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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

28 Apr 1976

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INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY AFFAIRS

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Southern African Policy -- INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

Drift along the path of least resistance has characterized U.S. African policy since the early sixties when we apparently decided that we could straddle the racial issue successfully, keep big power rivalry at a low level, simultaneously maintain our NATO relationship with Portugal and the mainstream of black African leadership, and make economic assistance the principal U.S. contribution to African development. Like the family movie there was a little something for everyone. In part, our policy derived from the belief that solid bilateral relationships with several key countries would buffer us from the impact of colonial wars of independence and the mounting black African moral and political forces gathering against the policies of the white regimes.

As though driven by an Orwellian time machine, however, events have accelerated dramatically and the problems many observers thought would be with us in ten to fifteen years are upon us now. Self-evidently we need to formulate a new policy in order to cope with a sharply changed situation in Southern Africa. Angola has been the most obvious catalyst. In a subtle way related to the quickening of aspirations and bolstering of egos Angola bears a similarity to the October 1973 Middle East war. South Africa demonstrated clear military superiority, but suffered a major strategic defeat. The MPLA demonstrated its impotence against its internal or external enemies without major foreign support, yet achieved a strategic victory that has altered black African views on their capacity to deal with the white regimes.

Apart from the new level of Soviet/Cuban boldness in Angola, the Soviet introduction of increasingly sophisticated weapons elsewhere in Africa to countries which are traditional friends of the U.S. (to Somalia and Uganda which threaten Ethiopia and Kenya, for instance) has contributed to the formation of the new situation in Southern Africa. In addition, the solid African bilateral relationships we earlier might have anticipated for use as influential levers in Southern Africa have not materialized. To the contrary, Nigeria is wallowing in a regression to tribalism and regionalism, Zaire suffers widespread economic discontent in addition to the loss of prestige for Mobutu because of Angola, and Ethiopia is in the midst of a half baked revolution with a seriously divided leadership trying to suppress insurgencies in all but two provinces. Finally, exacerbating all these negative

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factors is the continuing impact of increased energy costs for most African economies. This is often coupled with a drop in commodity export earnings or the effects of a savage drought. A new note of despair and a crushing of expectations has been introduced which adds to instability.

(S) Secretary Kissinger's (HAK's) Africa trip is obviously being utilized as the pivot for U.S. policy redirection, permitting a dialogue with African leaders to appear as the stimulus. Given the major scope of HAK's April 26 speech in Lusaka, however, plus what may be his even more significant May 6 UNCTAD address in Nairobi, it appears that our principal new policy directions have already been defined. In this sense, NSSM 241, United States Policy in Southern Africa may prove principally to be an exercise for devising tactics of implementation and for taking a longer look at the impact elimination of minority role in Namibia and Rhodesia will have on South Africa. The NSSM probably will develop options at least pro forma through a wide spectrum ranging from active U.S. support for liberation groups all the way to a U.S. decision to turn away from Southern Africa with the definition that it represents a European and African problem. The principal focus clearly will be toward mediation, plus increased U.S. pressure on Rhodesia, and Namibia by means of South Africa, plus increased financial inducements. In approaching the task of designing options the following appear priority considerations:

- As we encourage mediation/negotiation between leaders of the independence movements, the neighboring black states and the white regimes we cannot appear to be stalling for the sake of the white regimes. The Soviets would reap benefits from this in more ways than one.

- We need to drop our threats against Soviet and Cuban involvement. Our threats will not deter them. The threats embolden the white hard liners into thinking we will somehow stave off the insurgents. And to the blacks these threats appear to defend the white regimes. Should we decide, in fact, to act we will not have been helped by excessive prior discussion.

- We should resist falling into the Soviet-set trap of polarizing the situation as they did in the Middle East, where at times we have been against certain actions simply because the Soviets were for them.

- Concrete pressures and tangible steps by the U.S. therefore will have to accompany U.S. jawboning or we will find ourselves worse off and with less credibility than we have even at this current low point.

(S) Articulation of our policy, particularly noting your comments Monday, should shift in emphasis away from the "majority rule" formulation. We will stress to the NSSM participants the pitfalls of attempting to rally U.S. public opinion for a policy that will, strictly speaking, not produce what we have said it will. Majority rule, globally applied, hardly benefits U.S. and NATO security and economic interests. We are really seeking equal and racial justice. The U.S. has already supported U.N. resolutions defining the authority in Namibia and Rhodesia as illegal. We have ample and clear national self-interest justifications to underpin our policy of seeking change without having to employ the "majority rule" formula. HAK's Lusaka speech provides for ample alternative

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themes; but also draws heavily on "majority rule" and quotes President Ford as saying "the U.S. is totally dedicated to seeing to it that the majority becomes the ruling power in Rhodesia" (to the Chicago Sun Times on March 13, 1976). But HAK also said, "Of all the challenges before us, racial justice is one of the most basic. . . This is a dominant issue of our age." We anticipate rough sledding on this point during the NSSM exercise because of HAK's and the President's statements and because "majority rule" has become such a key buzzword in the media and throughout the third world.

While NSSM 241 is due for SRG review by May 21, I expect the process to take much longer. Tomorrow's (Thursday, April 29) initial organizational meeting at State, which I plan to attend, probably will assign initial drafting tasks to various agencies. Typically, Defense would be asked to contribute sections on strategic and military aspects. We will go through several drafts before we reach the stage of submission to the SRG. In keeping with NSSM practice, of course, the paper will develop options, not recommendations. ISA will keep you informed during the NSSM process to any degree of detail you wish.

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International Security Affairs

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