

**Title:** “We must analyze where our national interest lies and not worry too much about other peoples’ domestic policies.” Richard M. Nixon and apartheid South Africa in the early 1970s.

**Abstract:** This article explores the pragmatic stance that the United States adopted, during the Nixon era, regarding relations with Pretoria. The Nixon administration believed that Washington needed to prioritize the protection of its own strategic and commercial interests and not become overly concerned about the domestic agenda of its global partners. The vehement anti-communism of the National Party government combined with a profitable economic relationship and the abundant mineral resources of the apartheid state dictated a need on practical grounds for closer ties with South Africa. This stance was further reinforced by Nixon’s contempt for black Africans and lack of interest in achieving racial justice.

**Keywords:** Richard Nixon, U.S. Foreign Policy, U.S. History, South Africa, Cold War, Economic History, Race Relations.

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## Introduction

On January 28, 1970 President Richard Milhous Nixon authorized National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 38. The NSDM represented a sharp change in United States policy towards South Africa and the broader question of white minority rule in the southern African region.. Instead of continuing the previous policy, inherited from the Lyndon B. Johnson administration, of symbolic “disassociation” from Pretoria, the White House now sought greater “communication” with the practitioners of apartheid.<sup>1</sup>

An examination of U.S. relations with South Africa during the Nixon years reveals that the White House decision was based on a practical real politik dominated by geopolitical strategy and commercial interest, This was further reinforced by racial prejudice and disinterest in the cause of black liberation in southern Africa.

Analyzing U.S. policy towards South Africa during the Nixon years allows a better understanding of the pressure points that shaped the White House approach to broader foreign relations over this era. Indeed, Pretoria provides a particularly useful illuminative lens given that the issue of apartheid encapsulated key political issues of the 1970s including the Cold War and race relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Nixon Library (hereafter NL), NSC Institutional “H” Files, Box H-026, NSSM-39, Memo for Rogers et al. from Kissinger, April 10, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-144, NSSM-39, August 15, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM-39, Memo from Kissinger to the Vice President et al., January 28, 1970; E. Michel, “The Luster of Chrome: Nixon, Rhodesia and the defiance of UN sanctions”, *Diplomatic History*, 42 (1) 2018 14.

Furthermore, as part of the global ‘periphery,’ South Africa offered a great deal of flexibility to the White House in shaping policy. This allowed the Nixon administration to adopt an approach that truly reflected the White House’s core beliefs regarding international politics. As clearly demonstrated by its policies toward Pretoria, the Nixon administration identified anti-communism, economic interest, and the need for strategic minerals as the key dynamics in policy decision-making leading to the adoption of closer ties with South Africa.

## Historiography

There is a wide range of existing literature that offers a range of arguments that purport to explain U.S. foreign policy towards southern Africa during the Cold War and decolonization eras. A number of scholars, including John Lewis Gaddis and Odd Arne Westad, have argued that the “containment” of global Communism was the principal concern of policy makers during the entire Cold War era. Indeed, it has been suggested that the wider Third World was integral to the broader struggle for supremacy as both Washington and Moscow realized that full scale conflict in Europe or North America was unwinnable therefore the Cold War descended into a contest that in the words of Nancy Mitchell comprised of “shadow-boxing in the periphery.”<sup>2</sup>

Some historians have noted that that U.S. aid was primarily restricted to regimes that displayed anti-communist credentials, opposed radicalism and were willing to act as regional policemen in the broader defense of Western interests. Policymakers in Washington typically exhibited little concern if such allies displayed repressive internal policies provided the governments remained firmly in the U.S. sphere of influence. Indeed, it has been argued that the white minority regimes in southern Africa deliberately employed Cold War rhetoric to obtain U.S. aid.<sup>3</sup>

A number of scholars have noted the role of economics in shaping policy towards Africa during this period. According to this school of thought, the promotion of free market capitalism, specifically access to raw materials and markets, was the principal objective of policy makers. The mineral wealth, industrialized economies and cheap labor costs of the South African regime proved to be especially enticing for corporate investment and trade. Thomas Borstelmann, in particular, has contended that the growing economic ties between South Africa and the United States, together with geostrategic concerns, were a significant factor impacting U.S. support for the white minority government during the 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> J. Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); N. Mitchell, “Terrorists or Freedom Fighters? Jimmy Carter and Rhodesia,” in *Cold War in Southern Africa. White Power Black Liberation*, ed. S. Onslow. (London: Routledge, 2012); N. Mitchell “The Cold War and Jimmy Carter,” in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume III Endings*, ed. M. Leffler et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); O. Westad, *The Global Cold War*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> A. DeRoche, *Black, White and Chrome*, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001); G. Horne, *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and The War against Zimbabwe*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); M. Lawrence, “Containing Globalism. The United States and the Developing World in the 1970s”, in ed. N. Ferguson et al. *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in perspective*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010); R. Litwak, *Détente and the Nixon Doctrine: American Foreign Policy and the Pursuit of Stability, 1969-1976*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); J. Suri, “Henry Kissinger and the Geopolitics of Globalization,” in *The Shock of the Global*, ed. Ferguson et al.; C. Saunders and S. Onslow, “The Cold War and Southern Africa, 1976-1990,” *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Volume III*, ed. Leffler; Westad, *The Global Cold War*; Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa*.

<sup>4</sup> T. Borstelmann, *Apartheid’s Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); H. Davis Jr, “US Policy toward South Africa: A Dissenting View,” in.

It has been further posited, notably by Westad, that for the U.S. Government the ideological struggle of capitalism versus Soviet collectivism heightened the importance of trade with and investment in Africa and the wider Third World. He has asserted that Washington sought a greater economic predominance globally in order to demonstrate the superiority of the free market system over the rigid state centric economy of the Soviet Union. Conversely, Michael Franczak has explored the challenge posed to the United States by the New International Economic Order (NIEO) and its goal of achieving a redistribution of wealth from the global North to the global South through the weaponization of oil and other raw materials. His work highlights how Third World solidarity behind the NIEO forced successive presidential administrations to consider global inequality as an important variable in U.S. national security. He further observes the impact of NIEO on domestic politics including the fissures within the Democratic party and the construction of Ronald Reagan's conservative coalition.<sup>5</sup>

The scholarship has also considered the importance of an emerging human rights movement in the 1970s on the development of U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, the growing assertiveness of the human rights movement and the increasing influence of the moral ideology of human rights have been highlighted as a major factor in decision making. It has been widely agreed that during the Jimmy Carter years a priority for the president, as observed by Michael Cotey Morgan was "to launch a new era in American foreign policy by attaching central importance to human rights as a standard for crafting U.S. decisions."<sup>6</sup>

Historians have discussed the impact of race, specifically the rise of African-American political power during the Cold War era, on policy towards Africa. It has been argued that as early as the 1950s, African Americans considered the "liberation" of colonial peoples of color as inseparable from the struggle for racial justice in the United States itself. They have further argued that the occupants of the Oval Office, especially by the 1970s, were not only aware of the growing importance of the African-American vote but also that the apartheid question represented a test of the White House's stance on racial issues. The work of Robert Massie has provided a detailed account of how anti-apartheid groups in the United States waged a campaign of seeking divestment from and sanctions upon South Africa. The issue of balancing the domestic anti-apartheid movement and the emotive issue of racial justice with immediate geopolitical and economic interests is also explored in the literature especially in the further work of Borstelmann and Thomas Noer.<sup>7</sup>

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*American Policy in Southern Africa: The Stakes and the Stance (Second Edition)*, ed. R. Lemarchand. (Washington: University Press of America, 1981); W. Foltz "U.S. Policy toward Southern Africa: Economic and Strategic constraints," in *American Policy in Southern Africa*, ed. Lemarchand; D. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> M. Franczak, *Global Inequality and American Foreign Policy in the 1970s*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2022); Westad, *The Global Cold War*.

<sup>6</sup> P. Lauren, *Power and Prejudice: The Politics and Diplomacy of Racial Discrimination*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996); W. Minter, *King Solomon's Mines Revisited: Western Interests and the Burdened History of Southern Africa*, (New York: Basic Books, 1986); M. Cotey Morgan, "The Seventies and the Rebirth of Human Rights", in *The Shock of the Global*, ed. Ferguson et al; S. Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010); C. Watts, "'Dropping the F-bomb': President Ford, the Rhodesian crisis, and the 1976 election", Panel 89: Domestic Aspects of U.S. Policy towards Southern Africa from Ford to Reagan, SHAFR Conference, Lexington, Kentucky, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Borstelmann, *The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); DeRoche, *Black, White and Chrome*; DeRoche, "Relations with Africa since 1900" in *A Companion to American Foreign Relations*, ed. R. Schulzinger. (Malden, UK, 2006), 117; R. Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years*, (New York, NY, 1997); T. Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: The United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948-1968* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985); B. Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935-*

A different perspective on the racial question as it pertains to the Nixon administration has been offered by Gerald Horne who has suggested that the White House adopted a dual electoral “Southern Strategy” and “Southern Africa Strategy” designed to gain domestic white political support by slowing down the pace of racial change in both the southern states and southern Africa. He further posits that the two strategies were mutually compatible as their origins lay in Cold War rationalization, which postulated African Americans and Africans as the allies or dupes of the communists. Opposition to Nixon’s perceived tilt towards the practitioners of apartheid, both domestically and internationally, is explored by Eric Morgan in his article from 2006.<sup>8</sup>

While the broader literature is extensive, there is, however, a comparative paucity of literature comprehensively examining the bilateral relationship with Pretoria through the lens of the Nixon administration and the determinants that influenced White House decision making. In fact, in *Nixon and the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, an otherwise impressive analysis of the balance of power realism that characterized foreign policy during the Nixon era there is no examination of the bilateral relationship between Washington and Pretoria and indeed no mention of South Africa or apartheid at all.<sup>9</sup>

A magisterial overview of U.S. policy towards South Africa during the apartheid era focusing on the clash between human rights and strategic or economic concerns is offered by Alex Thomson but it does not focus specifically on the early 1970s. An in depth analysis of the shift in policy towards southern Africa during the Nixon era is provided by Anthony Lake but he operates from the premise that the White House was clearly erroneous in its approach which inevitably colors the narrative and further fails to note the subtleties of the Nixonian position. The work is also somewhat dated as it was first published nearly fifty years ago.<sup>10</sup>

A more complete investigation considers both the global and domestic determinants that shaped Nixon’s policies toward Pretoria as well as the persona of the President himself. In this article, I argue that the Nixon White House adopted a pragmatic approach, based on considerations of U.S. geostrategic and economic interests, when addressing Washington’s position on the issue of white minority rule in South Africa. This was further stimulated by Nixon’s own cultural prejudice and apathy towards the cause of black liberation in southern Africa.

## Background

On May 26, 1948, the National Party (HNP) led by Daniel Francois Malan defeated long term South African leader Jan Christian Smuts in an election that heralded the onset of the strict system of racial discrimination, known as apartheid in Afrikaans, that would become the prevailing theme in South African politics and society for the following half century. The Population Registration and Group Areas Acts of July 1950 forced all South African residents to be classified into racial groupings and empowered the Governor-General to declare geographical areas, including urban residential and business neighborhoods, to be for the

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1960, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); P. Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937-1957*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> G. Horne, *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and The War against Zimbabwe*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); E. Morgan, “Our Own Interests; Nixon, South Africa and Dissent at Home and Abroad”, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 17 (3) 2006.

<sup>9</sup> F. Logevall and A. Preston (eds.), *Nixon and the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> A. Lake, *The “Tar Baby” Option: American Policy Toward Southern Rhodesia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976); A. Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

exclusive occupation of specific racial groups. Pretoria also passed legislation that would enforce what became known as petty apartheid. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 was followed in 1950 by the Immorality Amendment Act which prohibited extramarital sex between whites and individuals of any other race.<sup>11</sup>

In the global arena, as early as 1946, during the Smuts era, Pretoria been under attack at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) both for the treatment of Indians and those of Indian descent in South Africa and for its refusal to submit South West Africa, which it governed under a League of Nations mandate, to a UN trusteeship. On December 5, 1952, in response to a request from thirteen Afro-Asian member states, the UNGA adopted Resolution 616 (VII) which established a three-member commission to examine the racial situation in South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

Over the course of the next two decades the domestic policies of the National Party government, came under increasingly criticism at the UN and from the newly independent black African states. Following the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) on 23 May 1963, the organization imposed an economic boycott of South Africa and set up a Liberation Committee to assist the movements of southern Africa fighting white minority rule. At the UN, on 1 April 1960, in the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre, the Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 134 which deplored the actions and policies of the South African Government. Three years later, on 7 August 1963, the UNSC, passed Resolution 181 calling upon all member states to cease the sale and shipment of arms, ammunition and military vehicles to South Africa. In Washington, however, the U.S. response to apartheid was far less clear cut.<sup>13</sup>

In the early apartheid era, geopolitical considerations and economic ties dominated U.S. decision making regarding South Africa. The strategic position of the apartheid state combined with Pretoria's support for Western actions against the global communist threat and agreement to sell large quantities of uranium to Washington placed the Afrikaner leadership in the good graces of both the Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidencies.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter TL), Papers of Harry S. Truman, Box 177, President's Secretary's Files, NSC Meetings June 17, 1948, CIA Review; TL, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Box 170, President's Secretary's Files, National Security Policies, Vol. I Geographical Areas, NSC Report on the Current Policies of the United States of America Relating to the National Security; Foreign Relations of the United States (hereafter FRUS), 1948, Vol. V, Part 1, Policy Statement of the Department of State, November 1, 1948; Nelson Centre of Memory, O'Malley Archive, Population Registration Act No 30, Apartheid Legislation 1948-1990, <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv01538/04lv01828/05lv01829/06lv01838.htm> University of the Witwatersrand, Cullen Library, Department of Historical Papers, Box A1485, Union of South Africa Act, No.41 1950; TL, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation Box 3, Union of South Africa Act No. 55, 1949; TL, Joseph D. Sweeney Papers, Union of South Africa File, Parliamentary Legislation Box 3, Union of South Africa Act No. 21, 1950; D. Aikman, *Great Souls: Six Who Changed the Century*, (Lanham: W Pub Group, 2003), 81; T. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 253.

<sup>12</sup> TL, Papers of Harry S. Truman, National Intelligence Estimate, President's Secretary's Files, Central Intelligence Reports, Box 215, The Political Situation in the Union of South Africa, January 31, 1949; TL, Dean Acheson Papers, Memoranda of Conversations File October 1952, Box 71, Memorandum of Conversation, October 14, 1952 and FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume XI, Part 1, Editorial Note.

<sup>13</sup> Lyndon Baines Johnson Library (hereafter LBJL), Papers of Lyndon Baines Johnson, Box 73, South Africa, CIA National Intelligence Estimate, May 20, 1964; LBJL, National Security Files (hereafter NSF), Box 78, South Africa, 11/64-9/66, Vol. 2, CIA Special Report, September 3, 1965; Gerald R. Ford Library (hereafter GFL), White House Central Files (hereafter WHCF), Box 45, South Africa 6/1/75-11/30/75, Briefing Memorandum for Ford;

<sup>14</sup> TL, Papers of Harry S. Truman, President's Secretary's File's, Box 150, Foreign Affairs, Department of State Report: The Berlin Crisis; Library of Congress, South Africa: A Country Study (Washington, DC: Federal Research Division, 1997), 338; FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, Secretary of State to South African Ambassador, February 5, 1951; FRUS, 1951, Vol. V, Consul General Johannesburg to the Department of State, April 19, 1951; Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle*, 4, 50 and 81; E. Michel, "My children, you are permitted in time of

During the subsequent John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations, however, the increasing international and domestic criticism of apartheid led Washington to seek greater disassociation from South Africa but close economic and strategic ties combined with Pretoria's growing financial and military strength made disengagement a difficult balancing act. Under Kennedy, Washington adopted a posture of public criticism of and limited cooperation with Pretoria as well as the imposition of a bilateral arms embargo, albeit with loopholes, but sought to avoid tangible actions that would lead to a dangerous level of friction with a de facto Cold War ally. The balancing act continued under his successor in the Oval Office. In the Johnson era, the differing racial trajectory of the U.S. and South Africa led to a series of vexing diplomatic clashes between the two nations, including over the multi racial receptions hosted at the U.S. Embassy, but economic interests and geostrategic concerns prevented the establishment of an overly hostile policy towards the National Party government in Pretoria.<sup>15</sup>

### **President Richard M. Nixon (1969-74)**

On January 20, 1969, Nixon was inaugurated as President of the United States. In the presidential campaign of 1968, Nixon had been elected to a large extent due to the conservative resurgence of a middle class angered and tired by the liberalism and radical politics of the 1960s. A key element in Nixon's electoral success, as noted by Horne, was the "Southern Strategy." Nixon won over white voters in the southern states, traditionally a stronghold for the Democratic Party, by assuring conservatives he would slow federal enforcement of civil rights laws. Indeed, Nixon himself was reluctant on ideological grounds to force change on de facto segregated communities as he believed it would foment unnecessary social tensions. Once in office the new president swiftly surrounded himself with like minded advisers including his influential National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State Henry Alfred Kissinger. The election of Nixon also led to a shift towards a closer relationship with Pretoria based on a mix of conceptual and pragmatic considerations combined with cultural prejudice.<sup>16</sup>

On a theoretical level, the foreign policy of the Nixon years, as shaped by Kissinger, was characterized by a preoccupation with the balance of power linked to a form of global federalism with the U.S. at the apex of a multipolar pyramid of nations. Kissinger believed that in such a system the superpowers would feel less directly threatened by each other's every action and also U.S. leverage would increase as regional allies voluntarily shouldered the responsibility to protect their areas of the globe from communist encroachment. Indeed, the Nixon Doctrine of 1969, specifically advocated the pursuance of strategic interests not by direct military intervention but through military and other aid to friendly governments. These

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great danger to walk with the Devil until you have crossed the bridge": President Truman, apartheid and the early Cold War" *South African Historical Journal*, 72 (2) 2020 2 and 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter KL), John F. Kennedy Papers (hereafter KP), Box 2, NSF, Africa General 8/61, Guidelines for U.S. policy towards the Republic of South Africa, July 19, 1961; KL, KP, Box 2, NSF, Africa General 5/62, Department of State Guidelines for Policy and Operations Republic of South Africa, May 1962; KL, KP, Box 159A, NSF, South Africa-General, Department of State National Strategy Series-South Africa, October 28, 1963; FRUS, 1964-1968, Vol. XXIV, Africa National Security Action Memorandum (hereafter NSAM) No. 295, April 24, 1964; E. Michel, "Since we can't now bet on a winner, we should be hedging our bets and buying time." President John F. Kennedy, domestic racial equality and apartheid South Africa in the early 1960s, *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 22 (4) 2022 1-2; E. Michel, "You haven't been too horrible to us recently." Lyndon B. Johnson and apartheid South Africa." *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 32 (4) 2021 743-744.

<sup>16</sup> G. Horne, *From the Barrel of a Gun: The United States and the War against Zimbabwe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 7; Michel, "The Luster of Chrome" 8; R. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978) 439-40.

governments could include unpalatable regimes provided they had distinctively anti-communist credentials.<sup>17</sup>

In the case of South Africa, its key strategic location and strong military combined with the vehemently anti-communist stance adopted by the National Party leadership heavily influenced White House policy towards Pretoria. Its position on the tip of southern Africa allowed the apartheid state to monitor Soviet activities in the south Atlantic as well as potentially providing important logistical facilities for U.S. aircraft and naval vessels on the Cape sea route. South Africa also hosted a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Deep Space Tracking facility at Hartebeesthoek, near Johannesburg. It additionally served as the terminus of the Atlantic Missile Range which extended southeast from Cape Kennedy in Florida and accommodated related Department of Defense (DOD) installations.<sup>18</sup>

The claims of Pretoria to be a staunch Western ally were further bolstered by its record of supporting U.S. military actions in the post-World War II era including South African Air Force (SAAF) participation in the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War. In comparison, the black liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC) were not only seen weak and divided by internal rivalries, but more importantly in the geopolitical context, were supported by the communist world, especially the Soviet Union and China, both for funding but also through covert arms shipments and guerrilla training. From the standpoint of the Nixon administration this made the liberation factions amenable to communist influence or indoctrination.<sup>19</sup>

The flourishing South African economy also provided lucrative opportunities for trade and investment. In 1968, U.S. exports to South Africa totalled over \$450 million and imports from South Africa were approximately \$250 million with a favorable trade balance of around \$200 million. In terms of direct assets, by 1970, U.S. corporate and private investment in South Africa amounted to around \$1 billion with, in the view of the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, considerable potential for further profitable investment. By the early 1970s approximately three hundred and twenty U.S. firms invested in the apartheid state including Caltex, Firestone, Ford and General Motors.<sup>20</sup>

The Nixon administration was also well aware of the importance of South Africa's vast mineral resources for the United States on both economic and strategic grounds. By 1969, Pretoria produced over 75% of the free world supply of gold and largely controlled the world supply of diamonds. It was also an important source of other essential minerals including chrome, copper, manganese, platinum and vanadium as well as strategic grades of asbestos and

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<sup>17</sup> H. Kissinger, *White House Years* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 69; M. Lawrence, "Containing Globalism: The United States and the Developing World in the 1970s," in *The Shock of the Global: The 1970s in Perspective*, ed. N. Ferguson et al. (Cambridge: 2010) 209–10; Michel, "The Luster of Chrome" 8; J. Suri, "Henry Kissinger and the Geopolitics of Globalization," in *The Shock of the Global*, ed. Ferguson et al., 173–84.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Nixon Library (hereafter NL), NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-145, NSSM 39, Minutes of NSC Meeting, December 17 1969; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Paper Prepared by the NSC Departmental Group for Africa, December 9, 1969; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

<sup>19</sup> TL, Dean Acheson Papers, Box 68, MemCon File, MemCon, April 20, 1951; NL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-145, NSSM - 39 3 of 3 (2 of 4), Briefing by CIA Director Richard Helms, December 17 1969; FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. E-5, Part 1, 1969-1972, Office of National Estimates Memorandum, March 13, 1969; FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. E-5, Part 1, 1969-1972, CIA Special Report, June 20, 1969; FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. E-5, Part 1, 1969-1972, Office of National Estimates Memorandum, March 23, 1971; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII 1969-1976, Paper Prepared in the Bureau of African Affairs, Undated; Michel, "My children, you are permitted in time of great danger to walk with the Devil until you have crossed the bridge" 17-19.

<sup>20</sup> FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, December 9, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-145, NSSM 39, Minutes of NSC Meeting, December 17 1969; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

crocidolite asbestos. South African uranium, a key component in atomic and nuclear weapons, was of particular importance to Washington.<sup>21</sup>

By 1970, Washington was also confronted by an increasingly confident and assertive South African government. The Nationalist Party was firmly entrenched in power and in the view of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Richard Helms, were justified in “their belief they can defy world opinion and get away with it.” The South African economy was “booming”, including a high level of foreign investment, which provided an increasing standard of living for the white population and some non-white groups as well. The international condemnation and boycotts had also paradoxically led to an increasing degree of self-sufficiency.<sup>22</sup>

The powerful South African military was more than capable of defeating any external threats from both hostile black African nations or the liberation movements. Internally, while the anger and frustration of the non-white groups, towards white political and economic supremacy, was exacerbated by their increasingly restrictive and repressive treatment the strength and efficiency of the security forces combined with an “arsenal of legislation” designed to intimidate and stifle domestic opposition meant that Pretoria had the internal situation under firm control.<sup>23</sup>

Within the United States, South Africa, on both racial and strategic grounds, also enjoyed considerable support among the public and on Capitol Hill especially among conservatives. Indeed, Nixon’s political allies included a number of powerful Congressional figures supportive of Pretoria and known opponents of domestic civil rights including Senators James Eastland (D-Mississippi) and Strom Thurmond (R-South Carolina). Former Secretary of State and influential unofficial White House adviser Dean Acheson, as noted by his biographer Douglas Brinkley, was particularly vocal in his support for continued white minority rule in southern Africa.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast the African-American civil rights groups and the anti-apartheid movement possessed little leverage over the White House. The “Southern Strategy” was designed to appeal to conservatives and white southerners and Nixon possessed little electoral incentive, to endanger this successful strategy by engaging with the concerns of African Americans whether domestic or global. It is noteworthy that he refused to meet with the Congressional Black Caucus after its formation in February 1971. Indeed, Nixon was dismissive of State Department concerns of the significance of domestic liberal or African-American criticism of apartheid

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<sup>21</sup> KL, KP, Box 2, NSF, Africa General 5/62, Department of State Guidelines for Policy and Operations Republic of South Africa, May 1962; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, December 9, 1969; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Memorandum from Guhin to Kissinger, November 19, 1971; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

<sup>22</sup> FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, From Hughes to Rogers, June 24, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM - 39 3 of 3 (2 of 4), Briefing by CIA Director Richard Helms, December 17 1969.

<sup>23</sup> FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, From Hughes to Rogers, June 24, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM - 39 3 of 3 (2 of 4), Briefing by CIA Director Richard Helms, December 17 1969.

<sup>24</sup> NL, White House Country Files (hereafter WHCF), Box 63, CO 135 South Africa, Republic of (1969-70) Paper to Henry A. Kissinger from Dean Acheson, April 30 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM 39, Minutes of NSC Meeting, December 17 1969; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, October 6, 1971; D. Brinkley, *Dean Acheson: The Cold War Years 1953-1971*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 316-327; J. Crespiño, *Strom Thurmond’s America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 71, 193; E. Michel, *The White House and White Africa: Presidential policy towards Rhodesia during the UDI era of 1965-79* (New York: Routledge, 2018) 133-134.



describing it, in a private conversation with Kissinger, as “detrimental” to U.S. political objectives.<sup>25</sup>

Both Nixon and Kissinger, influenced by cultural bias, were also apathetic towards the cause of black liberation and had little interest in black Africa. Indeed, both Nixon’s racism and contempt for Africa are highlighted by his comments to Kissinger after meeting Mauritanian President Moktar Ould Daddah that those “poor, child-like Africans.... a lot of patting them on the ass goes a long way.” In Kissinger’s view, the former colonial nations of Africa deserved little respect because of their lack of political tradition, immature economies, and weak militaries.<sup>26</sup>

### **NSSM 39-NSDM 38**

The Nixon administration came into office determined to reshape U.S. foreign policy. In order to impose a new blueprint on policy, the White House inundated the State Department with requests for comprehensive policy reviews of U.S. relations and interests worldwide. On April 3, 1969, at the recommendation of the National Security Council (NSC) staffer for African Affairs Roger Morris, Kissinger urged Nixon to order a National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) on southern Africa.<sup>27</sup>

Morris and Kissinger believed that the NSSM was necessary as the last high-level review of U.S. interests and objectives in the region had been undertaken nearly a decade earlier in the Kennedy era. Since that time, however, the situation had become increasingly volatile due to the appearance of Moscow and Peking as patrons of the black liberation groups. Furthermore, Washington had meaningful yet potentially conflicting interests in the area that needed to be clearly identified and weighed.<sup>28</sup>

On August 15, 1969, the Interdepartmental Group completed its response to NSSM 39. As an overview, the group noted the important U.S. strategic and economic interests in the white-controlled nations, notably South Africa, including the DOD and NASA facilities as well as the approximately one billion dollars in investments, the highly favorable balance of payments and abundant natural resources.<sup>29</sup>

The study pointed out, however, that U.S. military and commercial ties with the apartheid state were seen as at least tacit acceptance of racism, which affected U.S. standing with other African states and was also considered a reflection on Washington’s stance on domestic racism. It was further observed that an increase in violence in the region stemming from black insurgency and white reprisal posed a genuine threat to U.S. interests but at present the liberation movements posed no serious threat to white political control.<sup>30</sup>

The Interdepartmental Group laid out a number of options for the NSC to consider including closer relations with the white regimes, a broader association with both black and

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<sup>25</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Southern Africa, Vol. XXVIII, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, October 6, 1974; GFL, General (1), Box 3, Stanley S. Scott Papers 1971-1977, Black Caucus – Meeting with the President, August, 1974, Washington Post, August 13, 1974; Home, *From the Barrel of a Gun*, 7, 65.

<sup>26</sup> FRUS, 1969–1976, Vol. XXVIII, Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, September 28, 1971; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 69; Suri, “Henry Kissinger and the Geopolitics of Globalization,” 186.

<sup>27</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-144, NSSM-393 of 3 (1 of 4), Memorandum for Nixon from Kissinger, April 3, 1969; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 65; Lake, *The “Tar Baby” Option*, 124.

<sup>28</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-144, NSSM-393 of 3 (1 of 4), Memorandum for Nixon from Kissinger, April 3, 1969.

<sup>29</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-144, NSSM-392 of 3 (1 of 2), NSC Interdisciplinary Group for Africa, Study in Response to NSSM 39, August 15, 1969.

<sup>30</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-144, NSSM-392 of 3 (1 of 2), NSC Interdisciplinary Group for Africa, Study in Response to NSSM 39, August 15, 1969.

white states, dissociation from white Africa, and, more broadly, detachment from the whole southern African region to avoid any form of formal U.S. involvement in the racial problems of the area. At the subsequent NSC Review Group meeting on October 16, 1969, it was agreed to reformulate the options proposed into three broad categories: relaxation of relations with the white regimes, limited association, and disengagement. Within each broad posture there were two operationally different options, which created a total of six possibilities for consideration.<sup>31</sup>

The first, known at the time as the “Acheson Option,” was a normalization of U.S. relations with white-ruled Africa. This would include the termination of the arms embargos on South Africa, Rhodesia and the Portuguese territories. A similar but less politically explosive option was the selective broadening of ties with both white and black states to encourage moderation and protect interests on both sides. This would mean a relaxation of ties with Pretoria but not an abandonment of the arms embargo combined with an increase in aid to black states.<sup>32</sup>

The third and fourth possibilities involved increased identification with the black states to permit Washington to pursue minimally necessary interests in the white states. A fifth option was greater dissociation from the white regimes to enhance standing on the racial issue in Africa and globally. The final choice for the White House was to engage in the broadest possible coercive measures, short of armed force, to induce change in the racial policies of white states.<sup>33</sup>

At the NSC meeting on December 17, 1969 it was clear that within the second option, the selective broadening of ties with Pretoria, appealed to a number of agencies on geostrategic and economic grounds. The CIA and the Defense Department believed it would protect important intelligence, military and scientific research interests while Commerce liked the idea of the expansion of U.S. exports and Treasury supported the potential increase in the bilateral balance of payments. Only the State Department opposed any greater relaxation of posture towards South Africa on both moral grounds and damaging to U.S. relations with black Africa although Secretary of State William Rogers acknowledged that regarding apartheid “anything we do is a problem.”<sup>34</sup>

Nixon himself favored some form of “relaxation” of relations with the white regimes. He stated that the United States “must analyze where our national interest lies and not worry too much about other peoples’ domestic policies.” He further discounted black political aspirations and abilities by observing that the whites in South Africa, while only 6 percent of the population, produced 40 percent of the continent’s GNP and that they were there to stay.<sup>35</sup>

On January 28, 1970, Nixon issued NSDM 38. On Kissinger’s advice, the president had selected a policy along the lines of partial relaxation. This represented a significant change in policy toward South Africa. Instead of being guided by the principle of political disassociation

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<sup>31</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-144, NSSM-392 of 3 (1 of 2), NSC Interdisciplinary Group for Africa, Study in Response to NSSM 39, August 15, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM-393 of 3 (4 of 4), NSC Review Group Meeting, Southern Africa (NSSM 39), October 16, 1969.

<sup>32</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM-393 of 3 (4 of 4), NSC Review Group Meeting, Southern Africa (NSSM 39), October 16, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-026, Southern Africa (NSSM 39) (3 of 3), Issues for Decision, NSC Meeting December 17, 1969.

<sup>33</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM-393 of 3 (4 of 4), NSC Review Group Meeting, Southern Africa (NSSM 39), October 16, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-026, Southern Africa (NSSM 39) (3 of 3), Issues for Decision, NSC Meeting December 17, 1969.

<sup>34</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-026, Southern Africa (NSSM 39) (3 of 3), Issues for Decision, NSC Meeting December 17, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-026, Southern Africa (NSSM 39) (3 of 3), Memorandum for Nixon from Stans, December 12, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145 NSSM-39 3 of 3 (2 of 4), Minutes of NSC Meeting, December 17 1969.

<sup>35</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145 NSSM-39 3 of 3 (2 of 4), Minutes of NSC Meeting, December 17 1969.

with Pretoria, the White House now sought greater “communication” and closer ties with the National Party government.<sup>36</sup>

The habitually secretive Nixon chose to keep this new policy approach not only away from the news media and the public but also from most government personnel. White House officials apparently preferred that the shift toward the white regimes not be revealed because it was to be a quiet and protracted relaxation of U.S. relations that would only become evident over time. It is also clear that the White House was aware of the potential political firestorm that such a shift in policy could provoke both domestically and internationally. The niceties of a foreign policy that proclaimed an abhorrence of white minority rule but sought closer ties with its practitioners would be lost on those who identified with oppressed blacks in southern Africa.<sup>37</sup>

### **A new Ambassador for a new Policy**

In arguably the first symbolic gesture of Nixon’s desire to develop closer ties with Pretoria was the selection of John Hurd to replace William Rountree as the U.S. ambassador to South Africa on July 24, 1970. Rountree a career diplomat appointed under President Johnson had been seen as too liberal and critical of apartheid by the National Party leadership. Hurd, a multi-millionaire cattle rancher and oil and gas producer based in Laredo, Texas had served as Nixon’s 1968 campaign manager in the Lone Star State and was positively viewed in Pretoria. The South African ambassador to the United States, Harold L. Taswell even observed that “Mr. Hurd’s heart is in the right place as far as we are concerned.”<sup>38</sup>

In August, prior to his departure to take up his post, Nixon met with Hurd to discuss his role as the administration’s leading diplomat to the apartheid state. He informed Hurd that while his administration opposed apartheid the United States must preserve its strategic, economic and scientific interests in South Africa. Nixon also highlighted that disorder and violence within the country would have serious implications and that Washington was “absolutely opposed” to the use of force by the so-called liberation groups. He also warned Hurd against being too “preachy” with South African government officials.<sup>39</sup>

While in office, many of Hurd’s actions certainly seemed designed to ingratiate himself with South African government figures and build closer ties with the Afrikaner leadership. In 1971, the ambassador attended the segregated grand opening ceremony of the Malan Opera House in Cape Town. Three weeks later, in a break from the policies of his predecessors, he hosted an all-white diplomatic reception at his official residence. Hurd even joined several National Party officials on a hunting trip to Robben Island, the location of a maximum-security prison where a number of black political resistance leaders, including Nelson Mandela were

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<sup>36</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM-39 3 of 3 (2 of 4), Memo for Agnew et al. from Kissinger, January 28 1970.

<sup>37</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-145, NSSM-39 3 of 3 (2 of 4), Memo for Agnew et al. from Kissinger, January 28 1970.

<sup>38</sup> Archives of the South Africa Ministry of Foreign Affairs (hereafter ASAMFA), Countries, 1/33/3, Vol. 16, USA Relations with South Africa, Memorandum from Taswell to Muller, 11 June 1970; NL, White House Country Files (hereafter WHCF), Box 65, CO 135: Republic of South Africa, Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, August 24, 1970.

<sup>39</sup> NL, WHCF, Box 65, CO 135: Republic of South Africa, Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, August 24, 1970.

being detained. In a particularly bad optic, and one picked up on by U.S. media outlets, black prisoners were used as beaters to drive the game towards the white hunting party.<sup>40</sup>

As pointed out by Morgan, however, Hurd's closer ties with the South African government did not mean that he wasn't aware of the dangers arising from the continuance of Pretoria's apartheid policy and the potential for racial conflict within the country. In August 1973, he observed that it will be a long time before white South Africans, whether Afrikaans or English speaking, accept or understand the rising current of black consciousness in their nation. Hurd further warned the State Department that the readiness of the National Party leadership to crack down heavily on any form of dissent will continue to lead to bilateral tensions and difficulties between Washington and Pretoria.<sup>41</sup>

### Arms Sales and Military Ties

NSDM 38, while advocating greater collaboration between Washington and Pretoria did not represent a full normalization of ties as per the "Acheson Option". In terms of the sale of military equipment Nixon therefore continued to enforce the arms embargo on South Africa imposed by Kennedy seven years earlier in 1963. The White House also avoided invoking the "strategic exemption" inserted into the embargo which allowed Washington to interpret the policy in the light of the maintenance of international peace and security.<sup>42</sup>

The Nixon administration, however, took a more relaxed interpretation than its predecessors of the ban on arms exports as it related it the sale of dual-purpose civilian/military equipment, termed "gray area" items, to South Africa. In NSDM 81, issued on August 17, 1970, Nixon specified that in addition to allowing the sale of non-lethal dual use items to the South African Defence Forces (SADF), licenses could also be issued, on the concurrence of the Departments' of Commerce and State, for the sale of dual-use items with a "clear and direct application to combat or to internal security operations" to "civilian" purchasers within South Africa.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed, even before the issuance of NSDM 81, Nixon approved the sale of General Electric jet engines to Dassault Aviation to be installed on the French company's Mirage fighter aircraft destined for South Africa. The NSDM itself further authorized the sale of Lear Jet 25 transport jets and Cessna dual-engine 401s and 402 light transport aircraft to the SADF. Nixon, however, unlike European allies including France, Italy and the UK was not prepared to sell lethal or dual use items to the South African military. Despite the growth in Soviet shipping activity in the Indian Ocean and heavy lobbying from Pretoria, Nixon refused to invoke the "strategic exemption" and authorize the sale of Lockheed P-3 Orion anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft to South Africa.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Telegram from the State Department to Consulate General Cape Town, May 14, 1971; Michel, "You haven't been too horrible to us recently" 750; Morgan, "Our Own Interests: Nixon, South Africa, and Dissent at Home and Abroad" 477.

<sup>41</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA), General Record of the Department of State, Political and Defense Record Group 59, Subject Numerical Files, 1970-1973, Box 2578, Pol 15-1 SAFR, Telegram from Hurd to Department of State, August 2, 1973; Morgan, "Our Own Interests" 478.

<sup>42</sup> KL, Papers of Harlan Cleveland (hereafter HCP), Box 98, South Africa and Apartheid, 7/63-8/63, Statement by Stevenson to the UNSC, August 2, 1963; NL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-208, NSDM 81, Memo for Agnew et al. from Kissinger, August 17, 1970.

<sup>43</sup> NL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-208, NSDM 81, Memo for Agnew et al. from Kissinger, August 17, 1970.

<sup>44</sup> NL, National Security Council Institutional ("H") Files, Study Memorandums (1969-1974), Box H-144, NSSM-39 2 of 3 (2 of 2), Memorandum for Kissinger from Stans, April 16 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Telegram from Rogers to Department of State, July 12, 1970; NL, National Security Council Institutional ("H") Files, Policy Papers (1969-1974, Box H-213, NSDM 38: Records of the Staff Secretary NDSM Working Files,

In the case of broader military ties, the White House determined that contacts between the U.S. and South African military and intelligence services should be kept to the minimum level of cooperation required to satisfy U.S. national security requirements and maintain access to South African intelligence information. In terms of association with the South African police this was to be kept to the “absolute minimum” level needed to be appraised of intelligence useful to the United States.<sup>45</sup>

While Washington continued to consider South African requests for visits of high-ranking military personnel, participation of SADF members in correspondence courses and the sharing of unclassified materials it was determined that port calls that port calls by U.S. naval vessels to South African harbors should continue to be on an emergency only basis. The need for and political impact of the DOD and NASA facilities was also to be kept under constant review.<sup>46</sup>

### **Gold and Nuclear Agreements**

In December 1969, while Nixon was considering the options put forward in NSSM 39, he approved an important agreement made by the Treasury Department regarding the marketing of South African gold. As noted earlier, South Africa provided over 75% of the free world supply of gold and from a domestic perspective it was the apartheid state’s most valuable export. In response to the late 1967 devaluation of sterling, which had caused \$3 billion in official gold held by monetary authorities, primarily in the United States, to move into private hands, a number of major countries adopted a two-tiered gold system in March 1968 to divorce the monetary and private markets for gold.<sup>47</sup>

In the two-tiered system monetary system, monetary gold moved between national authorities at \$35 per ounce while all other transactions took place in private markets at whatever price developed from supply and demand. It was of “critical importance”, as termed by Kissinger, as it prevented private purchases of gold from draining U.S. monetary reserves. The system worked too well though and combined with the strengthened confidence in the dollar and the decision to activate Special Drawing Rights as a substitute for gold to augment international liquidity it created a problem opposite to its creation in that it led to a sharp decline in gold prices to the point where the free market price was exactly the same as the official price. This situation was of grave concern to Pretoria as it threatened South African economic stability.<sup>48</sup>

As part of a broader international endeavor with European countries, concerned about their own gold reserves, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Treasury Department negotiated a bilateral agreement with Pretoria to stabilize the situation. Under the terms of the deal, all newly mined gold was to be sold into the free market when the price was above \$35, sales to monetary authorities were permitted when the free market price dropped below \$35 and and when the South African balance of payments deficits in a given time period exceeded

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Memorandum for Nixon from Kissinger, August 10 1970; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-208, NSDM 81, Memo for Agnew et al. from Kissinger, August 17, 1970.

<sup>45</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-208, NSDM 81, Memo for Agnew et al. from Kissinger, August 17, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

<sup>46</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-208, NSDM 81, Memorandum for Agnew et al. from Kissinger, August 17, 1970; FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Johnson to Packard, November 18, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

<sup>47</sup> FRUS, Vol. XXVIII, 1969-1976, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, December 9, 1969; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, From Kissinger to Nixon, December 23, 1969.

<sup>48</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, From Kissinger to Nixon, December 23, 1969.

its gold production during that same period after all of that production is sold into the free market. Furthermore, sales to monetary authorities permitted was also permitted from a small “kitty” of around \$250 million representing some of SA gold reserves at the time that the two-tiered system was inaugurated.<sup>49</sup>

In a memorandum to Nixon, Kissinger praised the agreement as it secured the maintenance of the two-tiered system and assured that most of the South African gold would enter the free market and therefore hold down the price which would then promote confidence in the official price of gold. It is clear that the White House also saw the arrangement as an important gesture in showing good will towards South Africa, a fact not lost on the ANC who claimed that it was part of a “wider and politically based understanding” between Washington and Pretoria. Both Nixon and Kissinger were well aware of the potential political criticism of any fiscal agreement made with South Africa but felt that the strategic and economic aspects of the deal trumped any negative political ramifications. Indeed, in a handwritten note to Kissinger, Nixon stated, “I approve—We had better look after our own interests where national security and international monetary matters are concerned.”<sup>50</sup>

The Nixon administration also adopted a pragmatic approach regarding nuclear cooperation with Pretoria. In 1964, during the Johnson era, Washington had permitted the delivery of an Allis-Chalmers experimental 20-megawatt reactor to the South African Atomic Energy Commission for the use of civil atomic energy at its research facility at Pelindaba, outside of Pretoria and further approved the shipping fuel rods containing approximately 4.5 kilograms of 90% enriched U-235 necessary for the initial start-up of the reactor. In 1967, Johnson had also approved a ten year extension of the civil atomic energy agreement with Pretoria which had initially been signed in 1957 under the auspices of President Dwight Eisenhower’s Atoms for Peace initiative.<sup>51</sup>

By the early 1970s, however, it was becoming increasingly clear the Pretoria was determined to develop a nuclear weapons capability. South Africa had refused to sign the 1968 Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and in July 1970, Prime Minister John Vorster stated that South African scientists had developed a unique method for enriching uranium and that Pretoria would build a pilot facility to test the new method. South Africa also refused to place the pilot facility called Valindaba, a contraction of a Zulu expression meaning “we don’t talk about this at all”, under international safeguards.<sup>52</sup>

In Washington, both the White House and the intelligence community were concerned by Pretoria’s perceived efforts to achieve a nuclear capability. As early as 1969, South African nuclear research facilities had been targeted for surveillance by Corona satellites equipped with KH-4A cameras. Over the following years CIA agents were dispatched, under diplomatic cover, in a concerted effort to find out the details of Pretoria’s uranium enrichment process.<sup>53</sup>

In January 1972, however, despite mounting disquiet over the South African nuclear program, Nixon approved the sale of a General Electric nuclear reactor to Pretoria. The White House also allowed General Electric to utilize financing from the Private Export Funding Corporation (PEFCO) and use guarantees from the Export Import (Ex-Im) Bank. Nixon

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<sup>49</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, From Kissinger to Nixon, December 23, 1969.

<sup>50</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, From Kissinger to Nixon, December 23, 1969; U.S. Imperialism and the Southern African Liberation Movement, *Sechaba*, May 1970, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/sechaba-volume-4-number-5-may-1970>.

<sup>51</sup> Michel, ““You haven’t been too horrible to us recently” 753-754.

<sup>52</sup> NSA, To Chairman Ray et al. from James G. Poor, Director, Division of International Security Affairs, U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, October 2, 1974, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB181/index.htm>; J. Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb: American Nuclear Intelligence from Nazi Germany to Iran and North Korea*, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company 2006) 244 and 270.

<sup>53</sup> Z. Cervenka and B. Rogers, *The Nuclear Axis: Secret Collaboration between West Germany and South Africa*, (London: Julian Friedmann Books, 1978) 274-275; Richelson, *Spying on the Bomb*, 263.

refused, however, to approve the Ex-Im bank, which serves as the official export credit agency of the United States to provide a \$50 million credit itself due the potential diplomatic and political interpretation and ramifications of such a deal in black Africa. Two years later, in 1974, Washington agreed to amend the 1967 atomic energy agreement to increase the amount of reactor fuel that could be sold to Pretoria.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the potential military applications of the South African enrichment program and Pretoria's continued refusal to sign the NPT the White House nevertheless believed that continued bilateral cooperation with Pretoria in the atomic field represented a logical approach on both strategic and economic grounds. The cooperation bolstered U.S. efforts to establish itself as a global supplier of enriched uranium that was not overly susceptible to political considerations. In addition to South Africa, Washington had similar agreements with nineteen other countries including Argentina Brazil, Italy, Japan and Taiwan.<sup>55</sup>

Such cooperation was also highly advantageous on fiscal grounds. The amended atomic energy agreement alone led to a foreign exchange benefit of around \$250 million over thirty years. As observed by both the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and the State Department, it would also allow for continued access to South African uranium reserves, comprising of nearly 30% of free world uranium, and significantly allow Washington to ensure that International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) regulations were adhered to at least in terms of the facilities and transactions that the United States was directly involved in.<sup>56</sup>

### **Export-Import Bank Assistance and Corporate Responsibility**

Regarding broader commercial ties with South Africa, while the official policy of White House remained the same as the previous occupants of the Oval Office, to "neither nor discourage investment" in the apartheid state, nevertheless under the Nixon administration the United States cemented and deepened its economic relationship with South Africa.<sup>57</sup>

In April 1964, during the Johnson era, the White House had imposed stringent restrictions on the Ex-Im Bank in its ability to offer loans, insurance and guarantees to U.S. firms investing in South Africa. While U.S. direct investment continued to grow due to the favorable rate of returns, nevertheless, as noted by the NSC, the opportunity for further profitable investment was substantial and the existing Ex-Im policy prevented U.S. businesses from meeting the terms offered by officially supported third-country competitors. Indeed, the Nixon administration estimated that the Ex-Im constraints had cost U.S. corporations up to \$100 million annually since 1964.<sup>58</sup>

In August 1970, as part of NSDM 81, Nixon loosened the restrictions on Ex-Im Bank's dealings with Pretoria. The bank was permitted to offer insurance and guarantees to U.S. businesses in South Africa for all commodities up to \$200 million per transaction for a

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<sup>54</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Southern Africa, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Hormats and Wright to Kissinger, January 24, 1972.

<sup>55</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Southern Africa, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Guhin to Kissinger, November 19, 1971; FRUS, 1969-1976, Southern Africa, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Hormats and Wright to Kissinger, January 24, 1972; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII. Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

<sup>56</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Southern Africa, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Guhin to Kissinger, November 19, 1971; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII. Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

<sup>57</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Kissinger to Flanigan, July 14, 1973; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 57 and 77.

<sup>58</sup> LBJL, NSF, Box 4, National Security Action Memorandums (hereafter NSAMs), NSAM 295, April 24, 1964; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 78.

maximum period of ten years. While direct loans were still prohibited, discount loans of less than \$2 million, with certain restrictions were permitted. In 1972, the NSC, advised a continuance of this policy and the White House should remain “alert” to the possible need for further liberalization to allow U.S. firms to meet the terms offered by foreign competition.<sup>59</sup>

Nixon’s decision led to a massive increase in Ex-Im Bank assistance to U.S. corporations investing in the apartheid economy. Between 1971-76, such support increased from around \$34 million to a staggering \$260 million. Unsurprisingly, U.S. commercial ties with Pretoria saw a major boost as exports increased by 240% between 1970-75 and imports from South Africa during the same period rose by around 200%. Direct assets increased to over \$1.5 billion including a doubling of U.S. investment in essential minerals and raw materials.<sup>60</sup>

In a second shift from the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Nixon, on pragmatic grounds, actively encouraged U.S. companies operating in South Africa to engage to corporate social responsibility regarding the employment on non-white workers. The White House was well aware that the more than three hundred U.S. corporations with commercial interests in the apartheid state were not in the forefront as regarded equitable personnel practices. Furthermore, their presence and actions led to increasing criticism both in black Africa and from domestic opponents of apartheid that such corporations were giving moral support to the “unpalatable racial policies” engaged in by Pretoria.<sup>61</sup>

The State Department, therefore, began a quiet campaign of highlighting to U.S. businesses with interests in South Africa the political, social and economic problems associated with the racial policies of the National Party and the public relations problems for Washington resulting from U.S. investment in South Africa. U.S. firms were urged, in the interest of their own public image as it related to domestic consumer groups, organized labor and civil rights, to follow fair employment practices for non-whites especially with regard to pay, training and assisting the development of effective representation of labor. Potential U.S. investors were also invited to consider the financial and public relations advantages of business ventures, especially developmental projects, in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland all of which were also in the Rand customs and currency area.<sup>62</sup>

In response to this gentle pressure from the State Department, a number of U.S. corporations, including Chrysler and General Motors, had by the mid-1970s established better conditions, remuneration and opportunities for their non-white employees, through various social responsibility and improvement programs. Indeed, as early as February 1972, Nixon, in his report to Congress entitled “U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s, The Emerging Structure of Peace”, highlighted that U.S. companies in South Africa were upgrading conditions and opening opportunities for all their workers regardless of race. In South Africa, however, the ANC criticized the emphasis on corporate responsibility as paternalistic U.S. charity that did not solve the underlying problem and accused Washington of speaking with a “forked tongue” to conceal its “mercenary and short-sighted self interest.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Kissinger to Flanigan, July 14, 1973; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 78.

<sup>60</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 78.

<sup>61</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Newsom and Stevenson to Rogers, February 17, 1971; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972.

<sup>62</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Newsom and Stevenson to Rogers, February 17, 1971; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, March 1972

<sup>63</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Newsom and Stevenson to Rogers, February 17, 1971; FRUS 1969-1976, Vol. E-5, Part 1, 1969-1972, U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s, The Emerging Structure of Peace: A Report to the Congress by Nixon, February 9, 1972; “The Stealthy American”, *Sechaba*, August 1972,



Indeed, the White House was careful to ensure that in encouraging this move towards corporate social responsibility by U.S. business interests such action was not to be viewed as a “concerted attack” on South African racial policies by either the State Department or the companies concerned. If portrayed as such, it was feared that it could stimulate a strong reaction from Pretoria that would be damaging to broader commercial ties. Indeed, in July 1973, Kissinger observed to Nixon that while making sure that U.S. companies are fully aware of the political, social and economic problems associated with apartheid the principal objective of Washington was “continued profitable trade with South Africa and maintenance of U.S. investments and access to key resources.”<sup>64</sup>

## Rhodesia and South West Africa

The White House focus on geopolitical strategy and economic interest is also evident in his administration’s approach towards white minority rule in Rhodesia and South West Africa. In both cases, albeit with different results, the approach of the Nixon administration was based on pragmatic considerations of U.S. national interest.

Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe, was a self-governing British colony in southern Africa that in November 1965 defied London and unilaterally declared itself an independent nation. The decision by the white minority government was stimulated by a mix of factors including anti-communism but most significantly the determination of the white community to retain their power and privilege in an “independent” Rhodesia. Globally, the Rhodesian decision was met with condemnation and hostility especially at the UN.<sup>65</sup>

In Pretoria, however, the National Party government viewed Salisbury as an integral part of its military buffer between black-ruled Africa and the apartheid state itself. While offering no overt declaration of support or diplomatic recognition of Rhodesia, South Africa openly refused to commit to any form of embargoes or sanctions against Salisbury. Indeed, British hopes of a swift end to the rebellion were stymied by the support that Rhodesia had received from her de facto ally south of the Limpopo.<sup>66</sup>

During the Johnson era, Washington had maintained a policy of diplomatic hostility towards Salisbury and supported London in its efforts to end Rhodesian independence. In December 1966 and May 1968, the White House supported UN resolutions which respectively imposed selective mandatory sanctions and a comprehensive trade embargo on Rhodesia. The White House, however, had wished to avoid an overt clash with Pretoria over Rhodesia especially the possible imposition of Chapter 7 measures at the UN which would have determined the situation a threat to world peace. Johnson, therefore, refused to countenance enforcement actions against South Africa for any violation of sanctions.<sup>67</sup>

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<https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/sechaba-volume-6-number-8-august-1972>; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 78.

<sup>64</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Newsom and Stevenson to Rogers, February 17, 1971; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Kissinger to Flanigan, July 14, 1973.

<sup>65</sup> The National Archives, London (hereafter TNA), PREM, 13/545, From Salisbury to Commonwealth Relations Office, No.1707, November 11, 1965; LBJL, NSF, Box 97, Rhodesia, Vol. 2, UNSC Resolution 232, as attachment to letter to Johnson from Rostow, December 31, 1968; LBJL, NSF, Box 97, Rhodesia, Vol. 2, UNSC Resolution 253, as attachment to letter to Johnson from Rostow, December 31, 1968.

<sup>66</sup> Cory Library (hereafter CL), Rhodesia-Zimbabwe Papers (hereafter RZP), Box 2006 A, Cabinet Memoranda 1966 42-108, Ministry of Defence Memo, February 12, 1966; LBJL, NSF, Box 97, Rhodesia, Vol. 2, Rhodesia-Zambia SitRep, February 18, 1966; Michel, *The White House and White Africa*, 55-58.

<sup>67</sup> LBJL, NSF, Box 97, Rhodesia, Vol. 2. CIA Intelligence Memo, December 9, 1966; LBJL, NSF, Box 97, Rhodesia, Vol. 2. CIA Intelligence Memo, June 1968; LBJL, NSF, Box 97, Rhodesia, Vol. 2, UNSC Resolution 232, as attachment to letter to Johnson from Rostow, December 31, 1968; LBJL, NSF, Box 97, Rhodesia, Vol. 2,

Under Nixon, however, as with South Africa, the United States moved towards closer ties with Rhodesia on both strategic and economic grounds. In NSSM 39, the Interdepartmental Group had noted the vehement anti-communism of the Rhodesian Government and that U.S. investment in Rhodesia amounted to around \$56 million dollars. More significantly though, NSSM 39 observed that prior to sanctions between a quarter and a third of U.S. chromite imports had originated in Rhodesia.<sup>68</sup>

Chromium, which is commercially produced from chromite ore, was a metal of high economic value and vital component of a number of U.S. industries including electric power generation, chemical manufacturing and the space program also used chrome. The United States, however, contained no deposits of chromite ore, leaving it dependent on global imports. Rhodesian chromite ore was considered some of the finest quality on the planet and prior to its unilateral declaration of independence Salisbury had been a major supplier of chromite ore to Washington. Adherence to the UN sanctions on Rhodesia, as noted by the White House, had led the United States to develop a growing dependence on ore from the Soviet Union. This was not only deemed unwise strategically but was hurting U.S. businesses due to inflated prices and inferior quality.<sup>69</sup>

In August 1970, Nixon approved an application for the Union Carbide Corporation to import 150,000 tons of chrome ore under a domestic “hardship exemption” to the enforcement of UN sanctions on Rhodesia. In addition to the strategic and economic rationale, the White House had come under pressure from political allies including Senators Eastland and Strom Thurmond to relax compliance with UN sanctions on Salisbury. Fifteen months later in November 1971, Nixon signed the Military Procurement Act. Under Section 503 the act authorized the importation into the United States of seventy-two strategic and critical minerals from Rhodesia notably chrome and placed the United States in open violation of UN sanctions against Salisbury. While black African nations reacted with dismay, for the White House ensuring a supply of free world chrome from an anti-communist nation trumped the domestic and international ramifications of doing business with Rhodesia.<sup>70</sup>

Nixon was also apathetic about the efforts to attain black majority rule in Rhodesia. The White House was broadly supportive of the ultimately unsuccessful Smith-Home Agreement in November 1971, which, if formally approved by London, would have allowed the independence of Rhodesia under a white minority government albeit with a roadmap to majority rule at a future point. While the Nixon administration was concerned that U.S. diplomatic recognition of a white ruled Rhodesia could affect Washington’s influence in black Africa this was counterbalanced by the fiscal and strategic advantages of a diplomatic

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UNSC Resolution 253, as attachment to letter to Johnson from Rostow, December 31, 1968; Michel, *The White House and White Africa*, 42 48 52-53 81-82 89-90.

<sup>68</sup> NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-144, NSSM-392 of 3 (1 of 2), NSC Interdisciplinary Group for Africa, Study in Response to NSSM 39, August 15, 1969; Michel, “The Luster of Chrome”, 12.

<sup>69</sup> NL, NSC Country Files, Box 743, Rhodesia (1969-70), Statement of J. Clayton Stephenson, President, Mining and Metals Division, Union Carbide Corporation, October 31, 1969; NL, NSC Country Files, Box 743, Rhodesia (1969-70), Statement L. G. Bliss, Chairman of the Board and President of Foote Mineral Company, October 31, 1969; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-214, NSDM 47, Memorandum for Nixon from Stans, May 15, 1970; Michel, “The Luster of Chrome”, 8-9.

<sup>70</sup> NL, NSC Country Files, Box 743, Rhodesia (1969-1970), Memorandum for Kissinger from Davis Jr., December 24, 1969; NL, WHCF, Box 63, CO 124 Rhodesia 5/1/70–8/31/70, Letter to Mollenoff from Eastland, March 19, 1970; NL, NSC Country Files, Box 743, Rhodesia Vol. 2 (1969-1970), Letter to Nixon from Thurmond, April 15, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII To The Vice President et al. from Kissinger, August 7, 1970; NL, NSC Country Files, Box 743, Rhodesia Vol. 2 (1969-1970), Memorandum for Nixon from Kissinger, November 16, 1971; DeRoche, *Black, White and Chrome*, 170, 201-202; Horne, *From the Barrel of a Gun*, 151, 180-181; Michel, “The Luster of Chrome”, 15-21.

settlement including full access to the mineral wealth of Rhodesia and overflight and landing rights.<sup>71</sup>

While Nixon prepared to flout international obligations regarding South Africa's de facto ally north of the Limpopo the White House took a tougher stance regarding South West Africa (present day Namibia) which was of little interest to Washington on either economic or strategic grounds. The South African occupied territory was a large primarily arid expanse with a population of under six hundred thousand (approximately half a million blacks and ninety-six thousand whites).<sup>72</sup>

South West Africa had been under South African administrative control since 1920 when Pretoria had been granted a League of Nations mandate to administer the former German colony in the aftermath of World War One. Following the dissolution of the League of Nations and creation of the UN South Africa had refused submit the territory to a UN trusteeship or abide by a subsequent ICJ advisory opinion that it should submit reports to the UN. Pretoria administered the territory as a de facto fifth province including the expansion of apartheid racial policies into South West Africa.<sup>73</sup>

As was the case with Rhodesia, the Johnson administration had adopted a posture of diplomatic opposition. Washington viewed the South African occupation of the territory as illegal and supported UN resolutions terminating the mandate and placing South West Africa, at least theoretically, under the direct authority of the UN. Johnson, however, had opposed any measures that were either unenforceable or could precipitate an economic or military confrontation with South Africa. In May 1967, United States opposed UN resolutions which set up a Council for South West Africa to take over the administration of the territory or which requested the UNSC to take the requisite measures to allow the Council to function.<sup>74</sup>

On January 30, 1970 Washington supported a UN Security Council resolution establishing a subcommittee to prepare recommendations on the implementation of UN responsibility for South West Africa. Approximately two weeks later Nixon ordered a comprehensive review of U.S. policy and interests in South West Africa. The study by the NSC Interdepartmental Group highlighted that U.S. direct strategic and economic interests in the territory were extremely limited. Other than occasional U.S. Air Force flights over the Caprivi Strip the military made little use of and had little interest in South West Africa. Economically, there was little trade between Washington and Windhoek and the small direct U.S. investment was primarily linked the Tsumeb mining complex in the northern Oshikoto region.<sup>75</sup>

On May 22, Nixon issued NSDM 55 regarding U.S. policy towards South West Africa. The NDSM maintained the existing restrictions on official diplomatic visits to the territory or military contacts with Windhoek but more notably sought to limit and discourage U.S. commercial activity in South West Africa. In particular, Ex-Im Bank credit guarantees and other facilities were withdrawn for trade with Windhoek and Washington would no longer

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<sup>71</sup> NL, NSC Country Files, Box 743, Rhodesia Vol. 2 (1970-1974), Memorandum for Kissinger from Wright, November 27, 1971; NL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-188, Memorandum for Kissinger from Newsom, December 22, 1971; Michel, *The White House and White Africa*, 151-157.

<sup>72</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, April 2, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Southern Africa, Vol. XXVIII, Intelligence Note from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, March 9, 1971.

<sup>73</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, April 2, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Southern Africa, Vol. XXVIII, Intelligence Note from the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, March 9, 1971.

<sup>74</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, April 2, 1970; Michel, "You haven't been too horrible to us recently", 756-758.

<sup>75</sup> NL, NSC Institutional ("H") Files, Box H-207, NSSM 89, Memo for Secretary of State Rogers et al. from Kissinger, February 12, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, April 2, 1970.

intervene on behalf of U.S. investors with commercial transactions made after the termination of the UN mandate in October 1966. The White House made clear, however, that such actions were solely limited to South West Africa and in no way constituted a precedent for similar policies towards South Africa itself.<sup>76</sup>

At the UN the White House policy followed in a similar vein. On May 20, 1970, the U.S. Ambassador to the UN Charles W. Yost announced the tougher U.S. stance in the economic arena towards South West Africa to the UN in New York. Two months later Washington voted in favor on UN Security Council Resolution 283 that called upon member states to refrain from any diplomatic activities that might imply recognition of South African authority over the territory and terminate any programs of state sponsored financial assistance to companies doing business with Windhoek. The United States also backed a UN Security Council request for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to issue an opinion on the legal status of South West Africa and endorsed the subsequent ICJ decision, issued in 1971, that the South African presence in the territory was illegal. Nevertheless, the Nixon administration sought to avoid stronger measures which it was believed would merely whet the appetite of the African “radicals” leading to demands for mandatory economic sanctions which the White House categorically opposed.<sup>77</sup>

## Conclusion

During the Nixon era, geopolitical and economic concerns determined the stance that Washington took regarding relations with Pretoria. The White House believed that the United States needed to prioritize the protection of its own strategic and commercial interests and not become overly concerned about the domestic agenda of its global partners. The vehement anti-communism of the National Party government combined with a profitable economic relationship and the abundant mineral resources of the apartheid state dictated need on pragmatic grounds for closer ties with South Africa. This stance was further reinforced by Nixon’s contempt for black Africans and lack of interest in achieving racial justice.

The pragmatic rationale of the Nixon administration is clearly exposed in the deliberations over and issuance of NSDM 38 calling for a policy of “communication” with Pretoria on strategic and economic grounds. The calculating real politik of the White House is further demonstrated by a looser interpretation of “gray area” dual-purpose civilian/military equipment, the gold and nuclear agreements and the relaxing of the Ex-Im Bank restrictions on insurance and guarantees to U.S. companies in South Africa. The differing approach taken by Washington on the questions of Rhodesia and South West Africa also highlights the Nixonian focus on geopolitics and commercial interests.

White House policy towards South Africa, during the Nixon era, additionally offers a useful lens to reveal his administration’s broader outlook on U.S. foreign relations. The bilateral relationship between Washington and Pretoria both illuminates and is demonstrative of the wider conceptual foreign doctrine of the Nixonian era which emphasized, especially on the so called global periphery, a reliance on and support for anti-communism regional allies, including regimes with unpalatable domestic policies, to stem the spread of communism in their respective spheres of influence.

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<sup>76</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, National Security Decision Memorandum 55, May 22, 1970.

<sup>77</sup> FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Paper prepared by the NSC Interdepartmental Group for Africa, April 2, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from Kissinger to Nixon, April 15, 1970; NL, NSC Institutional (“H”) Files, Box H-208, NSDM 55, Memo for Vice President Agnew et al. from Kissinger, April 17, 1970; FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXVIII, Memorandum from U. Alexis Johnson to Nixon, July 6, 1970; Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy towards apartheid South Africa*, 72.

