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The Bicentennial and America's Africa Policy

By Joseph E. Harris

The ambivalence and contradictions of United States policy for Africa were underscored last April when America's United Nations Ambassador, William Scranton, joined in the unanimous vote of the Security Council to extend economic sanctions against Rhodesia (Zimbabwe). Ambassador Scranton had described the vote as a signal to the white minority regime of Prime Minister Ian Smith that no support could be expected from the international community. However, observers familiar with the issue recognize the Ambassador's statement as contrary to recent practices of the United States, where President Ford (and Nixon before him) and the Congress failed to respond positively to the considerable pressure mobilized in several quarters for the repeal of the Byrd Amendment. Through this legislation, the United States has continued to violate those very sanctions Ambassador Scranton voted to support.

Although Secretary of State Henry Kissinger during his trip to Africa in May pledged that the Administration would seek repeal of the Byrd Amendment, the present political climate—stirred largely by Ronald Reagan in his attempt to embarrass and ultimately defeat the President in primary elections—removes even the possibility that the Administration will exert any serious pressure to make good Kissinger's promise.

Choosing between principle and expediency has constantly plagued the African policy of the United States, as it has domestic racial policies. It is appropriate to draw an analogy with the racial perspective because what is impending in Southern Africa is very much a racial confrontation with serious national and international implications for the United

States. The dilemma of choosing to support the principles of racial justice in domestic affairs as against the exigencies of the times has been well presented by Gunnar Myrdal in *An American Dilemma*; but that same dilemma exists in America's international relations as well.

In the recently liberated area of Africa, the status quo of racial oppression under Portugal would have continued had it not been for support of the former by independent African states, East European, and Caribbean nations, while the United States supported Portugal. And in Rhodesia, racial inequities continue while the United States proclaims support for majority rule of Africans on the one hand, and provides economic support for the Smith regime in violation of United Nations sanctions established as a punitive measure to force a change in unjust policies.

Other inconsistencies in United States policy would make the case more emphatic, but more important is the question of whether or not the United States can be made to face the critical Southern African crisis in economic and racial terms without major internal disruptions and tensions. When Secretary Kissinger observed that the United States "will do nothing to help the white minority to exercise authority in Rhodesia," he revealed his perception of the crisis in racial terms, although the statement in itself was meaningless in terms of reality.

Again, when Kissinger articulated a firm stance in support of the African majority in that country, his statement of United States intolerance for "further Cuban military intervention abroad" reflected not only a bigger issue, but broadened the scope of concern—as did the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs when he stated that America is committed to keeping the great powers out of Africa. Thus, the critical concern seems to rest on non-

African imperatives which is regrettable, for Africans certainly recognize their essential importance in international politics. Moreover, they know that America failed to achieve similar goals in Southeast Asia with the result of an erosion of confidence in its commitments. Herein rests another policy contradiction with regard to Africa: while the United States policy extends favorably to Communist and non-Communist governments and detente is being pursued with the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, African governments seeking better relations with those same countries are condemned and frequently ostracized.

Clearly, the United States must establish alternatives to past and present policies and become consistent if it is to regain credibility among the many newer governments in the world and reestablish the confidence of long-standing allies. The United States was out of step during the earlier decolonizing era; it now is out of cadence with the current stride toward freedom in Southern Africa. That this stage embodies a deeper racial element makes the need for clarity all the more necessary for this pluralistic society. Racial violence in Southern Africa would likely create serious repercussions in this country, where racial affiliations and sensitivities would be stirred, and where some white refugees would likely be settled if majority rule is reached through violence in Southern Africa.

Regarding violence, this Bicentennial year is a reminder that the concepts of consent of the governed and majority rule lubricated the wheels of the American Revolution and spurred the "Founding Fathers" to and through violence in an effort to achieve those ideals as they perceived them. Yet, in spite of that tradition of violence which has manifested itself in many other aspects of America's heritage, the government continues to focus on it (violence) as a reason to deny support to