Vice-President Walter Mondale made it clear to

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Prime Minister Vorster in Vienna that not only did we expect progress on the Namibia and Rhodesia question but we also expected progress on the question of South Africa as well. The South Africans were informed that failure to achieve progress on each of the three would result in a policy review and a change in the relations between the U.S. and South Africa.

In addition to de-linking we have also sought some initiatives on our own. On Rhodesia we recognized the primary responsibility of the British, but we have played an active supportive role. We have not produced a magic formula for resolving the Rhodesian question, but by putting a specific proposal on the table we have influenced the debate. Now on the table and public is a specific proposal that will influence other proposals. Any agreement reached as a part of internal discussions going on now in Rhodesia will eventually have to be merged with the Anglo-American proposals.

The approach we have tried to use on the Namibia problem has seen a degree of success, although the Namibia talks have teetered between success and failure. We confronted the South African Government with the necessity of engaging in talks with the only governments with which South Africa currently was communicating—the only countries Pretoria could depend upon to block punitive measures in the U.N. Security Council. We put together a coalition of the five Western members of the Security Council and shifted the responsibility for policy on Namibia to a small working group in New York. For months now a series of four-sided negotiations has gone on with South Africa, the front line states, the U.N. as a body, and, of course, Namibian groups.

The first thing we had to do was stop South Africa's announced intention to implement the so-called "Turnhalle Constitution." They were far along toward doing so—indeed they had planned to do this in late May of last year. As we told South Africa in the coded language of diplomacy, had it gone ahead with implementation of the Turnhalle proposal, we would no longer have been able to resist stern measures in the U.N. Security Council. The U.N. Charter discusses measures in only one place, Chapter Seven, describing mandatory actions that range from a total embargo to—very theoretically—the use of force. I stress the word "theoretically" because such provisions have never been implemented.

We were able to stop the implementation of the "Turnhalle Constitution" and to engage the South Africans and the various parties in negotiations that have resulted in a considerable measure of agreement. If we are able to overcome the differences on three or four remaining issues, a Namibia settlement may be possible.

I do not want to overemphasize the difficulties that remain, although the remaining issues are of tremendous importance. At least one of them involves the use of U.N. troops in Namibia, and under what controls a residual South African military force in Namibia during a transition period would be placed. But the point is that we have reduced the number of issues that separate the contending parties. Settlement of the Namibia question

**Following Ambassador McHenry's talk, he was questioned by the audience:**

Question: Dr. Kissinger's efforts in South Africa had a step-by-step quality to them. He was attempting to achieve a Rhodesia settlement to give South Africa a lot of time to come to grips with certain problems and to see a majority rule work out. He tried to keep some sort of trust on the part of South Africa. I wonder, in taking a somewhat more moralistic approach to the South Africans, how are you going to preserve the basis for being a mediator to these tortuous negotiations and keep the faith of the South African Government?

McHenry: I hope you did not perceive that much of a moralistic tone in what I said. One wants to make sure that he is dealing with hard facts. I frankly would not say that Dr. Kissinger's approach was as step-by-step as you would have us believe. Dr. Kissinger's approach had at least one major flaw. His approach had more to do with an international chess game with the Soviet Union than it had to do with resolving problems of Southern Africa. I do not know whether he gained the trust of the South Africans, but he did not have much trust from anybody else in Africa. I do not believe that we ought to have a confrontational approach. At the same time, I do not believe that there should be any misunderstanding as to where we stand. We cannot, on the one hand, try to reach a resolution of the problems in Rhodesia and Namibia and, on the other hand, mute our voices on the outrageous situation in Soweto. Dr. Kissinger largely did, and that is what he was criticized for. If it is confrontational to make clear where one stands, so be it.
might provide guidance and encouragement for a resolution of the Rhodesian question, and might even set some patterns that could be followed in South Africa itself.

The internal situation in South Africa keeps complicating an already complicated question. Henry Kissinger was in the midst of negotiations on Rhodesia and Namibia when Soweto exploded. When hundreds of children were being shot down in the streets, it was very difficult to get other countries in Africa to believe that South Africa was a civilized or dependable partner in negotiations. We have encountered similar problems with regard to our current efforts.

The Soweto riots produced such tensions and pulls within South Africa itself that it has made the process of negotiations even more difficult. Very early in the administration and at the highest level we decided that it was necessary for us to communicate policy changes to the South African Government. President Carter indicated part of what we were about to do when he informed a newspaper group that he had asked Vice-President Mondale to undertake special responsibilities with regard to Africa. In this instance the president had given only half the story. He was not yet ready to announce that the special responsibility he had given the vice-president involved a meeting with the South African prime minister in Vienna. The vice-president’s task was to deliver to the South African prime minister a twofold message. The first part was that we had to make progress on each of the three issues—Rhodesia, Namibia, and South Africa. The second part of the message related to South Africa itself: Unless we saw an end to racial discrimination and saw progress toward full political participation, the U.S. would review and change its policies toward South Africa.

Vice-President Mondale’s statement made clear that the U.S. was not about to prepare any formulae for the Government of South Africa. We could not dictate policy to the South African people. It would be no more right for us to dictate a future governmental arrangement in South Africa than it is for the whites to dictate a governmental arrangement to blacks who currently live there. Getting together to work out a political arrangement was one of the things South Africans would have to do. The vice-president said that South Africa would have to have time to think over the administration’s message before we would take any action.

Over a period of months the Mondale message and U.S. Africa policy were involved in the internal political campaign that South African whites conducted. A political campaign is the worst place to make decisions, particularly on issues as serious as those in South Africa. We have yet to see emerge in that situation someone I would call a “Pope John”; that is, a man who has decided that the time has come to make the very difficult decisions that will result in a change in direction.

South Africa has not taken the situation seriously enough. Its failure to do so may lead to pressures for further and more far-reaching measures against South Africa itself. Ultimately it will make the resolution of those questions infinitely more difficult. I thought the lesson had been learned long ago: What might have formed the basis of yesterday’s compromise is today’s nonnegotiable demand.

For example, had Rhodesia’s Ian Smith five years ago offered some of the concessions he is talking about today, I think the Africans would have jumped at them. But today, even if Smith gets the agreement of the small group to whom he is talking, it will not bring peace to Rhodesia. The same is true in South Africa. The one thing that is clear in Soweto is that the young people are unwilling to accept the conditions their parents were willing to endure.

If we do not make progress on full political participation, chaos and communism will prosper. The Government of South Africa says exactly the opposite. In fact the history of change in Africa shows that chaos, in terms of economic instability or white flight, results from the failure to make orderly change. If we fail to make progress, the white flight, the racial hatred, and the instability everybody wants to avoid are likely to occur.

It is in the nature of our government that we will not provide arms to promote change in situations such as Southern Africa. Since that is the case, arms will come from Communist countries, allowing an opportunity for change through violence, and also for ideological influence. In Southern Africa we have every incentive to work for peaceful change.

We would be wise not to behave as though we have a lot of time. Portugal is proof of that. Some said change would not come to Portugal for a long time, but change came to Portugal overnight, and the whole strategic situation in Southern Africa changed as a result. The same thing can occur today.

Organized groups can be put down easily by modern societies. They can be infiltrated. Modern communications equipment and the tools available to modern governments are far better than the tools available to private citizens. But what cannot be put down and what cannot be anticipated is a Soweto. I call this the “Rosa Parks syndrome.” Mrs. Parks did not get on the bus that day planning to become the symbol of a civil rights movement. Her feet just hurt, and so she refused to get out of her seat and stand in the back of the bus. Those students in Soweto who started the boycott of Afrikaans language training had no political ideology in mind, although Afrikaans language training represented political oppression they could no longer endure. I do not know whether change in South Africa will come as a result of resistance to Afrikaans language training, or whether change will come when a crowded bridge over a railroad track collapses under the weight of too many black bodies and the black people, realizing that the white bridge on the other side is empty, go into a rage. The unexpected event is the event that, were I a white South African, I would have every reason to fear. If that unexpected event occurs, the rational thinking that all of us would like to see applied—whatever the circumstances—may be too late.
Some of the greatest criticism Ambassador Andrew Young has had from South Africa involves his comparing, as you did, the situation of the civil rights struggle in America to South Africa. Perhaps a clue to the difference is that Vice-President Mondale said that we hold no animosity toward the government or the people of South Africa. It scarcely seems consistent that the implementation of political and economic factors of apartheid would allow us to withhold all animosity.

First, let me say that I do not believe I made any comparison between South Africa and the U.S. when I mentioned the "Rosa Parks syndrome." It was simply to say that sometimes movements develop spontaneously and not out of any planned activity.

I think much of the criticism of Ambassador Young is not well-founded. There is a marked difference between the situation in South Africa and the situation that existed in the U.S. But there are some amazing similarities in attitude. One is the belief that agreement to change means everything has to be done overnight. Another of the attitudes is the paternalism that existed in the South and still exists in South Africa. I remember that as I sat there with Vice-President Mondale, Prime Minister Verster turned to the vice-president and said: "Our blacks are not like Mr. McHenry there." How many times we had heard similar attitudes expressed in our South! However, I am not saying that the situation is the same. Socially and historically it is quite different.

With regard to animosity, I think it is necessary for us to recognize that a situation has been built up in South Africa that we today will have to work with. My South African friends, whether they are Afrikaans or English-speaking, inherited that situation. It came out of peculiar historical circumstances. The only thing we can do is to try to learn from the past and try with an open mind to resolve it. That does not say that we are going to agree on how it is to be resolved. This is one of the reasons we have not tried to come forth with any particular formula. The formula has to be one that South Africans develop. By that I mean all South Africans. The longer people fool around with separate parliaments for the Coloreds or Asians, as is now done, the more they avoid the fundamental question, which is full political participation. The fundamental problem in any society is to develop a governmental structure in which the people make the compromises necessary to live together. No compromises are being made in South Africa. In South Africa one group dictates to all others.

Once the participation process starts, even the Afrikanners will recognize that it is necessary for them to compromise. The Africans have indicated that they are willing to compromise. In the Lusaka Manifesto the African countries stated their willingness to work with South Africa over a period of time on an evolutionary process for change in the country. South Africa ignored that helping hand. They look at change as an all-or-nothing process. They believe in the slippery slope. They feel that once they take the first step, even if there was prior agreement that the steps would be completed over a period of one hundred years, those who said they would bear with them for that hundred years will come back after one year and demand that these steps be completed in ten years.

How are we going to monitor this mandatory arms embargo so that South Africa does not eventually acquire Cessna aircraft or arms to be used by the South African Government or military?

The sales you are talking about now are commercial sales to private individuals. They are not sales to the South African Government. When you say you have an arms embargo, you have to define the term "arms," otherwise you cannot administer it. We do not have a total ban on commercial activities with the South African Government. In the U.S., sales of light aircraft to most places in the world are not treated as military equipment. Because we think that the South African Government can very easily use light aircraft for spotting purposes in military operations, we have restricted those sales. The control of commercial sales grows in part out of the profit motive of the distributor. He knows that if he sells an aircraft to the South African Government in contravention of the arms embargo, or if the aircraft is used for military purposes, he gets no more planes to distribute and that his business will suffer.

Our embargo is an embargo on the sale of arms and military equipment and equipment for their maintenance and manufacture. We have pretty tight controls.

I would like to go back to the Cessnas. It is my understanding that almost every private pilot in South Africa is a member of the South African air commando until he reaches sixty-five. It is also my understanding that Paratus, which is South Africa's military magazine, has said that the Cessnas are among the most effective planes that South Africa has in its military force. Would you like to discuss that in relation to the arms embargo?

I have made it clear that there are no Cessna sales going to South Africa's military force. It seems to me that the question you are raising, which can always be raised in the administration of an arms embargo, is: Do not those items that are sold to private individuals have a potential for military use? Obviously the answer is yes. The practical problem we face is how to administer an arms embargo. We have already administered the arms embargo in a manner that is more sweeping than any other country in the world. We do not have a total embargo on trade with South Africa. In the absence of a total embargo on trade we have to face the possibility that at some time the South African Government will commandeer those planes.

I am not talking about a possibility, I am talking about the fact that every single one of the private purchases of those planes is by a member of the air commandos.

I do not know that that is the truth. I think what you are suggesting is a total embargo on trade. That is a policy question and a decision that has not been made. But I do not want you to try to sneak in the Cessna sales as a violation of the arms embargo, because a Cessna aircraft is not arms or military equipment. We have taken whatever practical steps we can to comply with an arms embargo. There may be others. If you come up with others, let us know, we would be glad to hear them.