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*The Labour Government and Southern Africa:  
The Case of Apartheid in South Africa, 1964-1970\**

**Abstract:** *In the 1960s, the British government was in a very awkward position in South Africa. The apartheid regime represented something contrary to western democracy principles, but for several reasons both London and Washington could not ignore the importance of that country. Strictly anti-communist and located at the junction of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, South Africa was pivotal to the defence of commercial and military sea-routes. Moreover, gold and uranium trading made Pretoria the most important partner of the West in the whole African continent. Finally, white regimes in the area, the Afrikaner one as well as those of Rhodesia and in the Portuguese territories of Angola and Mozambique, granted the stability necessary to pursue Anglo-Saxon interests and at the same time contain the communist influence. In a word, when the Nixon Administration issued NSSM 39, stating that the whites were there to stay and that the only thing to do was collaborating with them, with the aim of persuading them to gradually reduce racial discrimination, London had already come to the conclusion that such a racist government was of paramount importance to the stability of area. Therefore, it was decided not to follow the recommendations of the United Nations to the letter.*

**Keywords:** Apartheid; Southern Africa; South Africa; Containment; Gold; Uranium; Decolonisation.

*Introduction*

«We have seen the awakening of national consciousness in peoples who have for centuries lived in dependence upon some other power. Fifteen years ago this movement spread through Asia. [...] today the same thing is happening in Africa [...] the wind of change is blowing through the continent, and, whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must accept it as a fact [...]».<sup>1</sup>

With these words, addressed to both Houses of the South African Parliament, the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan marked a breakthrough in the history of colonialism. Speaking to his counterpart, Dr. Henrik Frensch Verwoerd, he had said that Britain would never follow Pretoria's policy of separate development. Rather, London thought it was right to work for a non-racial country in which all ethnic communities would share power. However, the most conservative section of British politics had seen that statement as London's abdication in Africa. As a consequence of this, right wing Tories immediately formed the "Monday Club" to mark as "Black Monday" the day

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<sup>1</sup> <http://africanhistory.about.com>.

Macmillan had spoken in Cape Town. An initiative like this seemed to have had a certain influence on the Premier's agenda, so much so that he suggested that franchise arrangements should be planned in countries where there was a significant white minority, such as Kenya. In a few words, a sort of indirect form of voting was regarded as a better way to prevent the subjugation of minority interests by the majority.<sup>2</sup> Whitehall had to be careful not to harm the British and Western position in Black Africa, keeping also an eye on the balance of power at Westminster. Hence, the path leading to African national liberation was long and full of hurdles and formed a patchwork of contradictions intertwined with Cold War issues.

The apartheid regime had been set up after the 1948 general elections, won by the Herenigde Nasionale Party, or simply the National Party, whose leader, Daniel François Malan, had been appointed Prime Minister. He regarded those elections as the outcome of a long and bitter struggle to secure Afrikaner power again and redress the unjust policies of Great Britain. Announcing victory, in fact, he is thought to have stated:

«Today South Africa belongs to us once more. For the first time since Union, South Africa is our own, may God grant that it will always remain our own».<sup>3</sup>

Words like these perfectly matched sentiments of revenge which had been dominating Afrikaner nationalism since the times of the Anglo-Boer War, stressing especially unity of *Volk*, Christian-Nationalism, anti-imperialism, and republicanism. The word “apartheid” was a neologism meaning “apartness”, or “separateness”. It was not only a matter of physical separation between different ethnical groups, but it was also considered as a moral imperative. In 1944, Malan in Parliament had affirmed that apartheid was not the same as the already existing policy of segregation, which featured separation in the sense of fencing off and preventing the black population from mixing up with whites, beside completely removing franchise rights for the blacks and assigning 87 per cent of the land to fifteen per cent of the population. Instead, he described the new policy in more positive terms, as a way to implement the progress of each race on the

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<sup>2</sup> See R. OVENDALE, *Macmillan and the Wind of Change in Africa, 1957-1960*, in «The Historical Journal», XXXVIII, 2, June 1995, p. 476-477.

<sup>3</sup> S. DUBOW, *Apartheid, 1948-1994*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 3.

basis of what was their own, thus keeping them apart from each other, thus protecting civilization and Christianity from barbarism and heathenism.<sup>4</sup>

South Africa had a pivotal geographic position, being also the only independent State of European tradition and of substantial power and stability in the whole African continent. Strategically speaking, stated CIA experts in a report issued in January 1949, the Union of South Africa was a major stronghold in the Southern hemisphere, as a way-station in the lines of communications to the Indian Ocean and extremely useful naval bases. Even more important was the fact that South Africa at that time produced at least twenty-three strategic minerals whose stock-piling was regarded as essential to the West, in particular uranium deposits. Finally, from a political point of view the Union's orientation was without any doubt pro-West. Finally, we can see from this first document that the Americans had already realised how South African issues would affect them in the following years. In fact, the report ended with a sort of prediction that the Malan Government's nationalistic posture would possibly weaken the British Commonwealth as a stabilising force in the world. Moreover, the United States, concluded the estimate, would be feeling the effects in the United Nations Assembly of Afrikaner intransigence.<sup>5</sup> As concerned domestic issues, the Truman Administration was taking a strong stance in favour of civil rights, such as the de-segregation of the Army, but the fierce anti-communism shown by the Malan Government, which put the South African Communist out of law in 1950, made obviously Washington concerned about the troubled future of the African ally.<sup>6</sup> In addition, due to the huge war effort the Americans had made only a few years previously, the Atlantic superpower had depleted some of its reserves of certain minerals crucial for its sophisticated military industry. Therefore, the White House had been obliged to look abroad for further supplies. Concerning this, the State Department in June 1948 had warned the Administration about the importance of Southern Africa for stockpiling materials. In consequence of this, the CIA stated the movement towards independence of European colonies in certain areas of the African continent had the risk

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<sup>4</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> See *The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa*, 31 January 1949, ORE 1-49, Confidential, in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

<sup>6</sup> See T. BORSTELMANN, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 83-84.

for the US to be deprived of assured access to certain military bases and raw materials reserves. This was even more worrying, if we consider that the US was already importing from South Africa relevant quantities of uranium, chrome, and manganese.<sup>7</sup>

As regarded British public opinion, the features of apartheid may not have been so publicised in the late 1940s, but it was well known that the afore mentioned doctrine was the ideology of the former Prime Minister's political rivals, who were Afrikaner nationalists sympathising with Nazi Germany during the war. Instead, Jan Smuts had been a loyal ally of Britain and a proponent of the Commonwealth. To boost British criticism and concern on South African policies was also the awareness that the Empire and old dominions like South Africa had become more important than ever, since Britain had emerged financially weakened from the war. As an outcome of this, considerable British attention was focused on the decisions taken by the new Nationalist Party's government in Pretoria. According to the whole political spectrum of the British press, the advent of an executive claiming the ideology of racism was regarded as a sort of disaster not only for Britain, but for the entire Commonwealth itself. Apart from this, apartheid policies were also seen as a threat to British colonial rule in Africa, in particular in the protectorates neighbouring South Africa. As a matter of fact, London was responsible for the rule and protection of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland, collectively known as the High Commission Territories. This responsibility was inevitably in contrast with the South African aim of taking control of those lands, but it was also impossible to ignore the antagonism between Africans and Europeans that the policies of apartheid were provoking.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, in the late 1940s a large part of the South African public opinion was well aware that the Labour government's stance was becoming more and more critical towards Pretoria's racial policies. In particular, Afrikaner nationalists responded to the Commonwealth transformation of 1949, allowing membership to republics, too. At a glance, it had become possible for nationalists to fulfil their dream of complete independence, without breaking ties with the Commonwealth. It was a surprise that every move towards a lessening of colonial rule in

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<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>8</sup> See R. HYAM-P. HENSHAW, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa since the Boer War*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 308-311.

Asia and Africa was lowering British prestige in the eyes of many white South Africans, while simultaneously raising it within the black population. Malan himself expressed deep concern in 1950, stating that the British policy of equal rights and franchise for all had already produced bitter fruits in Nigeria and the Gold Coast.<sup>9</sup>

1. *A brief history of apartheid legislation*

The first grand apartheid law was the Population Registration Act, which ensured that every child be assigned a racial category on birth. Official Boards were set up for those whose race was unclear, causing difficulty especially for coloured people and separating their families when members were allocated different races. The second pillar of grand apartheid was the Group Areas Act, allowing the government to proclaim residential and business areas in towns for designated races only, including Indians and coloureds. Each race was allotted its own area, used in later years as a basis of forced removal. Under the Reservation of separate Amenities Act of 1953, municipal grounds could be reserved for a particular race, creating separate beaches, buses, hospitals, schools and universities. Blacks were provided with services greatly inferior to those of whites, while a strict government bureaucracy developed in order to record a full national register to assign citizenship, employment, accommodation, and even social rights. Everything on grounds of race. Education was officially segregated in 1953 through the Bantu Education Act, crafting a separate system of education for black students and designed to prepare black people to be a labouring class only. In 1959, separate universities were created for black, coloured and Indian people. Existing universities were not permitted to enrol new black students. In the meantime, the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 had created separate government structures for blacks and whites and was the first piece of legislation to support the government's plan of separate development in the Bantustans, that is areas reserved for blacks of all different ethnic groups and commonly called Bantus. These amounted to only thirteen per cent of the country's land, and the homelands were run by cooperative tribal leaders, regardless of their popular legitimacy, while uncooperative chiefs were forcibly deposed.<sup>10</sup> Instead, the Bantu Education Act aimed at putting all

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<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>10</sup> See DUBOW, *Apartheid*, cit., p. 64.

educational provision under the control of the State, thus ending the independent church school system through which a small African elite had been formed for about a century.<sup>11</sup> Hendrik Verwoerd, who had introduced the Act, addressing the Senate in June 1954 stated there was no place for the Bantus in the European community, since they had to be guided to serve their own population. Hence, there was no need for Africans to receive training aimed at absorption in the white community. The former system, according to Verwoerd, had only shown the Bantus the green pastures of European society, thus misleading them from their own people and traditions. This speech was supposed to spread two messages: a) blacks were to be treated as mere units of cheap labour; therefore, it was useless to teach them academic subjects they were not allowed to use in their life; b) the terms “Bantu” and “community” were keywords in developing the concept of ethno-nationalism, with the aim of morally and culturally justifying apartheid. At the same time, the reference to pastures evoked the idea that blacks were reduced to simple docile animals, naturally fit to tribal life in rural reserves.<sup>12</sup>

In the meantime, in October 1952 a CIA intelligence estimate reminded the White House that from the Union of South Africa came pivotal raw materials in quite a big quantity. In addition, the Union’s production of gold was of paramount importance for the financial stability of the United Kingdom and the whole Sterling Area. at the same time, South African port facilities were acquiring more and more importance in light of the fact that the Middle East and the Suez Canal area were in turmoil. In case of denial to the West of the usage of the Canal, the report stated that the British controlled base at Simonstown would be extremely useful for ship and aircraft maintenance, air and sea operations, convoy organisation and protection, storage and re-supply activities, and troop staging. The outlook the CIA was worried about was that continuation of racial policies in the Union would confirm the belief of the non-white intelligentsia in the British colonies of Africa that similar measures would be taken once the Colonial Office

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<sup>11</sup> In nationalist eyes, mission schools had given a sort of dangerous academic training through an English and liberal outlook. This was seen as an embryo of an African elite claiming equality. Instead, Bantu Education provided a more technical syllabus with courses delivered in Afrikaans as well as in English, apart from African vernacular languages at the lower levels of the school path. See W. BEINART, *Twentieth-Century South Africa*, Oxford-New York, Oxford University Press, , 2001<sup>2</sup>, p. 160.

<sup>12</sup> See DUBOW, *Apartheid*, pp. 55-56.

relinquished control. On the other hand, in that moment it seemed the Nationalist Government did not have any intention to quit the Commonwealth, though putting pressure on London in order to extend the Union's jurisdiction to the protectorates of Basutoland, Swaziland, and Bechuanaland.<sup>13</sup> Another crucial point of the whole question was only marginally mentioned in this record, but it became the focus of a still partially classified report issued four years later. In a few words, while in Autumn 1952 South Africa had just powered up the output of uranium, only a few years later the Union had turned into one of the world's largest producers, with a contract between the South African Atomic Energy Board and appropriate agencies of the United Kingdom and the United States for the purchase of uranium oxide over an extended period.<sup>14</sup>

The role of the homelands was expanded in 1959 through the Bantu Self-Government Act, aimed at establishing a sort of separate development within the homelands, which were to become self-governing communities. However, the true intention of this policy was to make Africans nationals of the homelands rather than of South Africa. The homelands were encouraged to opt for independence, as this would greatly reduce the number of black citizens of South Africa, even if they lived in "white South Africa". Under the homeland system, the government attempted to divide South Africa into a number of separate states, each with the purpose to be turned into a separate nation-state for a different ethnic group. The government justified this policy, stating there was no will of discrimination on grounds of race or colour. Rather, it was a policy of differentiation on the ground of nationhood, of different nations, granting to each self-determination within the borders of their homelands. In this way, the blacks were destined to become foreign citizens working in South Africa as migrant labourers on temporary work permits. Hence, a lot of black South Africans who had never resided in their identified homeland were forcibly removed from the cities they had always lived in. Once a homeland was granted its nominal independence, its inhabitants were then issued passports instead of passbooks, meaning they were no longer legally considered South

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<sup>13</sup> See *National Intelligence Estimate: Probable Developments in the Union of South Africa*, 20 October 1952, NIE-72, Secret, Security Information, in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

<sup>14</sup> See *Scientific Intelligence Research Aid: Nuclear Activities of Foreign Nations*, vol. IV, *Asia and Africa*, 30 September 1956, CIA/SI 88-56, Secret, Noform, in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

Africans.<sup>15</sup> This “positive” apartheid is not to be regarded as the opposite of *baskaaap* (white domination). Instead, it constituted the ideological antidote to it, as a way to reduce everyday frictions by normalising separation and providing Africans a sort of outlet for their political ambitions. Within the frame of this ideology, South Africa claimed the role of mother country of a sort of mock-Commonwealth.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. *Macmillan Speech's Aftermath*

In his address to the South African Parliament, the British Prime Minister wanted to point out the necessity to follow the wind of change, since he saw the world was by then divided into three spheres, with the Western powers and the socialist bloc competing with each other to gain loyalty from newly independent non-white nations. The question was, therefore, whether the non aligned countries of Asia and Africa would swing to the East or to the West.<sup>17</sup> Macmillan’s speech was not welcomed at all in the South African society, which since gaining the status of Dominion in 1910 had always been working on the assumption that its position within the Western community was untouchable, on the basis of racial and cultural links. As imperial powers like Britain and France relinquished former colonies, Afrikaner intellectuals and politicians started talking about development and self-determination. The press was extremely clear in its response to the “Wind of Change Speech”, stating for example that the whites could not hand over any part of territory they were in control. Other commentators claimed that the white man’s spiritual place in the world was disappearing and that the protection of imperial powers was vanishing. In brief, the Afrikaner mood was made clear by Prime Minister Verwoerd in person, when he said that thinking only of non-white people had become a sort of

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<sup>15</sup> Throughout homelands, the land was eroded, people earned little income from agriculture, and more than eighty per cent of the population was below the average level of poverty. As regarded health conditions, while white South Africans enjoyed some of the highest standards of health care and died of typical diseases of the industrialised world, including the worst rate of coronary heart disease in the world, the government did not keep any official medical record for Africans. In particular, infant mortality rate in South Africa for both coloured and black children aged from one to four was thirteen times higher than it was for white children. The main cause of infant mortality rate was inadequate nutrition. In general, the most serious diseases for Africans were the same as those in underdeveloped countries, namely pneumonia, tuberculosis, and gastroenteritis. See L. THOMPSON, *A History of South Africa*, New Haven, CT-London, Yale University Press, 2001<sup>3</sup>, pp. 202-203.

<sup>16</sup> See DUBOW, *Apartheid*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>17</sup> See R.M. IRWIN, *A Wind of Change? White Redoubt and the Postcolonial Movement, 1960-1963*, in «Diplomatic History», XXXIII, 5, November 2009, p. 902.



psychosis no longer recognising the role of the white man. According to him, the Western countries were «[...] sacrificing their only real and stable friend [...] for something that will not succeed».<sup>18</sup>

Despite racial disturbances the executive was by then provoking, in 1960 the Americans were persuaded that the white minority would be able to maintain dominance for a few more years. The Africans, in fact, were at the time too weak and unorganised to mount a successful campaign of resistance. Despite this, it was likely for the Afro-Asian bloc at the United Nations to adopt economic sanctions against South Africa, able to reduce the country's ability to attract foreign investments and thus causing economic dislocation.<sup>19</sup> As an evidence of this, the emerging States of Black Africa were expected to provide direct encouragement and support to Africans of the Union, who had just experienced brutal repression in Sharpeville, South of Johannesburg, when a crowd of 5,000 had gathered in front of the police station offering themselves for arrest as a protest campaign against the pass laws requiring Africans to show a pass when crossing white areas. After a long stand off, the police had opened fire and about seventy demonstrators had remained on the ground. This was not certainly the first time that the police had killed Africans protesting against the system of discrimination, but the Sharpeville massacre became famous worldwide because it was regarded as part of the struggle bringing black Africans in power elsewhere in the continent.<sup>20</sup> In light of this, according to American reports serious economic consequences were likely to occur due to actions taken outside the country. Measures like these, in fact, were already taking place, for the Conference of Independent African States had requested to adopt an extensive programme of economic sanctions and boycott against South Africa. A decision like that did seriously harm the Union's economy, since the amount of national product involved was very small, but rather the psychological impact was able to affect the international community, with a negative outlook for the capacity to attract foreign investments.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 903.

<sup>19</sup> See *National Intelligence Estimate: The Outlook for the Union of South Africa*, 19 July 1960, Secret, in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

<sup>20</sup> See J. BARBER, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford-Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishers, 1999, p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> See *National Intelligence Estimate: The Outlook for the Union of South Africa*, cit.

Meanwhile, the process of decolonisation gained pace. In April 1960 Eric Louw, Foreign Minister of South Africa, predicted that white rule would soon be confined to the colonial territories of Southern Africa, apart from South Africa herself. The Nationalist government accused the colonial powers of abandoning the white man and his civilization, thus allowing communist penetration into the continent. Verwoerd added that British colonial rule was now running away from Africa, adopting “non-racialism” as a euphemism for promoting black interests at the expense of whites. Moreover, in that year the newly independent States were located in the middle belt of the continent, and they had no links with Pretoria. Geographical distance allowed those countries to exercise foreign policy with a strong moral fervour without fearing commercial losses. At this point, withdrawal from the Commonwealth had become inevitable. On May 31, 1961, the white population of South Africa chose to turn the Union into a Parliamentary Republic, with the Governor General assuming the office of State President. In this way, Pretoria had managed to avoid expulsion and Verwoerd was still thinking of retaining membership, provided certain conditions were accepted, that is: a) no interference in domestic matters; b) no relinquishment of principles; c) no loss of sovereignty or national dignity.<sup>22</sup> It is not difficult to figure out that the Premier was feeling encouraged by the deep-rooted trading relations with Britain, also confirmed in a secret Cabinet Memorandum by Her Majesty’s Lord Chancellor, stating that London’s interests in South Africa included investments, exports and earnings from invisibles and oil sales for more than one billion pounds a year. In order to safeguard these interests and keep the Republic within the Sterling area, the Chancellor suggested to maintain trading relations with the Southern African country as much as possible unchanged.<sup>23</sup> Macmillan was available to reach a compromise in order to keep the new-born Republic in the Commonwealth, but a public debate developed at the Conference which exacerbated the conflict.<sup>24</sup> Leaders like

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<sup>22</sup> See J. BARBER-J. BARRATT, *South Africa’s Foreign Policy: The Search for Status and Security, 1945-1988*, Cambridge-Melbourne-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 76.

<sup>23</sup> See *Cabinet Memorandum by the Lord Chancellor: Future Relations with South Africa*, 2 August 1961, C (61) 126, Secret, in <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/>.

<sup>24</sup> Commonwealth rules stated that any country wishing to become a republic was obliged to re-apply for membership. In most cases, this was purely a formality, but it was not like this as regarded South Africa, since Nyerere was supported by Nehru of India and many other fellow African nationalists. By virtue of

Julius Nyerere, future President of Tanzania, warned that their countries would not join the Commonwealth if the racist State were allowed to remain. On the other hand, Verwoerd was not ready to abandon white dominance to buy the favour of other members.<sup>25</sup>

The Sharpeville massacre had put South Africa on the United Nations Security Council agenda. This was not something taken for granted, as the United Kingdom in those years led any other country in terms of importance of investments in the area, with South Africa accounting for an overwhelming proportion in colonial Southern Africa.<sup>26</sup> Supported by the United States, with only Britain and France abstaining, the Security Council declared that apartheid policies were leading to international tensions and might also endanger peace and security. The American initiative had marked a change of attitude and that is why Britain soon followed by voting in favour of a General Assembly Resolution, which on November 6, 1962, requested all members to take every action, as it was open to them, to bring about the abandonment of apartheid policies.<sup>27</sup> On August 7, 1963, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 181, calling for a voluntary arms embargo against South Africa. In the same year a Special Committee Against Apartheid was established to encourage and oversee plans of action against the regime. Economic sanctions were also frequently debated as an effective way of putting pressure on the apartheid government. In 1962, the UN General Assembly requested that its members sever political, fiscal and transportation ties with South Africa. Due to ongoing pressure from African and Asian members, the Kennedy Administration was sensitive somehow to the question of apartheid, though the policy towards the South African ally could not be considered as hostile. This statement is confirmed in a secret document signed by the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, G. Memmen Williams, who was rather worried about the coincidence between African pressure for action against South African policies

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this, Pretoria decided not to re-apply for its Commonwealth membership after becoming a republic. See J. FARLEY, *Southern Africa*, London–New York, Routledge, 2008, pp. 115-116.

<sup>25</sup> See BARBER–BARRATT, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, pp. 81-83.

<sup>26</sup> See L. TAAPOPI–T.A. KEENLEYSIDE, *The West and Southern Africa: Economic Involvement and Support for Liberation 1960-1974*, in «Canadian Journal of African Studies», XIII, 3, 1980, p. 356.

<sup>27</sup> See BARBER–BARRATT, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 86-87.

and domestic powerful forces demanding historic decisions on racial inequalities. The Assistant Secretary's words were clear, when he added that

«[...] the time has come to review our arms policy towards South Africa. I believe we should be thinking in terms of a total arms embargo. [...] it is the only way we can convince both world and domestic opinion that we mean business in our disapproval of apartheid».<sup>28</sup>

Williams clarified his stand a month later, when he expressed concern about the intention of African States to judge all countries on the ground of their positive acts of opposition to apartheid.<sup>29</sup> As a matter of fact, while America could do nothing but having the strongest objection to apartheid, this was not a good reason to single out South Africa for harder treatment than other countries which deliberately put authoritarian policies into force. The question for Secretary Rusk was whether

«[...] we ourselves precipitate sharp crises in our relations with such States over such issues or whether we try to maintain the structure of international relations in order to work [...] toward the decent world community which is our main objective».

Washington could only be held responsible for what worked under the American constitutional system, while no one had elected the Administration to undertake such responsibility in other countries.<sup>30</sup> Apart from the Secretary, the Pentagon and the Secretary of Defence, Robert S. McNamara, were concerned about anything able to jeopardise American military interests in Africa. Any action undertaken by the U.S. on this issue, he said, would be likely «[...] alienate in some degree either Portugal and South Africa on one hand, or the African bloc on the other». Therefore, it was pivotal for the Americans to avoid any initiative prejudicing the relations with either side in such a dispute. This ambivalent position was translated into a strong verbal condemnation of apartheid policies, aimed however at avoiding a vote at the United Nations in favour of

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<sup>28</sup> *Memorandum from G. Memmen Williams to the Secretary through Mr. Harriman: U.S. Policy towards South Africa*, June 12, 1963, Secret, in K. MOKOENA, ed., *South Africa and the United States: The Declassified History*, The National Security Archive, New York, The New Press, 1993, Doc. 1, pp. 54-55.

<sup>29</sup> See *Memorandum from Undersecretary G. Memmen Williams to Secretary of State Dean Rusk: Arms Policy and South Africa*, July 12, 1963, Secret, *ibid.*, Doc. 3, pp. 59-61.

<sup>30</sup> See *Secretary of State's Memorandum for Averell Harriman et al.*: June 15, 1963, Secret, *ibid.*, Doc. 2, pp. 56-58.

economic sanctions, or arms embargo, or expulsion towards South Africa and Portugal.<sup>31</sup> In short, the Kennedy Administration took a middle way stand, committing itself to support Resolution 181 on the voluntary arms embargo and deciding not to sell Pretoria any kind of weapon which could be used to enforce apartheid. Nevertheless, the President considered requests for arms required for external defence. Hence, the White House approved the decision to sell South Africa submarines and spare parts of C-130 aircraft.<sup>32</sup>

### *3. After Kennedy: the Johnson Administration's early attitude*

At this point, with the new Administration in power after Kennedy's assassination, the Embassy of South Africa was trying to put pressure in order to defend the system of apartheid. The Ambassador himself warned that the whole character of his country would be ruined if separate development were lost. What Dr. Naudé wanted to highlight was that it was impossible to make a comparison between apartheid and segregation in American Southern States. According to him, in fact, black Americans were no longer "negroes", but neither were they Americans yet. Hence, they felt insecure. Instead, South African Bantus had not lost their African identity; therefore what the Nationalist aimed at was only a way to maintain their racial integrity. Despite American government officials proclaiming the Administration's opposition to racial discrimination, hence it was impossible for Washington to acquiesce to apartheid, we can always find out that the main question for the White House was to prevent the black continent from shifting to the East.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, there was uncertainty about apartheid in Britain as well. A certain number of people, according to the press, were admitting that they did not know much about South Africa. The point was that consumer boycott had proved ineffective after the indifference of the market of several products. As regarded economic sanctions, both Conservatives and Labour were concerned that apartheid should not be brought to a sudden end at the cost of following chaos. Even the left wing press affirmed that if the

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<sup>31</sup> See *Letter from Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara to Secretary of State Dean Rusk*, July 11, 1963, *ibid.*, Doc. 4, pp. 62-63.

<sup>32</sup> See *National Security Assistant McGeorge Bundy's Memorandum for Secretary Rusk and Secretary McNamara*, September 23, 1963, Secret, *ibid.*, Doc. 6, p. 70.

<sup>33</sup> See *Memorandum of Conversation: South Africa's Racial Policies*, January 9, 1964, in National Archives and Records Administration (thereafter NARA), College Park, MD, Record Group 59 (thereafter RG 59), Central Files, SOC 14-1, S AFR, Confidential.

West were asked to sacrifice economic and strategic interests in Southern Africa, this could only be done with some clear proof that apartheid could be abolished and replaced by a decent form of government.<sup>34</sup> Another reason why the whole Southern area of the African continent was pivotal for the Americans was due to the importance of space ground stations, four of which located in South Africa and one in Madagascar, supporting at critical phases the NASA space programme. In addition, another tracking base was required within a few years. All these facilities were essential requisite for long-range missile testing, earth orbiting unmanned satellites, lunar and planetary probes, and earth orbiting and lunar manned flights of the Apollo programme. Concerning all this, the State Department stated there was no satisfactory alternative to those ground bases, and failure to meet that requirement would jeopardise American key space missions and undermine U.S. image of scientific and technological achievement worldwide. Only the Republic of South Africa offered logistical support, communication and technical cooperation available at the same time. Any other relocation to other regions of Southern Africa could be met at substantial costs.<sup>35</sup>

Sensitivity on arms sales exploded again in 1964 when the South African government announced the recommendation of the Odendaal Commission first to extend apartheid measures to the Protectorate of South West Africa<sup>36</sup>, including separation of people to set up ten more homelands, and then to bring about a shift in governing powers till a real annexation of the territory<sup>37</sup>. This was something the United States could not allow,

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<sup>34</sup> See HYAM–HENSHAW, *The Lion and the Springbok*, cit., p. 322.

<sup>35</sup> See *Memorandum from the Director of the Office of International Scientific Affairs (Rollefson) to the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (Williams): Space Tracking Activities in the Area of Southern Africa*, March 9, 1964, in NARA, RG 59, Central Files, SP 15 S AFR-US, Secret.

<sup>36</sup> In 1915, South Africa had captured the German colony of South West Africa, in 1968 to be called Namibia. After the war, it was declared a League of Nations Mandate Territory, with the Union of South Africa as responsible for the administration. The Mandate was supposed to become a United Nations Trust Territory following World War Two, but South Africa refused to allow the territory's transition to independence, claiming it as a fifth province. This gave rise to several trials at the International Court of Justice, which in 1950 ruled that South Africa was not obliged to convert South West Africa into a UN trust territory, but was still bound to assume the supervisory role, clarifying that the General Assembly was empowered to receive petitions from the inhabitants of South West Africa and to call for reports from the mandatory nation.

<sup>37</sup> At the end of 1962, the Nationalist Government had set up a Commission of Inquiry on South West Africa which took the name from its Chairman, Frans Hendrik Odendaal, with the purpose to submit a report on a five-year plan on the development of non-white inhabitants of the territory. The document, issued in December 1963, suggested both the intensification of the apartheid programme in Namibia and

bearing also the risk to trigger off racial and anti-Western tensions in the whole Southern Africa. At the same time, the British Prime Minister, Alec Douglas-Home, lectured the South African Ambassador on the negative political and economic outcome of the Bantustans, while the High Commissioner in the Protectorates surrounding South Africa regarded the policy of “bantustanisation” as a mere perpetuation of a conquest. Despite this, at the time of the referendum, it was still widely believed in Britain that some form of white rule should continue in South Africa, as well as in British Central Africa. Much worse for London was South Africa’s fierce racial ideology, her antipathy towards British institutions in the country, and more in general her provocation of unrest and disorder threatening to spread into British Africa.<sup>38</sup> In light of all this, the Johnson Administration issued a secret order, National Security Action Memorandum 295, directing all government agencies involved in South Africa to take some appropriate measures, such as postponing decisions on submarine sales and loan applications, and the possibility to relocate NASA and Defence Department facilities to other countries.<sup>39</sup> Concerning this, an intelligence estimate *memorandum* encouraged the Administration to go on putting pressure on the issue of South West Africa, seeing it as a political area where a little flexibility was possible for Pretoria. As regarded economic sanctions, the CIA thought it was unlikely for nations having trading ties with the African country to impose effective measures. Just to make an example, the flow of South African gold was an important element in the financial stability of the West. On the other hand, it was also true that South Africa did not absolutely want to alienate commercial partners such as the UK or the US. Especially on the issue of Namibia, the South Africans tended to delay or temper

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the integration of the Namibian government with that of South Africa. Apartheid was to remain the main principle of political, social, and economic organisation in South West Africa as well. Theoretically, in the long term the task was to establish a network of independent homelands for the indigenous population, while white areas were supposed to become integral part of the Republic of South Africa. See M. WALLACE, *A History of Namibia, from the Beginning to 1990*, London, Hurst & Company, 2011, pp. 261-262.

<sup>38</sup> See HYAM-HENSHAW, *The Lion and the Springbok*, cit., pp. 319-320.

<sup>39</sup> See *National Security Action Memorandum No. 295: U.S. Policy toward South Africa*, April 24, 1964, Secret, in D.S. PATTERSON (gen. ed.) - N.D. HOWLAND (ed.), *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter FRUS), 1964-1968, vol. XXIV, *Africa*, United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1999, Doc. 586, pp. 984-986.

their actions in order to avoid a showdown.<sup>40</sup> This estimate is also worth remembering because it contains the most explicit suggestion of serious contradictions in South Africa's economy leading in the long term to the collapse of white rule:

«There is an internal conflict between the Republic's racial policies, which close many categories of employment to nonwhites, and the mounting need for skilled labor».<sup>41</sup>

To tell the truth, NSAM 295 had provoked another debate within the Administration, since not everyone was in favour of a harsher course of action against South Africa. The military, in fact, believed that the provisions required in the *memorandum* might lead the United States to an inflexible position, which at that time was seen as counterproductive. From the Joint Chiefs of Staff's point of view, as long as communist penetration and racial discord in Africa were viewed as an active threat to Western interests, stability in South Africa was the main aim to pursue. As concern this, it is important to underline that the U.S. Embassy in South Africa did not suggest to follow any major action in support of radical proposals. Washington's diplomats on the spot did not see any risk of internal security crisis. Rather, they wrote that any threat to peace came from outside South Africa, whose stability and economy were necessary preconditions for real progress on race matters as well.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. *Labour in power: arms sales and embargoes*

When the Labour Party came back to power in October 1964, the debate on arms sales to the Republic of South Africa became particularly heated, as the new Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, soon promised to ban this kind of trade. Not the whole press in Britain was in favour. Conservative newspapers like the Daily Express, for example, were severely critical towards the threatened cancellation of Buccaneer aircraft, complaining that Labour Government was acting in an irresponsible way, with the aim of ingratiating

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<sup>40</sup> See *Special National Intelligence Estimate: Short-Term Prospects for South Africa*, 20 May 1964, SNIE 73-64, Secret, Controlled Dissem, in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> See *Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara: National Security Action Memorandum No. 295 on United States Policy toward South Africa*, May 22, 1964, Secret, in FRUS 1964-1968, vol. XXIV, Doc. 589, pp. 989-991.



themselves with African States such as Tanzania and Kenya, where communist forces and anti-European movements were so powerful that the Britons were about to be chucked out.<sup>43</sup> In some way, the Tory press had been able to read among the lines of Government statements, as the order for the sixteen Buccaneer airplanes went through, thus setting a significant exception in the relations between Labour and apartheid South Africa. Hence, left wing public opinion took this decision as an evidence that Wilson was ready to sell out democratic principles for the sake of national interests and profit. After all, South Africa was always Britain's fourth largest export market, the Buccaneers had been ordered before the issue of the UN Resolution, and they had been already partly paid for. Moreover, Number 10 was concerned about the likely South African reaction towards the neighbouring British Protectorates. Finally, it was always possible for Pretoria to unilaterally terminate the agreement on the Royal Navy's use of the Simonstown Base. In a few words, the Wilson Government realised that economic warfare would damage British trading policies and investments.<sup>44</sup> The Labour Administration was following a line of continuity with the former Conservative government, which had stated that South Africa had the right to self defence under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and that she had an important part to play in the protection of sea routes around the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>45</sup> For this reason, being also Pretoria no threat to international peace, London felt allowed to sell weapons suitable for that purpose.<sup>46</sup>

After all, it is rather difficult to expect that the new government would have been able and willing to disappoint the country with which only a year earlier a *memorandum* of

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<sup>43</sup> See HYAM-P. HENSHAW, *The Lion and the Springbok*, cit., pp. 322-323.

<sup>44</sup> See J.W. YOUNG, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970*, vol. 2: *International Policy*, Manchester-New York, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 167.

<sup>45</sup> From a Cold War point of view, the Anglo-Saxon powers' concern was not so out of place, as in all countries where an ongoing struggle for independence against a foreign colonial power had persisted in those years, the Soviet Union had successfully infiltrated the leading movements and retained a post-colonial position of influence. See A.A. BRAYTON, *Soviet Involvement in Africa*, in «The Journal of Modern African Studies», XVII, 2, June 1979, p. 265.

<sup>46</sup> See *The British Attitude to the Problem of South Africa: FO Brief for Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting* ("Speaking Notes"), 29 June 1964, CAB 148/2, ff 223-226, in R. HYAM – WM R. LOUIS, eds., *British Documents on the End of Empire*, Series A, vol. 4, *The Conservative Government and the End of Empire*, Part II, *Economics, International Relations, and the Commonwealth*, The Stationary Office, London, 2000, Doc. No. 474, pp. 486-488.

agreement on the sale of uranium oxide had been stipulated, amending the previous one dating back to 1961.<sup>47</sup> Another reason why economic sanctions would have not been profitable at all was gold. The problem was that in the previous five years, central bank monetary reserves of Western countries had increased by two and a half billion dollars, two thirds of which coming from South African gold! Losing such a big wealth, in a word, meant jeopardising the stability of the major currencies. No matter how vigorously the government might condemn racial segregation policies. The point was that the West could not afford to pay such an enormous price for leading South Africa to repentance.<sup>48</sup> Apart from that, by reading the available documentation we can easily realise the commercial rivalry with France, which was regarded as willing to trade with any nation ready to deal with her. Therefore, the possible decision to supply no further arms to South Africa was likely to be interpreted by the French as an opportunity to expand their own trade.<sup>49</sup>

As regarded the U.S. Administration, by virtue of the available documentation it seems the most worrying issue concerned the question of the status of mandatory South-West Africa. According to the State Department, in fact, this was likely to bring the first major confrontation between South Africa and the international community, with consequent implications for the UN and the International Court of Justice, as the Americans were worried about communist forces acting unilaterally to jeopardise Western long-term interests in the continent. As a matter of fact, Afro-Asian countries within the United Nations were insistent that effective international action be taken against the South African Republic, both on the question of apartheid and on the Namibian issue. On one hand, Washington pursued good diplomatic and trading relations with both South Africa and the various sectors of the other African countries; on the other hand, however, it was impossible not to realise that the world was moving fast in a direction opposite to the one chosen by Pretoria. Therefore, a soft pressure programme

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<sup>47</sup> See *Memorandum of Agreement between the Atomic Energy Board of the Republic of South Africa and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority*, November-December 1963, in The National Archives (hereafter TNA), Kew, London, AB 48/65, *United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority, 1964-1971*.

<sup>48</sup> See *Maurice Vlaud: Problem of Economic Sanctions against South Africa*, December 10, 1964, in TNA, FO 371/182103, JSA, 1196/19, Confidential.

<sup>49</sup> See *Letter to P.R.A. Mansfield from British Embassy Paris*, January 13, 1965, in TNA, FO 371/182103, JSA 1196/19, (11919/3/65) Confidential.

was to be implemented towards this issue. In the long run – but this looked more as a declaration of intent than as an objective plan –, the aim was the promotion of an eventual dialogue among leaders of all groups about race relations and government by consent.<sup>50</sup> This position was backed by the British Labour government, which had ordered a report on the effect of possible economic sanctions that ruled out the possibility for Britain to implement any kind of trade embargo, or contribute to the costs of a blockade, thus destroying a market worth 220 million pounds of export each year, with financial investments of over one billion pounds. In addition, the Cabinet thought that sanctions would only produce chaos in South Africa. In a word, this was not a problem to be sorted out by coercion.<sup>51</sup> To sum up, the case against sanctions rested on five main points: a) the impossibility to apply even partial sanctions in the light of the effects on the British balance of payments;<sup>52</sup> b) the cost of a blockade, necessary to implement sanctions, which was too far beyond the resources of the United Nations; c) the risk for sanctions to have too serious repercussions on the British protectorates of Southern Africa; d) the fact that sanctions were likely to produce chaos in the Republic of South Africa, thus preventing a peaceful transition to majority rule; e) the risk to set an embarrassing precedent in case of Southern Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence.<sup>53</sup>

This posture was the outcome of the Anglo-American talks on Africa held in the British capital a few days previously. On grounds of the archive documentation, we can easily affirm that the two Atlantic powers shared the same assessment of the situation in Africa. The two allies agreed that the Soviet penetration of the African continent continued to be a serious threat. As concerned Southern Africa in particular, it was agreed that an attractive package of proposals had to be prospected to countries bordering with the area, in order to persuade them to approach the problem in a more moderate and rational mood, with the aim of catching the chance to develop favourable circumstances

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<sup>50</sup> See *National Policy Paper – South Africa; Part One: US Policy*, January 18, 1965, in NARA, RG 59, S/P Files: Lot 72 D 139, South Africa, Secret.

<sup>51</sup> See *Brief for Anglo-American Talks on Africa. South Africa (Note by the Foreign Office)*, 23 February 1965, in TNA, CAB 148/65, O.P.D. (O) (SA) (65) 2, Confidential.

<sup>52</sup> In the period between 1960 and 1965, South African economy literally flourished. As an evidence of this, real GDP grew by five-six per cent a year. See C. HARVEY, *British Investments in Southern Africa*, in «Journal of Southern African Studies», I, 1, October 1974, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> See *Letter to Prime Minister: Sanctions against South Africa*, 11 March 1965, in TNA, PREM 13/2954, 1964-1969 South Africa, [O.P.D. (65) 48].

for themselves, too.<sup>54</sup> Actually, it was China that was really enlarging her own contacts in Africa.<sup>55</sup> Since Chou En-Lai's African tour in 1963-1964, in fact, the Chinese had favoured the establishment of the International United Front, including also European countries not associated with United States policy. In particular, Chou offered the Africans a five-eight formula, that is five principles for Sino-African political relations and eight principles for economic relations. In summary, the whole package included: a) China as leader of the struggle against old and new imperialism; b) Chinese aid on the most favourable terms, in order to establish self-sufficient and diversified economies; c) support to African desire to observe non-aligned policies; d) greater unity of Africa and the Asian world, with the setting up of regional organisations as approved by the African people. Within this context, Chou En-Lai was careful enough to show an image of China as a revolutionary country dedicated to the overthrow of capitalism, but at the same time willing to co-operate with non-aligned States and aid less-developed former colonies of Africa.<sup>56</sup> As long as the British wanted to operate in the Indian Ocean area, they of course had a strong interest in the use of air, naval and communications facilities, also seeing the Americans involved.<sup>57</sup> Last but not least, existing oil investments by British oil companies in South Africa discouraged any kind of oil sanctions, since Shell and BP holdings in that country represented a major British investment at risk, with foreign exchange earnings of twenty million pounds per annum attributable to South Africa, and a possible loss of twelve million pounds a year to the UK balance of payments.<sup>58</sup> In addition to that, the leaders of the High Commission Territories, whose economy was

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<sup>54</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee – Sub-Committee on Africa: Anglo-U.S. Talks on Africa, 22-24 March 1965. Note by the Foreign Office, 2 April 1965*, in TNA, CAB 148/46, *Meetings and Memoranda 1-15*, O.P.D. (O)(A)(65) 14, Confidential.

<sup>55</sup> In the same years, another country with a significant involvement in the black continent was Israel. Concerning this, Tanzania was the third largest recipient of Israeli military aid. See A. JACOB, *Israel's Military Aid to Africa, 1960-66*, in «The Journal of Modern African Studies», IX, 2, August 1971, p. 178.

<sup>56</sup> See T.Y. ISMAEL, *The People's Republic of China and Africa*, in «The Journal of Modern African Studies», IX, 4, December 1971, pp. 512-513.

<sup>57</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy Committee – Defence Facilities in the Indian Ocean: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence, 7 April 1965*, in TNA CAB 148/20, OPO/65, *Memoranda 22-68*, O.P.D. (65) (68), Secret.

<sup>58</sup> See *Brief for Anglo-American Talks on Africa. South Africa (Note by the Foreign Office), 23 February 1965*, in TNA, CAB 148/65, O.P.D. (O) (SA) (65) 2, Confidential.

largely dependent on South African business,<sup>59</sup> had already declared that they could not risk to put their countries politically and economically in jeopardy for the sake of ideological differences with Pretoria.<sup>60</sup> Finally, on November 11, 1965, Southern Rhodesia unilaterally proclaimed independence from Britain, thus creating another wave of instability and potential subversion in the area. Concerning this, U.S. intelligence analysis did not show any optimism. For a certain span of time at least, economic and political sanctions would not be useful, the CIA stated, to put an end to white ruling and any military intervention was regarded as extremely unlikely. However, for black African States the whole question had become a sort of test of great powers' African policies.<sup>61</sup>

All this encouraged the British government to keep in mind the option of leaving military facilities in South Africa, but the point was that losing Cape communications bases would have inevitably implied at least a twelve hours' delay for signals to reach Her Majesty's ships in the Atlantic Ocean. The provision of alternative facilities on British territory, such as Falkland Islands, or Ascension, would have taken up to five years to be ready and the cost would have been no less than six million pounds. Concerning this, the Cabinet believed that the South African government was linking the possibility to demand renegotiation of the Simonstown Agreement to the continuation of some form of defence relationship with Britain. Hence, the continued use of South African facilities was mostly desirable.<sup>62</sup> As regarded nuclear co-operation, South Africa's purchase of a nuclear reactor from the United States did not elicit any concern that research at the reactor could involve anything but the production of energy for civil

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<sup>59</sup> Verwoerd was conscious that economic ties would draw different races together. Sooner or later, industrial development, he said, would act as a magnet attracting black people to European South Africa. In order to limit this process as much as possible, the Premier suggested three steps to implement: 1) mechanising factories as far as possible, in order for them to be managed by skill white workers only; 2) developing more factories on the borders of Bantustans, so that labourers could commute every day to work, thus avoiding the risk of residence in white areas; 3) rather than surrendering to Bantu domination, a smaller totally white State was much better, with its own armed forces and policies to pursue. See BARBER, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, cit., p. 176.

<sup>60</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee – Sub-Committee on Africa: Defence Relations with South Africa. Note by the Foreign Office*, 26 March 1965, in TNA, CAB 148/46, *Meetings and Memoranda 1-15*, O.P.D. (O)(A)(65) 12, Secret.

<sup>61</sup> See *Special National Intelligence Estimate: Repercussions of a Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Southern Rhodesia*, 13 October 1965, in www.foia.cia.gov.

<sup>62</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee – South Africa and South Atlantic: Memorandum by Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence Officials*, 8 June 1966, in TNA, CAB 163/55, *Africa – Southern Africa: Political-Economic Threats to S. Africa*, O.P.D. (O) (66) 19, Secret.

purposes. In 1965, in fact, when a member of the South African Atomic Energy Board stated that Pretoria should have a nuclear arsenal for prestigious reasons and to prevent aggression from Afro-Asian countries, no comment came from the American Administration.<sup>63</sup> State Department officers themselves admitted that any cessation of U.S. investment in that country would seriously damage the possibility to carry on a dialogue with Pretoria. Therefore, despite of the fact that American investments in South Africa totalled around a fifth of those of Britain, Washington was not ready to back economic sanctions.<sup>64</sup> However, Cold War questions could not but influence Washington's choices, as America sought to deny the control of the continent to the communist world,<sup>65</sup> though it was also true that domestic civil rights matters were increasingly involving the United States in race relation problems elsewhere. In light of this, Pretoria's choices on internal issues and even more on the question of Namibia, far from reinforcing South Africa as a bastion against communism in the world, carried the risk to foster its growth and increase the danger of its gaining power. Hence, the White House was always aware of the importance of cultivating the black African vote at the United Nations.<sup>66</sup>

##### *5. Balthazar Johannes Vorster: the architect of apartheid*

On September 6, 1966, Verwoerd was assassinated as he was taking his seat in Parliament. Shortly before the murder, he had called new general elections, whose dominant issue was still security. Although black nationalism at home was not absolutely living a positive period, disturbing events were taking place elsewhere in Africa, not least in Rhodesia, whose declaration of independence had ended up bringing economic sanctions to South Africa's doorstep. Therefore, the Government's message had been that safety depended on a determined defence of the white minority. To implement this

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<sup>63</sup> See A.M. VAN WYK, *The USA and Apartheid South Africa's Nuclear Aspirations, 1949-1990*, in S. ONSLOW, ed., *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation*, Abingdon–New York, Routledge, 2009, p. 58.

<sup>64</sup> See *Sir Hugh Stephenson to Mr. Stewart: Relations between South Africa and the United States*, 27 June 1966, in TNA, FO 371/188081, JSA 103145/13, Confidential-Guard.

<sup>65</sup> At the same time, the South African government used the communist bogey to justify its own repressive actions and to confirm itself as an indispensable defender of the West against the socialist threat. See V. SHUBIN, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, Bellville, Mayibuye Books, 1999, p. 59.

<sup>66</sup> See *Sir Patrick Dean to Mr. Stewart: United States Policy towards South Africa*, 4 August 1966, Section 1, in TNA, FO 371/188081, JSA 103145/17, Confidential-Guard.

decision, the Nationalist Party chose as a new Prime Minister Balthazar Johannes (John) Vorster, the former Minister of Justice who had fiercely fought against African nationalism. Concerning this, he said that the security of the State came on top of his agenda, as he also believed that «The communists have been organising for years to take over South Africa».<sup>67</sup>

In the meantime, on October 27, 1966, the General Assembly passed resolution 2145, which declared the Mandate on Namibia terminated and that the Republic of South Africa had no further right to administer South West Africa. Perhaps, the worst kind of injustice perpetrated on Namibians was the deliberate provision of lower education. In fact, Bantu education and an emphasis on Afrikaans as an official language to the exclusion of English was limiting the capacity of Namibians to communicate with the outside world.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, that was a period of international expansion for South Africa's major companies and ties with the West were so strong that exiled black opposition leaders spoke about a spider's web systematically spun to ensnare weak African governments, while Pretoria spread white rule over Africans through the Bantustans. From this point of view, South African policies followed three lines of conduct: a) a powerful white republic surrounded by compliant black satellites, such as the Bantustans, South West Africa and the former British protectorates of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland; b) a Southern African bloc, including also Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia and Malawi; c) the rest of the continent, with which the Boer Republic had patchy relationships. Concerning this, the Nationalist government realised that all levels were linked to one another, and that success with one of them would provoke a sort of positive domino effect. Despite this, the Namibian resistance movement of SWAPO (South West Africa People's Organisation) had begun infiltrating guerrilla fighters into the Namibian occupied territory and clashes were taking places with government forces,<sup>69</sup> which cost very much to Pretoria in terms

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<sup>67</sup> See BARBER, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, cit., p. 179.

<sup>68</sup> See W. JOHNSTON, *Namibia*, in RENÉ LEMARCHAND, ed., *American Policy in Southern Africa: The Stakes and the Stance*, Lanham, MD–London University Press of America, 1981<sup>2</sup>, p. 214.

<sup>69</sup> This was a source of embarrassment for Whitehall, as in those months there were headlines in Britain stating that Number 10 was considering ending the embargo on arms to South Africa. See H. WILSON, *The Labour Government 1964-70: A Personal Record*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1974, p. 597.

of loss of life, economic and military resources and growing international hostility.<sup>70</sup> Within this scenario, what the South Africans reproached the Americans for, was the encouragement to black Africans to disrupt the “peace and harmony” of what they claimed to be the only stable country of the continent. At the same time, the government had stated they would carry on administering South West Africa – though there was no attempt of annexation – and that they would reply with force to any challenge of being divested from that part of Africa.<sup>71</sup>

The independence of the former High Commission Territories looked like a positive change from the British point of view, as these newly formed States immediately started to pursue a working relationship with the South Africans in the economic and diplomatic field. Commonwealth leaders, such as President Nyerere of Tanzania, did not agree with a policy like this, but others, like for example the Kenyans, said that there seemed to be no possibility of overthrowing apartheid by violence, and that was why the only hope to change was through a gradual peaceful process of establishing good relations with South Africa.<sup>72</sup> The first sign of what looked like a turning point in the relations among Southern African countries, or at least an evidence of pragmatism, was the meeting between John Vorster and the new Prime Minister of Lesotho, Chief Leabua Jonathan, on January 10, 1967. Since the former Territory of Basutoland was only a small black enclave in the South African nation, with no link to the sea and with its skies controlled by Pretoria Air Force, it was impossible for it not to have good relations with the much more powerful neighbour. However, the event became a source of optimism for the British Embassy, which reminded that for a Nationalist Premier to hold such a multi-racial luncheon with the leader of an independent black State was a great step forward. Apart from the list of requests advanced by Chief Jonathan in terms of collaboration and assistance South Africa was supposed to provide, the nationalist press saw the meeting as forming a new pattern of inter-state relations in Southern Africa. Therefore, what British

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<sup>70</sup> See BARBER-BARRATT, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 126-127.

<sup>71</sup> See *Memorandum from Edward Hamilton of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant (Rostow): Meeting with South African Ambassador and Minister-Consueller Botha*, November 14, 1966, Confidential, in FRUS 1964-1968, vol. XXIV, Doc. 628, pp. 1062-1065.

<sup>72</sup> See *Signs of Growing Black African Acceptance of Working Relationships with South Africa*, undated, in TNA, FCO 25/585, *South Africa: Political Affairs. External-Multilateral Policy: Black Africa*, Confidential.



diplomats perceived was a new line in Mr. Vorster's policy, that is the aim of establishing happier and more fruitful relations with other independent States in the continent, while still pursuing separate development at home. The fact that Chief Jonathan had declared that difference in political philosophy were no barrier to positive relations among States, seemed to encourage that point of view.<sup>73</sup>

In view of what afore mentioned, it was not by chance that the British Joint Intelligence Committee issued a report stating a long term outlook for the Southern Africa region, with the particular aim of figuring out whether white minorities would retain control of the area in the following ten years, or if African nationalism would increase and violence spread. According to the British intelligence, there was little doubt that black African States would seek to maintain support against apartheid regimes, but it was also true that their policies would unlikely be uniform. By reading the paper, we can easily realise how concerned the British were about the question of Rhodesia, on dealing with which African Commonwealth countries were going to put pressure on Britain, with the outlook to leave the organisation should London be impotent towards the illegal regime of Salisbury. As concerned communist powers, London's experts stated that they had till then shown little interest towards that part of the planet, but at the same time it seemed likely that they would back African liberation movements as an easy way to embarrass the West at a little cost for themselves. However, even so it appeared extremely difficult for African liberation movements to successfully challenge the existing order, since the Soviet Union or China were not believed to have any decisive influence in Southern Africa. The dominant factor determining inner developments was supposed to be the determination of white minorities to keep their privileges.<sup>74</sup> Economic and industrial development required the industry to find an increasing number of skilled black workers to meet new requirements. Despite this, the government kept a lot of formal and informal barriers – such as colour bars reserving specific jobs for white employees, resistance to the registration of black apprentices, insistence by unions to

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<sup>73</sup> See *British Embassy Cape Town Despatch No. 4: Meeting between Mr. Vorster and Chief Leabua Jonathan*, 10 February 1967, in TNA, FCO 31/92, *Lesotho: Political Affairs-Bilaterals: South Africa: Relations with*, 1031/67, Confidential.

<sup>74</sup> See *Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee: The Prospects for Southern Africa up to 1976*, 27 February 1967, in TNA, CAB 163/55, JIC (67) 28 (Final), Secret, UK Eyes Only.

observe the “rate for the job” in order to discourage employment of cheaper black workers, and serious deficiencies in the education and training available to the black – to prevent African and other non white workers to enter skilled occupations.<sup>75</sup> To this the British Embassy added that there was a good chance in the following decade for the South Africans to economically woo black States like Kenya. Certainly, the Afrikaners were no longer on the defensive and this new approach was interpreted as a way to avoid to be overcome by the overwhelming non-white majority. The reason why South Africa was showing a more realistic attitude was also due to a negative outlook of food producing in relation to population growing. In the last years, in fact, the country had been obliged to import a certain quantity of food products. Therefore, British diplomats thought the government had no alternative but seeking good relations with neighbouring black countries.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, there were a few European countries starting a really profitable arms trading with South Africa, despite the embargo. Just to give an example, since 1963 Italy and France had been playing the lion’s part in a massive effort of arms and ammunition transfer to South Africa. In the span of time between 1960 and 1975, France was going to sell something like four billion Francs of military equipment to South Africa, which in 1968 had become the third customer of French aviation industry.<sup>77</sup> In particular, South African interest in French armaments and warfare techniques had been developed since the Algerian war of independence. The political context following de Gaulle’s rise to power had certainly favoured the cooperation between the two colonialist countries. It was obvious for Pretoria to make an effort to learn anti-guerrilla techniques, after backing the French position in the North African country. As a sign of gratitude, General de Gaulle never pronounced in public the word “apartheid”.<sup>78</sup> To tell the truth, optimism in British political circles was influenced by the Ambassador’s view on the need of the Afrikaners not to feel surrounded by enemies willing to destroy their

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<sup>75</sup> See C.H. FEINSTEIN, *An Economic History of South Africa: Conquest, Discrimination and Development*, Cambridge–New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 191-192.

<sup>76</sup> See *Cabinet Joint Intelligence Committee: The Prospects for Southern Africa – Attachment A*, 22 May 1967, in TNA, CAB 163/55, JIC (67) (SEC) 179, Secret.

<sup>77</sup> See D.C. BACH, *Un système autonome de relations: la France et l’Afrique du Sud, 1963-1977*, in D.C. BACH, ed., *La France et l’Afrique du Sud: histoire, mythes et enjeux contemporains*, Paris, Éditions Karthala, 1990, pp. 177-178.

<sup>78</sup> See H. SADA, *Les intérêts militaires et stratégiques en Afrique australe*, in BACH, ed., *La France et l’Afrique du Sud*, cit., p. 286.

civilization. According to Sir John Nicholls, in fact, there were more and more people in South Africa ready to talk more on the complexity of racial problems and expressing concern at the human consequences of apartheid policies. Hence, though maintaining a firm stand against the racist system, the British Government were not suggested to put pressure for instant majority rule.<sup>79</sup> Apart from this, we must always remember that Britain was the most important source of foreign capital for South Africa and that South African largest banks, such as Barclays National, had British parent companies. As a matter of fact, British banks were being accused of redirecting black savings into the white economy.<sup>80</sup> Interestingly enough, CIA estimates noted that the African population in the white areas had been growing by fifteen per cent over the last three years and it appeared extremely unlikely for Bantustans to absorb significant amounts of black labourers in the next five years. In no major city were the white a majority and Pretoria was the only town where Europeans formed the largest racial group. This was going to have political implications, since the American intelligence believed that if the level of non white participation in the economy increased, at the same time there would be demand for increased political rights, as well as the will of the whites to preserve their power at all costs. Paradoxically, apartheid was favouring the job market among non-white communities, as job restrictions was banning numerous positions to white people. Therefore, Prime Minister Vorster had set up a sort of new deal policy to show other African States that his government was ready to pursue a working relationship with whomever was able to trade on a non racial basis.<sup>81</sup>

In this period, the apparent encouraging situation in South Africa was leading to a debate within the British government on a possible lift of the arms embargo. This option was also due to the serious risk of losing shares of trade with Pretoria, which was reasonably expected to turn from Britain as a supplier not only in the maritime field, but

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<sup>79</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy Committee: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs – South Africa. Annex A: Text of Letter from Sir John Nicholls, K.C.M.G., G.B.E., H.M. Ambassador, Cape Town, to the Rt. Hon. George Brown, M.P., Dated 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1967*, 21 March 1967, in TNA, CAB 148/31, OPD (67) 24, Confidential.

<sup>80</sup> See N. JOHN, *The Campaign against British Bank Involvement in Apartheid South Africa*, in «African Affairs», IC, 396, July 2000, p. 416.

<sup>81</sup> See *National Intelligence Estimate: South Africa*, 4 May 1967, NIE 73-67, Secret, Controlled Dissem., in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

also in other areas associated with defence. In case of refusal to resume normal arms transfers, British authorities were also concerned about a reduced willingness by the South Africans to make a contribution towards reaching a settlement over Rhodesia.<sup>82</sup> According to the Foreign Secretary, George Brown, despite the embarrassing consequences following that decision, on balance the better course was to agree to supply most of the equipment requested by the South Africans. In addition the Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, affirmed that the naval facilities Britain enjoyed under the Simonstown Agreements would be essential at any time. On the other hand, it was also true that supplying military equipment would be probably seen as a withdrawal from compliance with United Nations resolutions and British relations with African Commonwealth countries would become even more difficult. In short, the best solution according to the Secretary of Defence was a bargain with South Africa, during which Whitehall could somewhat relax the criteria for the supply of defence equipment, in exchange for specific South African assistance to bring about an acceptable settlement of the Rhodesian question.<sup>83</sup> To sum up, the Defence and Foreign Secretaries were facing Prime Minister Wilson on grounds of economic, military, political and even moral reasons.<sup>84</sup> Particularly in those circumstances, they said, exports of that order, paid in cash or in short-term credit, were extremely important to Britain.<sup>85</sup> The Prime Minister, instead, felt miserable and unhappy about his ministers pressing so much in favour of arms sales resumption, but he eventually conceded that in principle the sale of naval weapons to South Africa could be resumed, but there should be no final decision except as part of the deflationary package following devaluation. However, some Labour

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<sup>82</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence – Arms for South Africa*, 11 September 1967, in TNA, FCO 31/148, *South Africa: Defence, War and Belligerency – Armaments: Export to: Policy Regarding*, Part A, OPD (67) 70, Secret.

<sup>83</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee: Minutes of a Meeting Held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1, on Thursday, 14th September 1967 at 10.00 a.m.*, 14 September 1967, in TNA, FCO 31/148, Part A, OPD (67) 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting, Secret.

<sup>84</sup> In his memories, Denis Healey writes that, in supporting George Brown on this issue, he had shown great insensitivity to the hate of apartheid both in the Labour Party and in the Commonwealth. He also adds that his personal experience in South Africa after 1970 had completely changed his attitude on the problem. See D. HEALEY, *The Time of My Life*, London, Penguin Books, 1990, p. 336.

<sup>85</sup> See *Letter to Prime Minister: Arms for South Africa*, 12 September 1967, in TNA, CAB 163/55, OPD (67) 70, Secret.

backbenchers wished to condemn any sale of arms to South Africa. At that point, tension within the party was very high and it is also likely for Wilson himself to encourage the growth of protest by the extreme left, while Brown and Healey, backed by the majority of the party, insisted that the Premier had condoned, if not actively supported negotiations with the South Africans. Hence, when the Cabinet reconsidered the issue in December, Wilson managed to take the moral ground and said that the credit of the government was at stake. The whole question had left a mark of bitterness in the relationship within the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary and the former had overcome the will of two of his most important ministers.<sup>86</sup> The two top ministers, in fact, underlined that South Africa had become the second most important trading partner of Britain and that Pretoria was by then able to discriminate against British firms if political reasons were strong enough. Moreover, for budget reasons the British had been obliged to withdraw some ships from South African stations, thus asking Pretoria to assume greater responsibility for the defence of Cape sea routes.<sup>87</sup>

As concerned the American Administration, President Johnson was facing a real dilemma in South Africa. As a matter of fact, he had committed himself to ending racial discrimination in the United States. Yet, the US still had substantial economic and strategic ties with Pretoria, which enjoyed one of the fastest growing economies in the world. In fact, the CIA warned that South Africa was a major supplier of minerals for the West, especially gold and uranium. Nevertheless, that country was a source of political problem for the democratic Presidency, having virtually banned any kind of opposition and arrested what the National Security Council itself regarded as black moderate leaders, such as Nelson Mandela. As a consequence of this, black South Africans were turning towards radicalism and “black consciousness”, a movement which paralleled that of “black power” in the United States.<sup>88</sup> Almost as a confirmation of these contradictions,

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<sup>86</sup> See P. ZIEGLER, *Wilson: The Authorised Life of Lord Wilson of Rievaulx*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993, pp. 287-290.

<sup>87</sup> See *Cabinet Defence and Overseas Policy Committee: Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Defence - South Africa: Maritime Defence Supplies*, 5 December 1967, in TNA, FCO 31/149, *South Africa: Defence: Export of: Policy Regarding*, Part B, OPD (67) 85, Secret.

<sup>88</sup> See Th. BORSTELMANN, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena*, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press, 2003, p. 200.

we can read that, although American tactics were clearly to refuse any renewal of the Atomic Energy Co-operation Agreement with South Africa, in practice the latter had supplied uranium to the US, but also the United Kingdom and France, without any restriction whatsoever. Despite this, in 1967 the State Department was prepared to recommend the renewal of the agreement for another ten years.<sup>89</sup> All this affected American policies on arms transfers and it is important to highlight that there was hardly any liaison on this issue among NATO allies and even between two Atlantic powers such as Britain and the United States. Having said this, we can notice that debates on the resumption of at least partial arms trading with South Africa were taking place not only within British political circles. The State Department, in fact, underlined that disparate standards among allies, especially between the Anglo-Saxon countries, were causing increasing difficulties to American manufacturers. As an example, due to the impossibility to sell British planes with American engines, the South African government was turning to the Italian Piaggio firm for similar aircrafts. The net outcome was that the American balance of payments was suffering, frictions with European governments were spreading and de Gaulle was having another chance to say that the United States was unreliable as a business partner.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps this vision was encouraged by CIA reports claiming that liberation movements in Southern Africa would be probably suffering lack of indigenous support, without any chance to expand insurgency operations sufficiently enough to shake white regimes. It was also true, according to American intelligence, that the continued frustration of the liberation movements was going to further complicate relations with the US, but there were also other factors affecting American relations with African States, such as the need of many of them to look at the United States as a source of economic aid and development capital, as well as an essential trading partner. As concerned communist support to African nationalists, the Soviet Union and communist China, though seeking to expand their influence by providing limited military and

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<sup>89</sup> See *Items of Interest in the Field of Atomic Energy: Developments during March-April-May 1967 – Renewal of the United States-South Africa Atomic Energy Co-operation Agreement (July 1957 to July 1967)*, May 1967, in South African Foreign Affairs Archives, Brand Fourie, Developments in the Atomic Energy Field, F2190, Secret, in [www.wilsoncenter.org](http://www.wilsoncenter.org).

<sup>90</sup> See *Memorandum from the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Rostow) to the Under Secretary of State (Katzenbach): South African Arms Sales*, December 20, 1967, in NARA, RG 59, Central Files, DEF 12-5 S AFR, Secret.

financial assistance, were not thought to be willing to engage in direct military intervention. The key to the whole matter, however, was always the will and ability of the white regimes to pay the military and economic costs to resist insurgency effects.<sup>91</sup>

In effect, John Vorster's first reaction to the British decision to maintain the arms ban in full was coherent with what Wilson's main collaborators had predicted:

«Mr. Wilson however will be mistaken should he perhaps believe that cooperation can be carried out one-sidedly, and that contractual relations [...] can be conveniently forgotten or exchanged for political expediency without reaction from the other part concerned. [...] I have come to the conclusion and accept that the British Government does not care whether we fall prey to aggression from the sea or land».<sup>92</sup>

By reading the documentation available, we are capable of figuring out that this threat was seriously taken in consideration by the Foreign Office, which suggested that it would not be wise to take the lead in getting international discussion on extending the arms embargo.<sup>93</sup> As concerned the possibility of communist infiltration, the Americans were not the only ones to study the structure of South African society, within which the communists had gone further than any other political organisation in supporting the aspirations of non-whites and working closely with them. On that particular point, it had never been established whether Nelson Mandela was in fact a communist, but according to the British there was some evidence that he really was. Outside South Africa, the picture was different. The South African Communist Party had its headquarters-in-exile in London, and its members seemed to be involved primarily in contacting individuals in the Anti-Apartheid Movement. What was concerning for British authorities was the communist will to completely destroy white rule in South Africa and replace it theoretically with a non-racial democracy, which in practice would be a black State. This new regime was supposed to back communist world powers and throw its weight against

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<sup>91</sup> See *National Intelligence Estimate: The Liberation Movements of Southern Africa*, 24 November 1967, NIE 70-1-67, Secret, Controlled Dissem., in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

<sup>92</sup> *Telegram No. 1 from Pretoria to Foreign Office: South Africa and the United Kingdom*, 1 January 1968, in TNA, PREM 13/3489, Unclassified, En Clair.

<sup>93</sup> See *Letter to A.M. Palliser*, 22 February 1968, in TNA, PREM 13/3489, Confidential.

imperialists, exploiters and colonialists, among whom Britain was included.<sup>94</sup> The sense of strength of South Africa was certainly based on her strategic position and natural resources. As concerned gold, the Minister of Finance stated that Pretoria had to determine her policies for the future on the basis of that raw material. The country, he carried on, was in a very favourable position, economically strong and with a positive balance of payments, as well as a minimal foreign debt. All this made it possible for South Africa not to be obliged to sell any gold at the moment. In the meantime, the mineral was being bought by the Reserve Bank, so that future sales, once necessary to purchase foreign currencies, would be done by the mining industry under the supervision of the authorities.<sup>95</sup> Other factors favouring the Southern African country were the supply of exceptional cheap labour and a well-organised industry with large capital resources available for prospecting and investment in the most modern mining techniques and equipment. According to CIA estimates, the whole South African production accounted for about ten per cent of the GDP, was worth more than one billion dollars in 1967 and earned around forty per cent of the national foreign exchange. Moreover, gold exports represented something like forty per cent of all exports and financed close to half total imports. As concerned the Reserve Bank, this used the Bank of England as an agent on the London market, showing how Western powers were connected to South Africa, thus leaving really little room for manoeuvre on the apartheid issue.<sup>96</sup> According to American analysis, in fact, by reducing taxes on the gold industry the government could be able to maintain a high level of production for still many years to come, or also use tax revenues to develop other industrial sectors fit for exports.<sup>97</sup>

In the meantime, the South Africans did not react so well to the British intention to withdraw their military bases from East of Suez, fearing that the vacuum left would be

<sup>94</sup> See "S" Despatch from Cape Town: *Communism in South Africa*, 29 March 1968, in TNA, FCO 25/609, *South Africa: Political Affairs, Communists, Expansion, Ext. Multilateral*, JS2/24, Secret.

<sup>95</sup> See *Statement by Dr. N. Diederichs, Minister of Finance, before the House of Assembly of the Republic of South Africa*, 8 April 1968, in TNA, FCO 59/178, *International Monetary Matters, Gold, South Africa, 1967-68*, WE 4/4/1.

<sup>96</sup> Objections to a boycott of South Africa were also present within the Trade Union Congress. Unions leaders thought that a measure like that would harm the Africans and British workers themselves, rather than other groups against whom it was supposed to be oriented. See J. MAJOR, *The Trades Union Congress and Apartheid, 1948-1970*, in «Journal of Southern African Studies», XXXI, 3, September 2005, p. 488.

<sup>97</sup> See *Intelligence Memorandum: South Africa – Prospects for the Gold Industry*, April 1968, ER IM 68-37, Secret, in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).



filled by communist elements. Statements like these could have been delivered for domestic purposes as well, but the sense of isolation had certainly increased South African determination to build up national navy and improve relations with other African States. Having realised that Europe's role in Southern Africa was no longer comparable with that of the past, the nationalist government was going to take into greater account countries within the black continent and in the East. On the vacuum left in the Persian Gulf, the Minister had also said that attempt had been made by Russians and Chinese to infiltrate into Southern Africa. However, the Embassy was also persuaded that such pessimistic statements were deliberately exaggerated first to rally nationalist opinion, and then to try to induce a more favourable atmosphere for the sale of arms to South Africa in the event of a change of government in the United Kingdom.<sup>98</sup> Apart from military reasons, a good way to figure out what South Africa meant for the economy of all Western powers is the reading of International Monetary Fund records. In fact, South Africa's aim in that period lay in the increase of gold price. Despite British opposition to this objective, it was high desirable that there should be no confrontation with Pretoria on this particular issue at the I.M.F. Executive Board, since that might in certain circumstances weaken the authority of that institution and push up the price of gold. It was a matter of fact that eighty per cent of the new mined gold, excluding Russia, came from South Africa.<sup>99</sup> As an outcome of all this, by 1968 a lot of businessmen in the United States were clearly hostile to the Administration's hostility to Pretoria's policies. As a matter of fact, they predicted an economic boom in South Africa, especially in the area around Johannesburg and therefore argued that official opposition to apartheid negatively affected chances for American firms to capitalise new opportunities. Outside the establishment, instead, major demonstrations against university investments in companies and banks active in South Africa were taking place. The point was that the Johnson Administration, though defending the rights of black Americans,<sup>100</sup> had never

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<sup>98</sup> See *South African Reactions to the British Withdrawal from East of Suez*, 26 August 1968, in FCO 25/609, JS2/24, Confidential.

<sup>99</sup> See *Her Majesty's Treasury – I.M.F./I.B.R.D. Twenty-Third Annual Meeting: Gold. Annex I: South African Gold Sales*, 20 September 1968, in FCO 59/178, B.F. (68) 17, Secret.

<sup>100</sup> Until the late 1950s, the image black Americans had of Africa was the one presented in movies, such as Tarzan. Therefore, even black Americans had a very low perception of African people and civilization. It

used all possible power against apartheid South Africa. On the contrary, it was thought there would be the risk for South African retaliation to harm American economic and strategic interests. To be honest, for a lot of officials Pretoria's violation of human rights was no worse than those of a good numbers of other regimes around the planet.<sup>101</sup>

#### 6. Vorster's Outward Foreign Policy

At the end of the Johnson's mandate, the State Department had left to the successor a detailed analysis on the policy to follow towards Southern Africa. The real dilemma was always the same, that is how to conciliate indigenous claims with the safeguarding of American geo-political interests. Washington's aims in the area could be summed up as follows: a) encouraging substantial and long-term changes; b) reducing violence and confrontation; c) minimising the negative outcome of violence on national interests. In order to best pursue these objectives, it was advisable not to put white regimes under pressure too much.<sup>102</sup> However, the debate within the Administration could not ignore risks of communist influence in the area. Racial tensions, according to this analysis, gave communist countries excellent opportunities at a very low price, through funds to nationalist movements and assistance to black States.<sup>103</sup> What influenced the Americans' assessment most was the belief that the liberation movements of the area were not regarded as capable of overcoming the resistance of the white regimes for at least a few more years to come. In a nutshell, shortly before the Nixon Presidency in the region there were tangible interests which were difficult to match with idealist intentions. First of all Portugal, though led by a dictatorial regime, was a member of NATO and the Azores Islands hosted pivotal facilities to American military operations. Moreover, the

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was only when Ghana had become the first independent black Republic in the continent that they became increasingly sensitive to that issue. See M. SITHOLE, *Black Americans and United States Policy towards Africa*, in «African Affairs», LXXXV, 340, July 1986, p. 334.

<sup>101</sup> See T.J. NOER, *Cold War and Black Liberation: The United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948-1968*, Columbia, MO, University of Missouri Press, 1985, pp. 182-183.

<sup>102</sup> See *Paper Prepared in the Policy Planning Council: National Policy Paper, Southern Africa*, November 20, 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Department of State, S/S Files, Lot 70 D263, SIG/MEMO, #107-11/22/68-U.S. Policy toward Southern Africa, 47<sup>th</sup> SIG Meeting, Secret, Noform.

<sup>103</sup> See *Memorandum of Meeting – Senior Interdepartmental Group: Chairman's Summary of Discussion and Decisions at the 47<sup>th</sup> SIG Meeting*, December 3, 1968, in NARA, RG 59, Department of State, S/S Files, Lot 70 D263, SIG/RA, #49-12/9/68 – Chairman's Summary of Discussion and Decisions at the 47<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 12/3/68, Secret.

Americans had investments amounting to more than a billion dollars, not to mention naval bases on the Southern Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.<sup>104</sup> Concerning this, Geoffrey Kemp says that having South African facilities denied in a peace-time crisis would have produced psychological effects, rather than military ones, for the Americans did not use them so much.<sup>105</sup> Though exaggerated, the reference to communist expansion was not totally wrong. Since the early 1960s, in fact, the national liberation movements of the area had been trained by the Russians as well. Vladimir Shubin, who had been assigned by the Kremlin to come in touch with the various leaders of African insurrections, writes that Soviet assistance to the South African resistance in that moment, when the whole military machine of the African National Congress faced liquidation, clearly showed its value in that area.<sup>106</sup>

The new Administration was certainly welcomed by industrial lobbies, as a Republican Presidency was supposed to be more sensitive to their requests, especially those dealing with raw materials trading. Moreover, a statesman like Henry Kissinger, recently appointed National Security Adviser and used to reading the geographical map through a Cold War perspective, could not absolutely ignore that South Africa was crucial. In addition, South Africa's gold output was of great concern because of its role in determining the price system. Finally, many of the ores needed in the nuclear industry were located in that part of the world. Therefore, some kind of control was necessary to prevent their use by others, with the consequent risk to proliferate nuclear weapons. This control had been translated into an atomic agreement between the United States and South Africa. Needless to say, the breaking of such an accord could prove extremely dangerous for the whole world.<sup>107</sup> In the meantime, the South African parliament was discussing about enacting legislation to put South West Africa under closer administrative control, thus reducing it to the status of another province of the Republic.

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<sup>104</sup> See R. MORRIS, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, Columbia, MO, Harper & Row, 1977, p. 108.

<sup>105</sup> See G. KEMP, *U.S. Strategic Interests and Military Options in Sub-Saharan Africa*, in J.S. WHITAKER, ed., *Africa and the United States: Vital Interests*, New York, New York University Press, 1978, p. 134.

<sup>106</sup> See V. SHUBIN, *The Hot "Cold War": The USSR in Southern Africa*, London, Pluto Press, 2008, p. 245.

<sup>107</sup> See R.L. STEVENSON, *U.S. African Policy under Henry Kissinger*, in H.WALTON, JR.–R.L.STEVENSON–J.B. ROSSER, SR., eds., *The African Foreign Policy of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger: A Documentary Analysis*, Lanham, MD, Lexington Books, 2010, p. 85.

The bill in that moment under consideration made also all South African laws applicable to Namibia.<sup>108</sup> In view of all that, it was difficult for the White House to rely on economic sanctions to solve the problem. Above all, such a policy was no longer thought to match American national interests. According to new CIA reports, in fact, though African *élites* were not so easy to influence from abroad, any circumstance undermining relations with the West could be exploited by the Soviets to expand their own influence, despite not even the American intelligence believed that the Marxist-Leninist ideology could get deeply rooted in a continent crossed by waves of xenophobic nationalism.<sup>109</sup> In a few words South Africa, though founded on racial discrimination, was a State with a stable and strong government and had become a sort of bastion against any possible communist infiltration in the area. According to CIA experts, moreover, there was no chance for national liberation movements to overthrow white regime in the following decade.<sup>110</sup> As concerned racial questions, instead, United States ability to influence Pretoria's home policies was rather limited, since all whites regarded their domination as a non negotiable question of survival.<sup>111</sup> As a matter of fact, though the Soviet Union was not being so successful in Africa, Chinese diplomacy was gaining ground all over the continent. Maoist ideology, in fact, gave Beijing a leading role in the world revolution and the struggle against colonialism and white racism. In addition, the old dictator was pursuing something like a "dollar diplomacy" and to this end Zambia offered the best outlook in terms of commercial and political expansion. Apart from that, China was always ready to finance insurrection movements as well.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> See *Intelligence Note from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Secretary of State Rogers: South West Africa: Shrunkon Autonomy*, February 11, 1969, Confidential, in M.F. BURTON–E.C. KEEFER, eds., FRUS, vol. XXVIII, *Southern Africa*, Washington, D.C., United States Government Printing Office, , 2011, Doc. 1, pp. 1-3.

<sup>109</sup> See *Central Intelligence Agency – Office of National Estimates Memorandum: The Soviets and Black Africa – New Approaches and the African Response*, 13 March 1969, Secret, in E.C. KEEFER, gen. ed., FRUS 1969-1976, vol. E-5, Part 1, *Documents on Sub-Saharan Africa, 1969-1972*, Office of the Historian, Bureau of Public Affairs, Washington D.C., U.S. Department of State, 2005, Doc. 1, in [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).

<sup>110</sup> See A. DONNO, *Stati Uniti, Sudafrica e rivolgimenti politici dell’Africa australe*, in «Nuova Storia Contemporanea», XIX, 2, marzo-aprile 2015, p. 85.

<sup>111</sup> *Intelligence Note from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Secretary of State Rogers: South Africa – The Invisible Government*, 24 June 1969, in NARA, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, POL 23 S AFR, Secret, No Foreign Dissem, Controlled Dissem.

<sup>112</sup> See *Directorate of Intelligence – Special Report Weekly Review No. 32: Communist China’s Presence in China*, 20 June 1969, Secret, in FRUS 1969-1976, vol. E-5, Part 1, Doc. 5, in [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).

In light of all these economic and strategic reasons, the relationship between the United States and South Africa was getting closer and closer and the apartheid question was inevitably being relegated to the field of moral principles which did not alter *Realpolitik*. At the same time, Afrikaner leaders were perfectly aware that neither the Portuguese colonial network in Angola and Mozambique, nor the settler regime in Rhodesia were stable and armed enough to stop the wave of black nationalism. Hence, relations with Washington had become more important than those with the United Kingdom.<sup>113</sup> Thus, when in May 1969 fourteen African States in Lusaka, Zambia, issued a Manifesto to condemn the white regimes based on racial discrimination – though with quite a conciliatory tone, as the liberation of Southern Africa did not mean racialism in reverse and all people living in the continent were to be judged as “Africans” regardless of skin colour –, Kissinger was extremely realist:

«[...] African leaders will not abandon their basic opposition to white minority rule, yet they can't reach their objective [...] without outside – and especially U.S. – support. The long-run problem [...] is how to reconcile their passion with that dependence».<sup>114</sup>

The African context and the relations among black States had been translated into the meeting in April 1969 of East and central African States in Lusaka, during which a manifesto on Southern Africa had been issued, emphasising equal rights and human dignity. Therefore, there was no longer place for racism, though the whites were welcome in multi-racial States. At the same time, rather than calling for a commitment to immediate change, the document simply called for change and peaceful progress, though in case of armed struggle all black States were supposed to aid freedom fighters. On South Africa the tone was sharper, and its recommendations went much further, including the suggestion to expel that country from all international political and economic bodies. However, this distinction also contained an acknowledgement of South Africa's status as an independent, sovereign UN member, while Namibia, Mozambique, Rhodesia and Angola were colonies without recognition as states. The manifesto acknowledged the

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<sup>113</sup> See DONNO, *Stati Uniti, Sudafrica e rivolgimenti politici*, cit., pp. 86-87.

<sup>114</sup> See *Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon: Black African Manifesto on Southern Africa*, May 15, 1969, Confidential, in FRUS, vol. XXVIII, Doc. 9, pp. 14-15.

right of all the whites who had settled to stay there, without any changes of boundaries and advocating boycott and isolation, rather than armed intervention or internal revolt. Above all, it urged negotiation and accepted that change could not come overnight. The White South African regime rejected the document and the ANC was likewise opposed as in their view the declaration legitimised apartheid. According to the document, there was one thing which distinguished South Africa from other oppressive regimes. The apartheid policy implied a position of privilege based on something which was beyond the power of anybody to change, that is the colour of skin, parentage, and ancestors. Therefore, abilities and behaviour were all irrelevant to a man's status. The whole system of government and society in South Africa was based on the denial of human equality, keeping the majority of the population under oppression. In consequence of all this, and due to the fact that no action was following declarations of intent within the international community, it was proposed to expel South Africa from the United Nations.<sup>115</sup> At first the South African government welcomed the Manifesto, but its attitude changed as that of black States hardened. In fact, shortly after the issuing of the document, the Foreign Ministers of the group decided that peaceful progress was not possible, as the white regimes had closed any door of cooperation<sup>116</sup>. In the same period the African National Congress held a conference at Morogoro, in Tanzania. The report coming out from the conference set a future based more on armed struggle than on diplomacy, thus fostering relations with communists and the Afro-Asian bloc. Another product of the conference was the so-called "Revolutionary Programme", discussing in particular the relationship between Africans and other peoples and recognising the former as indigenous owners of the country, entitled to determine its direction and destiny. However, no-one denied the right of the white in South Africa to legitimately live there. In future a democratic State had to be formed through the revolutionary forces led by the ANC itself. As regarded the Afrikaner national group and the whites in general, it was stated that a democratic government would ensure that all national groups have equal rights in a united South Africa. From an economic point of view, instead, the revolution was to be extended to

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<sup>115</sup> See *Manifesto on Southern Africa*, proclaimed by the Fifth Summit Conference of East and Central African States, 14-16 April 1969, Lusaka, Zambia, in <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/>.

<sup>116</sup> See BARBER - BARRATT, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 146.

economic emancipation, so that the wealth of the land be returned to the people as a whole.<sup>117</sup>

The other question which arose at Morogoro was the nature and character of the movement. The outcome of this discussion was the now famous Strategy and Tactics of the ANC, claiming the alliance among all organisations opposing the regime, regardless of colour, as the only realistic alternative government. At the same time the ANC was learning from other organisations in the continent. In some African countries liberation movements, exclusively African in composition, had since independence opened their doors to non-Africans as members. Surely it had become undesirable to confine the membership of the ANC exclusively to members of the “majority group”, since this effectively denied the members of the `minority groups` an opportunity to participate in the democratic process within the ANC. This was all the more important because “participation in the democratic process” meant how to mobilise the different national groups.<sup>118</sup>

From the Afrikaner point of view, instead, black nationalism was publicised as an instrument coming from the communist powers in a global campaign in which South Africa was the main target. Following British colonial withdrawal from the area and the consequent Rhodesian independence, Pretoria had recognised that her interests were best served by taking part in the white regional bloc, within which South Africa emerged as the most developed State with an outlook of great responsibility. For this reason the government promoted what was called an “outward policy”, aimed at diversifying trade and diplomatic links and reducing political isolation. The main effort was pursued in Africa itself, where the Executive highlighted two objectives, provided there was no interference in domestic affairs, or attempts to set up common political positions: a) promoting peace based on mutual respect and co-operation; b) sharing economic and technical activities. To be more detailed, outward policy was built at three levels, that is: 1) Greater South Africa, giving the idea of a powerful white republic surrounded by compliant black States, like the Bantustans, Namibia and the former British High Commission territories; 2) the Southern Africa bloc, including also Mozambique, Angola,

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<sup>117</sup> See BARBER, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, cit., pp. 203-204.

<sup>118</sup> See *The Morogoro Conference*, in <http://www.anc.org.za>.

Rhodesia and Malawi; 3) the rest of Africa, with which Pretoria had difficult relations. Regarding all this, the government recognised that the relations with the West, which were by far more important and profitable, were also determined by the relations with other African countries.<sup>119</sup>

As concerned the Namibian question, American and British manoeuvrability on the South-West Africa issue was seriously reduced due to the UN Security Council Resolution of August 12, 1969, calling for South Africa's withdrawal from Namibia within early October. In terms of mandatory sanctions, as usual the Security Council did not impose anything precise, for effective measures were requested, without specifying how. The point was that the Western powers did not share the Afro-Asian bloc's point of view, according to which it was time to appeal to Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. Among permanent Security Council members, the United Kingdom was the one strongly opposing such measures and ready to veto, or at least diluting mandatory sanctions.<sup>120</sup> What gave South Africa a pivotal role was not only the strategic position and her economic strength, but also the transport system, since all newly independent black States were landlocked and relying on the Republic for major ports and railways. The outcome of this was that Pretoria's trade in the region was eighty per cent of the total in Africa.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, the Nationalist Party was split between the "*verkrampers*", believing that white rule depended on rigid opposition to any change and that every concession jeopardised the whole edifice of apartheid, and "*verligtes*", claiming a better future based on a certain degree of flexibility to protect the core of white authority. The "hawks" were led by Dr. Albert Herzog, who had been dismissed the previous year from the government due to his opposition to Vorster's policies. In April 1969 he had launched a campaign against the political merging of Afrikaners and English speakers in the new white nationalism. According to this vision, the Afrikaners were those embodying the great complex of principles witnessed by Calvinism. From this tradition, they recognised the diversity of creation, from which they appreciated the love of freedom for their own

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<sup>119</sup> See BARBER-BARRATT, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 124-126.

<sup>120</sup> See *Intelligence Note from the Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (Hughes) to Secretary of State Rogers: South-West Africa. The Issue that Won't Go away*, August 18, 1969, in NARA, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, POL 19 SW AFR, Confidential, No Foreign Dissem, Controlled Dissem.

<sup>121</sup> See BARBER - BARRATT, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 131-133.



people and stood firm against any unlawful challenge to their authority. It was because of this Calvinist mentality, said Herzog, that the Afrikaner was a very good soldier for white civilization. On the other hand, the English were advocates of liberalism and found difficult to take drastic action against communist and leftist movements.<sup>122</sup>

Meanwhile, Vorster was aware that Conservatives in Britain had made clear that they favoured the resumption of arms sales for external defence. Therefore, the difference with Labour reinforced Pretoria's preference for the Tories. At the same time, economic lobbies, such as the South Africa-Britain Trade Association, reminded that if concentration were placed on economics, many difficulties would be removed. These words seemed to be confirmed by the Foreign Secretary George Brown saying that Britain could not contemplate any economic war with South Africa.<sup>123</sup> Vorster was persuaded that all independent States should be treated as fully self-governing and of equal worth.

«We as whites in South Africa», he said, «have a special duty towards the rest of Africa [...] and to the extent that we establish the right relations with Africa, to that extent will our problems diminish in the rest of the world [...] We are the only white people that are of Africa. [...] no-one understands the soul of Africa better than we do».<sup>124</sup>

Conservative opposition in Britain denounced what they regarded as a dangerous trend. In fact, South Africa had been Britain's second largest trading market, after the United States, but in the last months she had become the third one, after the United States and Australia. At the same time, in the last four-five years British exports to South Africa had fallen from twenty-nine per cent of the market to twenty-four per cent, while West Germany's exports there had increased by three per cent, Japan's by two per cent and Italy's by one per cent. In addition, said the Tories in the House of Commons on July 21, 1969, the balance of trade during 1968 had been in South Africa's favour for about 10 million pounds, whereas, in most previous years it had always been in Britain's favour.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> See BARBER, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, cit., p. 181.

<sup>123</sup> See BARBER-BARRATT, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, cit., pp. 158-159.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>125</sup> See *House of Commons Debate: South Africa (Trade)*, 21 July 1969, vol. 787, in <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>.

### 7. *National Security Study Memorandum 39 and the end of the Labour Government*

In December 1969, the National Security Council finally suggested to implement a shift on policy towards Southern Africa. The document issued in that circumstance, National Security Study Memorandum 39, became a turning point of the Nixon Administration. What was different about this report was its extreme realism, as it stated that sorting out racial problems and colonial conflicts in Southern Africa did not match American interests. Hence, Washington's involvement during the years had not been due to White House will, but rather to a kind of necessity coming out from international attentions towards those questions. As concerned national liberation movements, the attitude of the President was influenced by Kissinger's belief that they were a little more than puppets in the hands of communist powers. Such an outlook was probably due to the experience with Vietnamese revolutionary movements, that was why the National Security Adviser did not want to provoke any open conflict.<sup>126</sup> Although NSSM 39 was intended to cover the whole region of Southern Africa, the Administration's attention was primarily focused on South Africa. By reading the document, we can figure out that Washington regarded Pretoria as a reliable ally, indispensable to Western interests and responsible to shape the destiny of the whole area. The study was based on the assumption that

«the whites are here to stay and the only way that constructive change can come about is through them. There is no hope for the blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence, which will only lead to chaos and increased opportunities for the communists. We can, by selective relaxation of our stance toward the white regimes, encourage some modification of their current racial and colonial policies and through more substantial economic assistance to the black states [...] help to draw the two groups together and exert some influence on both for peaceful change».<sup>127</sup>

In reaching these conclusions, and thus rationalising the tilt in favour of the white minority regimes, the White House was persuaded that: a) because of her growing

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<sup>126</sup> See M. EL-KHAWAS–B. COHEN, eds., *The Kissinger Study of Southern Africa: Security Study Memorandum 39 (Secret)*, Westport, CT, Lawrence Hil & Company, 1976, pp. 26-28.

<sup>127</sup> *Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Interdepartmental Group for Africa – Study in Response to National Security Memorandum 39: Southern Africa*, December 9, 1969, AF/NSC-IG 69-8 Rev. A, in NARA, National Security Study Memoranda (thereafter NSSMs) and Related Papers, 1969-1976, Lot 80D212, NSSM 39, Secret.

dependency of African labour, Pretoria would soon be obliged to develop more moderate racial policies; b) due to lack of challenge to Pretoria's effective power, the United States was not obliged to take any active role. Finally, Africans and black Americans were too concerned about their own domestic situation to really oppose the new policy of communication between the United States and the apartheid regime.<sup>128</sup> In reviewing U.S. attitude towards the area, Kissinger himself outlined some objectives the Administration was supposed to embrace, including: a) improving American stand in black Africa and on racial issues in general; b) minimising escalation of violence in Southern Africa and the risk of American involvement; c) minimising opportunities for communist powers to exploit racial issues for propaganda and thus gain political influence with black governments and liberation movements; d) encouraging moderation in colonial and racial regimes of the area; e) safeguarding American economic, scientific, and strategic interests, starting from the South African gold market.<sup>129</sup>

This choice, nicknamed "Tar Baby" by Nixon's detractors,<sup>130</sup> implied secret arms supplies towards South Africa and Portugal. Apart from this, the United Nations, with the Afro-Asian bloc forming up to one-third of the membership, was an important forum where racial relations and the American posture towards Southern Africa affected U.S. relations with the rest of the world and the relating access to African and Asian areas, thus putting in jeopardy 2.5 billion dollars of investments in Africa, one-third of which in the white regimes. In view of all this, Washington had all the intention to protect her own material interests in South Africa, with a substantial favourable trade balance. Apart from gold, South Africa was the third largest supplier of uranium for the West and she was also eager to be included in Western defence arrangements, with the outlook to initiate some kind of collaboration with the United States in monitoring or surveillance of the Soviet

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<sup>128</sup> See M. EL-KHAWAS-B. COHEN (eds.), *The Kissinger Study of Southern Africa*, p. 30.

<sup>129</sup> See STEVENSON, *U.S. African Policy under Henry Kissinger*, cit., p. 86.

<sup>130</sup> The nickname was invented by some Department of State officers who criticised Nixon's policies. They thought the United States would get stuck to the destinies of the white regimes in Africa, without being able then to implement an exit strategy even after their fall. See L.A. PICARD, *U.S. Foreign Policy toward Southern Africa*, in D.P. FORSYTHE, ed., *American Foreign Policy in an Uncertain World*, Lincoln, NB, and London University of Nebraska Press, 1984, pp. 457-458.

Navy in the Indian Ocean.<sup>131</sup> The confirmation of the shift in the American African policy came with the State of the Union Address on February 18, 1970:

«Though we abhor the racial policies of the white regimes, we cannot agree that progressive change in Southern Africa is furthered by force. The history of the area shows all too starkly that violence and the counter-violence it inevitably provokes will only make more difficult the task of those on both sides working for progress on the racial question».<sup>132</sup>

Within a context like this, the Nixon Administration was not totally against the Bantustan programme, since it had been developed and publicised as a way to allow black majority rule in the homelands, while denying the “urban” blacks in white areas any kind of right, thus leaving most of the country under Afrikaner control. The problem with this strategy was that it did not really look credible, as eighty-five per cent of the entire population of South Africa was supposed to be crowded into only thirteen per cent of the land. Nevertheless, at this time the State Department was not ready to completely rule out the programme, as a lot of Africans had chosen to come to terms with separate development, for no other course seemed left to them.<sup>133</sup>

Nixon’s approach to the problem was realistic: «It is obvious that we have to avoid the colonialist label, but we must analyse where our interest lies and not worry too much about other people’s domestic policies». These words were the response to what the Assistant Secretary to African Affairs, David Newson, had previously pronounced, according to whom the American investment in the whole black Africa was equal to that in South Africa. Apart from that, the international community had to simply acknowledge that white South Africans had the right to stay there, such as the Anglo-Saxons in America. Moreover, the former Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, who had always been an advocate of a sort of “Anglo-Saxon alliance” leading the West against the communist bloc, in his April 1969 paper “U.S. Policies toward Southern Africa Require Change” had

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<sup>131</sup> See *Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Interdepartmental Group for Africa: Study in Response to National Security Study Memorandum 39*, December 9, 1969, Secret, in NARA, RG 59, NSSMS and Related Papers, 1969-1976, Lot 80 D212, NSSM 39.

<sup>132</sup> R.M. NIXON, *U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970’s: A New Strategy for Peace. A Report to the Congress*, February 18, 1970, in FRUS 1969-1976, vol. E-5, Part 1, doc. 7, in [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov).

<sup>133</sup> See C. COKER, *The United States and South Africa, 1968-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1986, pp. 69-71.

suggested that America should abandon the policy aligning the Administration with the enemies of the white regimes. Such a trend was counterproductive, as those policies were impossible to achieve, they were contrary to American interests and were also frustrating the need of stability of both black and white nations of that area.<sup>134</sup> Nixon himself, shortly before accepting the nomination to the Presidency, had said he had been disappointed by his trip to black Africa. According to the American statesman, in fact, in most cases the newly independent African nations did not have a ruling class able to achieve their development aims within a reasonable span of time.<sup>135</sup> In a nutshell, Nixon and his main collaborators were persuaded that the previous Democratic Administrations, basing their approach on a mixture of moral public rhetoric and limited diplomatic requests, had completely failed to achieve any pivotal result. On the contrary, the only outcome had been that South Africa, Portugal and Rhodesia had abandoned non violent methods, thus crushing nationalist uprisings and at the same time bypassing economic sanctions and the arms embargo.<sup>136</sup> As a confirmation of this shift in policy, a few days after the National Security Council meeting the United States and South Africa reached a mutual understanding on the marketing of South African gold, assuring that most of it would go into the free market, thus holding down the price and promoting confidence in the official price.<sup>137</sup> The situation in South West Africa, instead, was a little different due to the international status of the territory. Therefore, whatever it was decided to do, the White House regarded the South African administration of Namibia as illegal, though it did not support the use of force to terminate such an occupation.<sup>138</sup> On this question, it is interesting to notice how realistic Kissinger's approach was. The National Security Adviser, in fact, wondered what advantage the United States could gain by making concessions to the Africans. According to him, the Administration should have no

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<sup>134</sup> See *Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting*, December 17, 1969, Secret, in FRUS 1969-1976, vol. XXVIII, Doc. 20, pp. 57-63.

<sup>135</sup> See R.M. NIXON, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, New York, Grosset & Dunlap, 1978, p. 283.

<sup>136</sup> See G. IURLANO, *Henry A. Kissinger e l'Africa Australe: il National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 39*, in «Nuova Storia Contemporanea», XIX, 2, marzo-aprile 2015, p. 72.

<sup>137</sup> See *Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon: U.S. and South Africa Reach Understanding on Gold*, December 23, 1969, Confidential, in FRUS 1969-1976, vol. XXVIII, Doc. 22, pp. 66-68.

<sup>138</sup> See *Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Interdepartmental Group for Africa: Response to NSSM 89: South West Africa*, April 2, 1970, in NARA, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 19 SW AFR, AF/NSC-IG 70-2, Secret.

illusions that limited measures would stop African pressures. However, limiting investment in South West Africa (which was what the State Department recommended), by verbally discouraging it and terminating Export-Import Bank guarantees, could imply only a modest sacrifice for the United States, while strengthening its position in the event that a veto action at the UN became necessary to stop mandatory sanctions.<sup>139</sup> Actually, Nixon followed Kissinger's advice, ordering also his officers to encourage other nations to take similar actions, though the President made clear that such steps were not to be followed towards South Africa and the Portuguese Territories.<sup>140</sup>

By reading the documentation currently available, we can realise how embarrassed the British Labour Government was in dealing with the South Africans. The Foreign Secretary reminded the South African Ambassador on March 5, 1970, that in light of UN resolutions, if Britain decided to supply arms to Pretoria, a lot of black African States would thus conclude that the only help for them could come from the Soviet Union.<sup>141</sup> The position of the government was being tackled by a persistent Tory opposition whose policy was based on the assumption that it was in the interests of both Britain and the West in general that South Africa be able to participate in the defence of the area according to the lines indicated by the Simonstown Agreement. For this purpose, Pretoria needed arms for external defence. As a matter of fact, Conservative leaders thought that the British policy towards South Africa had to be looked as a part of a whole called Africa. Hence, while nobody could give a positive assessment to apartheid, it was also rational to resume arms supplies for external defence purposes.<sup>142</sup> After all, London was not bargaining from a position of strength as, due to the closure of the Suez Canal in 1967, the route around the Cape of Good Hope carried by then twenty-seven per cent of the British seaborne trade, with the outlook of increasing transport of ores from

<sup>139</sup> See *Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon: South West Africa (Namibia): Response to NSSM 89*, April 15, 1970, Secret, in FRUS 1969-1976, vol. XXVIII, Doc. 31, pp. 91-96.

<sup>140</sup> See *National Security Decision Memorandum 55: South West Africa*, May 22, 1970, in NARA, RG 59, Central Files 1970-73, POL 19 SW AFR, Secret.

<sup>141</sup> See *Record of a Conversation between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the South African Ambassador Held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on Thursday, 5 March, 1970, at 4.30 p.m.*, 5 March 1970, in TNA, FCO 46/605, *Strategic Importance of South Africa to United Kingdom*, DP 14/334/1, Part A, Confidential.

<sup>142</sup> See *Douglas-Home to Kenneth Kaunda, President of Zambia*, 19 March 1970, in TNA, PREM 13/3489, Unclassified.

Australia.<sup>143</sup> Apart from this, we cannot even ignore the American lobbies' pressure on the British Government. On June 18, 1970, in fact, the Conservatives had won elections and pressure groups overseas relied on them as a party more sensitive to market needs. To tell the truth, the new government, led by Edward Heath, did not show any enthusiasm towards UN sanctions, but at the same time they could not afford to harm British economic interests in black Africa. This is probably the reason why the Cabinet issued a report on the economic implications of a possible change in the United Kingdom arms policy. To continue the ban, it was stated, would involve the sacrifice of something like 225 million pounds of arms sales to South Africa over the following three years, not to mention substantial export losses in the private sector. On the other hand, the relaxation of the ban would call forth vigorous protests from many countries, but none of them, with the exception of Tanzania and Zambia,<sup>144</sup> were expected to take serious economic actions against the UK.<sup>145</sup> Both Anglo-Saxon executives aimed at pursuing a more indulgent policy for economic and military reasons. Southern sea routes, in fact, would have become even more important, once the British had withdrawn from the Persian Gulf area in late 1971. As a consequence of that, London did not want to risk that port facilities be threatened by the Soviets. Hence, Prime Minister Heath was thinking of selling to Pretoria a limited amount of naval war equipment, such as helicopters and frigates, provided they were not used for domestic repression purposes or to wage war on other African States. From the American point of view, the President affirmed that hostility to apartheid was certainly useful to have public opinion approval, but world powers like the United States and the United Kingdom were obliged to pursue their own national

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<sup>143</sup> See *Ministry of Defence – Chiefs of Staff Committee: The Value of Facilities Provided under the Simonstown Agreement to British and Western Defence Interests – Note by the Secretary*, 31 March 1970, in TNA, FCO 46/605, DP 14/334/1, Part A, Secret.

<sup>144</sup> Zambia's copper production had been strategically pivotal for the United States for several years by then. Since 1964, in fact, the former British colony had produced about fifteen per cent of the whole so-called Free World's copper, amounting to 360 million dollars, around one third of which belonged to U.S. firms. However, the energy sources supplying mines were not controlled by Zambia, but by Southern Rhodesia, which was also crossed by the railway used to transport raw materials towards Indian Ocean ports, before building the network connecting Zambia to Tanzania. See C.P. WATTS, *The United States, Britain, and the Problem of Rhodesian Independence, 1964-1965*, in «Diplomatic History», XXX, 3, June 2006, p. 450.

<sup>145</sup> See *Draft Report: South Africa – Economic Implications of a Change in United Kingdom Arms Policy*, June 1970, in TNA, BT 241/2438, *South Africa: UK Arms Sales Policy*, Confidential.

interests; therefore, the Americans were ready to have normal relations with South Africa, as well as they had with Spain and Greece.<sup>146</sup>

### *Conclusions*

The relations between the Nixon Administration and the United Nations, especially the Afro-Asian bloc and the smaller States, had become cause of frustration, as the White House did not understand why they were always voting against the Americans, who had always been major supporters of their development. In particular, during his first address at the UN General Assembly, at the end of 1969, he had stated that the multilateral organisation should be assigned a special task on the environment and demographic control, rather than on security and peace keeping. This was cause of attrition between Washington and Third World countries, but the President and the National Security Advisor had already chosen to limit the damage and focusing efforts on the Soviet Union and Communist China.<sup>147</sup> Moreover, an action aimed at liberalising the political system of a sovereign State like South Africa could be easily seen as an act of foreign subversion. Hence, human rights issues were regarded by the Nixon Administration as something dealing a policy of world order, rather than as an attempt to impose objective values on other countries.<sup>148</sup> On the other hand, the dilemma for the new Conservative government dealt with how it was possible to match South Africans and UK businessmen expectations regarding relaxation of the embargo with what it was really possible to achieve without seriously jeopardising British relations with Commonwealth partners. In the long term, the Cabinet thought that South African resentment could build up to such an extent as to harm British trade in case London did not allow important requirements

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<sup>146</sup> See *Record of a Meeting between the Prime Minister and President Nixon at Chequers*, 3 October, 1970, 11:45 am, Top Secret, in TNA, FCO 7/1815, ALUS 2/5, Annex, Records of Conversations during Visit of President Nixon to Europe, Sept/Oct 1970.

<sup>147</sup> See A. TORELLI, *L'Amministrazione Nixon, le Nazioni Unite e l'Africa. Un dialogo complesso*, in A. DONNO–G.IURLANO, eds., *L'Amministrazione Nixon e il continente africano. Tra decolonizzazione e guerra fredda (1969-1974)*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2016, pp. 50-51.

<sup>148</sup> See I.L. VALICENTI, “*The Tar Baby Option*”: *Guerra fredda e Africa australe durante la prima amministrazione Nixon (1969-1972)*, *ibid.*, pp. 188-189.



for Pretoria. Therefore, it seemed worthwhile to gain the highest possible trade benefit with South Africa, that is allowing the sale of arms for external defence.<sup>149</sup>

Britain's shift was by then on the way. The Prime Minister had decided to resume arms supply and was making it clear in conversations with Commonwealth leaders. Heath was persuaded that Black African countries had to learn to live with South Africa, as no one was going to settle the Southern African problem by force. Moreover, African leaders could not pretend to ignore that their countries economically depended on the ongoing trade with South Africa and Rhodesia as well.<sup>150</sup> The question of arms supply had become public in Britain, and the Government did not hide the intention to give effect to the purposes of the Simonstown Agreement to export to South Africa certain limited categories of arms, as long as they were for maritime defence. This, said the Foreign Secretary Douglas-Home while addressing the House of Commons, did not mean that Whitehall agreed with the racial policies of the South African Government. Therefore, it was always made sure that in no circumstances there would be sales of arms for internal repression. In other words, the Tory government believed it necessary that South Africa have arms to efficiently collaborate with Britain. As concerned United Nations resolutions, the Foreign Secretary reminded they had never been mandatory and that the former Conservative Government had expressly accepted recommendations in so far as arms were concerned in relation to internal strife.<sup>151</sup> A few days later, quite realistically Douglas-Home stated that the policy of any Government was to sell arms to any country unless that country was a declared enemy, which was not certainly the case of South Africa, and, in addition, to attach limitations to the nature of the weapons to be sold. In addition, the Secretary of Defence stated that, in light of the revision of Agreements under the previous Labour Cabinet in 1967, South Africa had by then a more important part in the command structure of the Southern Atlantic defence. A Soviet attack of any kind was not considered as a serious imminent risk, but he said it would be idle to pretend

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<sup>149</sup> See *Cabinet Brief for the President: Defence and Oversea Policy Committee – Sale of Arms to South Africa*, 30 June 1970, in TNA, BT 241/2438, DOP (70) 4, Secret.

<sup>150</sup> See *Record of the Prime Minister's Meeting with Sir Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of Mauritius*, at 4.30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 14, at No. 10 Downing Street, 14 July 1970, in TNA, PREM 15/026, Confidential.

<sup>151</sup> See *House of Commons Debate: South Africa (Arms)*, 20 July 1970, vol. 804, in <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>.

that the penetration of the Soviet Navy into the Mediterranean was not causing considerable concern, as Russian influence had grown not only in the Mediterranean, but also in the Middle East and in the Red Sea.<sup>152</sup>

According to Defence Department reports, as long as the Suez Canal remained closed the area off Southern Africa formed only a limited part of the seaways linking Europe, East Africa, the Indian sub-continent and the Far East. The point was that even if the South Africans had been willing to fully co-operate with Britain on the defence of those sea-routes against a possible Soviet expansion, nothing would have been effectively possible without the American naval presence in the area.<sup>153</sup> In virtue of all this, the following step the report suggested was entering into official negotiations with Pretoria, while at the same time trying to reassure Commonwealth countries by undertaking to consult with them before reaching any new arrangement with South Africa.<sup>154</sup> In light of all this, the Conservative Government was seriously thinking of reverting to the British pre-1965 position at the United Nations, that is selling to South Africa strategic arms which could not be used for the enforcement of apartheid, with the particular recommendation to link such trade with offers – such as building of social infrastructures, water supplies and irrigation networks, secondary and university education – improving material prosperity and communications of the population of the former High Commission Territories,<sup>155</sup> including the non white inhabitants of South Africa.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> See *House of Commons Debate: South Africa (Sale of Arms)*, 22 July 1970, vol. 804, in <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/>.

<sup>153</sup> Samuel P. Huntington in those years wrote that the original basis for the strategy of Containment was disappearing, since the Soviet Union had achieved military parity with the United States. Europe, Japan, and China were independent centres of economic and political power, and local hegemonic powers had emerged in the Third World. For the foreseeable future, therefore, the United States had to avoid military inferiority vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, diplomatic isolation among the major powers, and exclusion by the Russians from political or economic access to any major portion of the Third World. In order to achieve these goals, leading regional powers, otherwise called “local Leviathans” could be able to play an effective role to prevent Chinese or Soviet infiltration, provided they had good relations with the United States. See S.P. HUNTINGTON, *After Containment: The Functions of the Military Establishment*, in «Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science», CDVI, *The Military and American Society*, March 1973, p. 6.

<sup>154</sup> See *The Defence of the Sea Routes around Southern Africa and across the Indian Ocean*, 27 July 1970, in TNA, FCO 46/606, *Strategic Importance of South Africa to United Kingdom*, Part B, Secret.

<sup>155</sup> Pretoria's efforts concerning the outward looking policy were quite well received in several French speaking countries, such as Ivory Coast, Senegal, Gabon, Madagascar, as well as in a few Anglophone States showing willingness at least to hear out South African approaches. See J. SIKO, *Inside South Africa's Foreign Policy: Diplomacy in Africa from Smuts to Mbeki*, London–New York, I.B. Tauris, 2014, p. 21.

Concerning this, Heath and Douglas-Home had a difficult task to pursue, as the question of arms sales to Pretoria was also and first of all a very emotional issue in black Africa.<sup>157</sup> Seeing it from a strictly British point of view, the prime UK defence interest in that area was to deter the Soviets from harassing or seeking to limit the free flow of trade along the Cape routes, with a focal area off the Cape of Good Hope. The association of British and South African forces, in terms of access to naval and military facilities, was obviously a good deterrent to overcome Russian maritime pressure.<sup>158</sup>

The British had practically reached the same conclusions as the Americans on how to safeguard national interests in Southern Africa. Political stability was pivotal to defend economic and military interests, and on this purpose quiet relations with Black Africa were also important. That is why Whitehall top representatives were committed in having talks with African leaders, in order to avoid the risk of important countries to quit the Commonwealth and implement discriminating measure against Great Britain. In addition, the consequence of such a policy favouring South Africa could encourage Black Africans to turn to the Soviets and the Chinese for arms and commodities, thus increasing communist influence in the area, with a possible acquisition of military facilities. On the other hand, the Cabinet thought that by accommodating Black Africans London would not gain such political gains, as similar pressures were possible in the future.<sup>159</sup> American conclusions were similar, as Kissinger complained about the lack of any moderate Black African bloc. Hence, the President and his closest collaborator were persuaded that a “local Leviathan” like South Africa could play an important role on the Cold War chess-board, thus putting off racial issues to an indefinite future. Apart from this, the United States needed raw materials for nuclear weapons and the South African country was pivotal from this point of view. Concerning this, it had become more profitable to

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<sup>156</sup> See *Southern Africa Group: Policy on Southern Africa in the 1970s*, 4 August 1970, in TNA, FCO 45/640, *Political Relations between South Africa and United Kingdom*, 1970, CSS3/548/6.

<sup>157</sup> See *Record of the Prime Minister's Meeting with Mr. N. Mungai, Foreign Minister of Kenya at 5 p.m. on Friday, August 21, 1970 at No. 10 Downing Street*, 21 August 1970, in TNA, PREM 15/026, Confidential.

<sup>158</sup> See *Arms to South Africa: Defence Aspects*, 27 August 1970, in TNA, 46/606, FCO 46/606, Part B, Secret.

<sup>159</sup> See *Memorandum by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office – Cabinet Defence and Oversea Policy (Official) Committee: Implications for British Interests of United Kingdom Arms Sales to South Africa*, 4 September 1970, in TNA, CAB 148/104, DOP 0 (70) 3, Secret.

purchase such goods from white States exploiting cheap black workforce.<sup>160</sup> Such a way to make business was not surprising at all, if we consider how pivotal South Africa had become in terms of uranium sales not only to Britain and the United States, but also to France. In March of the following year, in fact, the CIA estimated that Pretoria had 220,000 tons of uranium oxide reserves, with an output of four thousand tons per year, representing about twenty per cent of the Western total production and placing the country third behind United States and Canada among leading suppliers. In addition, the very low comparative cost of uranium recovery, being a by-product of gold extraction, put South Africa in an extremely favourable position in the market.<sup>161</sup>

The realism characterising this new phase of Anglo-American policy towards Southern Africa was due to the awareness that the Afrikaner government had no intention whatsoever to give up apartheid, as South Africans did not stop saying that if one went further than self determination within Bantustans, the black majority would then be able to crush the white minority. Nobody in the West thought that white communities in the area would ever give up power, nor that anyone would be able to win a large-scale war against them. Moreover, the outward policy probably misled Western governments about a perceived intention to ameliorate the conditions of the African majority by pouring money into the Homelands, being also sure that none of them wanted full independence.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, in those days Prime Minister Vorster said in Parliament that he was ready to enter into a non-aggression pact with neighbouring States, as well as any other country in Africa. Instead, the Foreign Minister at the United Nations stated that he would be happy to discuss the matter further with anyone interested in that proposal.<sup>163</sup> On the other hand, Downing Street was conscious of the tensions with Black Africa States, whose leaders they tried to convince that isolating the South African regime was

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<sup>160</sup> See A. DONNO, *Gli Stati Uniti e il Leviatano sudafricano: il dilemma di Nixon e Kissinger*, in DONNO–IURLANO, eds., *L'Amministrazione Nixon e il continente africano*, cit., pp. 292-295.

<sup>161</sup> See *Central Intelligence Agency - Scientific and Technical Intelligence Report: Atomic Energy Activities in the Republic of South Africa*, March 1971, Secret, No Foreign Dissemination, in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

<sup>162</sup> See *Record of a Conversation between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the South African Foreign Minister in the Waldorf Towers Hotel, New York, at 10 a.m. on Saturday, 26 September, 1970*, 26 September 1970, in TNA, FCO 36/632, *Political Relations between South Africa and Rhodesia*, CP 3/334/1, Part B, Secret.

<sup>163</sup> See *South African Embassy Memorandum*, 15 October 1970, in TNA, FCO 45/630, *Attitude of South Africa towards Black Africa States, 1970*, OSS 2/6.

only a way to consolidate it. Therefore, the best hope of bringing about a more liberal system, stated Edward Heath, lay in maintaining contacts between Pretoria and the outer world, relying on the economic pressure coming from industrial expansion. Instead, a charismatic figure like Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, pointed out that Black Africa's relations with Pretoria were not based on defence matters, but rather on considerations dealing with apartheid. What for Britain was a question of Cold War issues and balance of payments, for Black States was a matter of principle and honour. The fact that the Simonstown Agreement had been signed in 1955, when most African States had not gained independence yet, implied that a new situation request a new attitude. All defence motivations and speeches about the Soviet threat in the area did not convince the Africans about the necessity of coexisting with the South African Leviathan. For the British, in short, the overriding consideration seemed to be what London regarded as the Soviet threat to sea communications. On the contrary, for the other African States priority was South African and Portuguese policy of white supremacy.<sup>164</sup>

Nevertheless, encouraging enough for the British was the fact that the leaders of former High Commission Territories said they secretly agreed with the policy over South Africa, feeling that the Russian presence in the Indian Ocean was a serious threat, thus justifying supply of arms for external defence. Such a posture is not to be interpreted as a betrayal of racial equality principles, but rather as a lack of choice for countries completely dependent on trade with the Afrikaner regime and entrapped within an area dominated by white minorities, though they did not think that South Africa had any intention to invade African neighbours.<sup>165</sup> Instead, the most influent African countries did not share this point of view. Important and emerging States, like Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, focused their arguments on the alliance among racist former colonies and a dictatorial imperial reality such as Portugal. Such a combination of interests was inflaming the whole area and the British government had failed to understand the real

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<sup>164</sup> See *Visit of the President of the United Republic of Tanzania: Record of a Meeting Held at Chequers on Sunday 11 October 1970 at 11.30*, 13 October 1970, in TNA, PREM 15/026, Secret.

<sup>165</sup> See *Record of the Prime Minister's Meeting with Chief Jonathan, Prime Minister of Lesotho, at 3.45 on Friday, October 16, 1970*, 16 October 1970, in TNA, PREM 15/026, Confidential.

nature of the problem<sup>166</sup>. According to this analysis, it was South Africa's policy to do anything possible to promote instability and weakness in the region, so that black countries could not have any chance to challenge Pretoria's basic tenets of racialism.<sup>167</sup> To tell the truth, Vorster's view was not so much a change in policy, since Verwoerd had already realised that friendly relations with as many black states as possible were necessary. As more African states became independent, resentment towards a racist and oppressive South Africa grew. If South Africa did not want to become totally isolated, she needed to maintain friendly relations. Vorster focused on economic aspects, knowing that many African countries were very poor and needed economic assistance despite their rejection of South Africa's racial policy. The principle of non-interference was at the basis of the outward-looking policy, as well as that of separation among races. The Premier stressed South Africa's successful trading performance in the past two decades, together with scientific and cultural exchanges, and this was something the British and the Americans could not afford to ignore. The apartheid country had become a reliable factor for the balance of payments, beside the strategic reasons widely shown in this paper. Tories had a realistic approach to these problems and had been likely encouraged also by Vorster's statements, according to whom South Africa's neighbours had nothing to fear from Pretoria, which instead recognised the independence of Black African States. As a gesture of good will, the Parliament had removed from the Constitution the article previously providing the possibility of incorporating former British protectorates in the area.<sup>168</sup>

The real issue was the firm white control on Southern Africa. Though London was obliged to take into account Commonwealth relations, the two Atlantic Powers were absolutely persuaded that the "colonial belt" in that part of the continent would be able to grant stability and protection from radical infiltrations, while any violent overthrow of existing regimes would expose the area to the communist threat. This was the Cold War

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<sup>166</sup> See *Record of the Prime Minister's Discussion with President Kaunda after Dinner at No. 10 Downing Street on Friday, October 16, 1970*, 16 October 1970, in TNA, PREM 15/026, Confidential.

<sup>167</sup> See *Record of the Prime Minister's Meeting with Dr. Arikipo, Nigerian Foreign Minister, at 12.15 p.m. on Wednesday, November 4, 1970, at 10 Downing Street*, 4 November 1970, in TNA, PREM 15/026, Confidential.

<sup>168</sup> See The Hon. B.J. VORSTER, *South Africa's Outward Policy*, Cape Town-Johannesburg, Tafelberg-Uitgewers Ltd, 1970, pp. 7-9.

paradigm a lot of white citizens of Southern Africa exploited to influence Western Powers' policies, by proclaiming that movements of black emancipation were inspired and manipulated by communist forces around the world. Despite this, for at least a whole decade the outlook was thought to be favourable to the South African Leviathan, whose racist policies were regarded as a question of survival, therefore not negotiable. In a word, the American ability to influence domestic racial issues in that country was very limited and thus useless to pursue.<sup>169</sup> This was also due to the trivial nature of Vorster's outward policy. Good neighbour relationship did not mean solving the problem at all. It was more a sort of escape from the problem. The Prime Minister, in fact, was impudent enough to affirm that African States had to understand the essential features of separate development, based on the mutual protection of cultural identity not in a multi-racial land, but rather in a land with nations, each with the right to live on its own in the territory it occupied,<sup>170</sup> regardless of forced movements of most of the population to the least fertile ends of the country. On the other hand, separate development produced an outcome opposite to the one Vorster was relying on. Apartheid universities established exclusively for black students nurtured cultural reaction to government programmes of racial separation. Under the name of Black Consciousness and with the leadership of some young activists like Steve Biko, while rejecting accusations stating that they had accepted the principles of apartheid and were a product of disillusionment with liberal doctrines, those students argued that blacks should first develop their own identity and institutions, and then their own cultural strength before co-operating with whites on the basis of mutual respect. All this because until then the system had oppressed the black so much that they had become a bunch of beggars publicly smiling at the enemy and swearing at him in secret. Fear was what the whole system had been built on, said Biko. The movement was outlawed on grounds of its "revolutionary" aims. When asked in court to explain the concept of black consciousness, Biko said that the black in their own fatherland were oppressed both by the State and also by themselves, since they had been convinced to be inferior and to associate anything good with the white. The aim of the

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<sup>169</sup> See *Central Intelligence Agency: National Intelligence Estimate: South Africa in a New Decade*, April 1972, NIE 73-72, Secret, Controlled Dissem., in [www.foia.cia.gov](http://www.foia.cia.gov).

<sup>170</sup> See The Hon. VORSTER, *South Africa's Outward Policy*, cit., p. 10.

movement, therefore, was to infuse a new pride, opposing the image of Africans as depending on the good will of the white minority:

«The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed», he carried on rejecting Bantustans and claiming «[...] a total accommodation of our interests in the total country, not in some portion of it».<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> See BARBER, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*, cit., pp. 192-195.