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Weekly Review

Special Report

New Challenges for South Africa

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25X1

April 18, 1975

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NEW CHALLENGES FOR SOUTH AFRICA

25X1

Since the coup in Portugal a year ago led Lisbon to decide to give up its African colonies, the South African government has faced new problems and opportunities in its dealings with black Africans. In a address to the South African Senate six months ago, Prime Minister Vorster said the black African states and South Africa had come to a crossroads between constructive cooperation and violent conflict. He promised financial and technical aid to any African country that would agree to co-exist on a basis of mutual nonintervention in domestic affairs. Vorster said his government was anxious to maintain South Africa's economic ties with Mozambique after it became independent, to participate in efforts to resolve the Rhodesian problem, and to prepare the people of Namibia (South West Africa) for self-determination.

Three days after Vorster's speech, Zambian President Kaunda welcomed this "voice of reason." Kaunda said the time might be ripe for constructive cooperation since South Africa's ties with Portuguese colonialism had been dissolved. Kaunda placed priority on resolving the Rhodesian problem, and proposed South Africa start the process by withdrawing its military support for the Smith regime. Kaunda said, would welcome progress toward self-determination in Namibia, provided led to the independence of the territory as a unified state. In recognition of the entrenched, white-controlled system in South Africa, Kaunda's comments about change there were less specific.

The two speeches had been coordinated beforehand in the course of a quiet dialogue—initiated by the Zambians—that had been under way for several months.

A Quandary in Rhodesia

Lisbon, Pretoria, and Salisbury had long shared a common interest in keeping the bulk of southern Africa under white rule. To the black Africans, this was an "unholy alliance," but it had always been more apparent than real. Solid collaboration had been inhibited by mutual distrust as well as by different approaches to their common racial problem. Portuguese and Rhodesian officials feared South African predominance in any joint venture, while Rhodesians and South Africans shared a basic contempt for Portuguese counterinsurgency capabilities.

A month after the Portuguese coup, Rhodesian Prime Minister Smith visited Vorster to discuss the effect of an early grant of independence to Mozambique. Their joint press conference after the talks made it appear that they saw eye to eye and that both would welcome an independent black government in Mozambique, provided it was stable and maintained constructive relations with Rhodesia and South Africa. Security authorities in Salisbury and Pretoria had no doubt, in fact, that the new Lisbon government would sooner or later turn Mozambique over to the insurgent Front for the Liberation of Mozambique.

Special Report

- 1 -

April 18, 1975

SECRET

Smith and Vorster drew different inferences from such a take-over. Vorster recognized, as Smith did not, that a black government in Mozambique would nullify South Africa's strategic interest in maintaining white control of Rhodesia. Smith's break with Britain in 1965 had posed diplomatic problems for Pretoria; the South Africans, for example, never officially recognized the breakaway regime. They did provide discreet economic, financial, and military support to Smith because a white-ruled Rhodesia was regarded as a buffer against black insurgents who might operate against South Africa from Zambia or Tanzania. A black government in Mozambique would, however, permit such insurgents to outflank Rhodesia.

Both Smith and Vorster understand that a hostile government in Mozambique may block Rhodesian or South African trade that now flows through Mozambican ports. Vorster perceives that Rhodesia is much more vulnerable to these dangers than South Africa. Loss of access to Mozambique's seaports would be a crippling blow for the Smith regime, but merely a temporary setback to the South Africans. The bulk of Rhodesia's overseas trade flows through Beira and Lourenco Marques, and rerouting through South African ports would be prohibitively expensive. Lourenco Marques, however, handles only one fourth of South Africa's overseas trade, mostly from the Transvaal mining and industrial area. A new South African port is scheduled to open in 1976 that will further reduce the present importance of Lourenco Marques to South Africa.

Black Insurgency

Mozambican support for insurgency, a remote contingency for Pretoria, is a present danger for Salisbury. The Rhodesian guerrillas who have been active in northeastern Rhodesia since late 1972 infiltrated through Mozambique from bases in Zambia and Tanzania. The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique has held out hopes to the Rhodesian insurgents that, after Mozambique becomes independent, they may extend their infiltration routes along Rhodesia's entire eastern border with Mozambique. Smith's security forces, dependent on a limited pool of

white reservists, could not expand sufficiently to cope with a major increase in guerrilla operations.

Last June, the prospect of early independence for Mozambique apparently encouraged the leaders of the African National Council, the largest black political organization in Rhodesia, to reject Smith's proposals for a constitutional settlement. Smith had offered to broaden the franchise gradually for Rhodesian blacks, who outnumber whites 20 to 1, but in a way that would have kept them from gaining a majority in Parliament for at least 40 years.

Smith countered with an election in which his party won all 50 of the parliamentary seats allocated to whites. Black candidates who supported the council's rejection of the Smith proposals won 7 of the 8 seats allocated to the some 7,000 blacks who are allowed to vote.

At about this same time, Smith's security advisers concluded that an early withdrawal of Portuguese forces from Mozambique would favor the Rhodesian guerrillas. Smith's closest aides, however, seemed confident that the South Africans would provide enough reinforcements to match any guerrilla inroads. The aides were encouraged in this belief because the South African government had increased its police contingent in Rhodesia from 300 in mid-1972 to roughly 1,600 in mid-1974.

By then, however, Vorster was seeking to avoid an open-ended commitment to help Smith in emergencies. Senior South African officials realized that even a moderate black government in Mozambique would come under strong international pressure to support the Rhodesian insurgents unless Smith moved toward early majority rule. The South Africans recognized that increased protection of Smith would undercut Pretoria's efforts to develop constructive relations with Mozambique.

The Zambian Factor

Zambian President Kaunda is a man with a strong preference for peaceful rather than violent change, and a Rhodesian settlement has become

SECRET

25X1

for him a matter of increasing urgency. Zambia has not been able to offset the economic cost of its boycott of the Smith regime since Salisbury's break with Britain. Even the Tan-Zam railroad, when it is completed next year, will not fully compensate for the stoppage of Zambian shipments over Rhodesian rail lines to Indian Ocean ports in Mozambique; port congestion in Tanzania will still delay Zambian shipments.

The mutual interest of South Africa and Zambia in a Rhodesian settlement brought Vorster and Kaunda together last October to seek a way to end guerrilla warfare and reopen settlement negotiations. From then on, the mediation effort has grown to involve Tanzanian President Nyerere, President Khama of Botswana, and Samora Machel, head of the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique.

Since November, Kaunda, Nyerere, Khama, and Machel have met repeatedly with the rival Rhodesian nationalist groups, while Vorster has kept in close touch with Kaunda and Smith. The combination of sustained pressures—Vorster on Smith, and the four black mediators on the Rhodesian nationalists—has brought progress toward a negotiated settlement:

- In December three Rhodesian insurgent groups merged with the non-insurgent African National Council.
- A few days later Smith and the leaders of the enlarged council agreed to a truce.
- In early February, Smith began meeting with the council leaders to try to arrange for the constitutional conference that was called for in the truce agreement.

In order to force both sides to observe the cease-fire, the black African mediators have scaled down their support for the Rhodesian insurgents, and Vorster has cut back his support for Smith's counterinsurgency teams. The black mediators told Rhodesian insurgent leaders, who wanted to retain control of their individual guerrilla forces, that all future aid would go to a newly unified command structure. Vorster told Smith in Janu-

ary that the 1,600 South African police then in Rhodesia would be gradually withdrawn, and more than half had left by late March.

Implications for Pretoria

While Vorster has pushed—and pushed hard—for Smith to come to terms with Rhodesia's blacks on early majority rule, he has no intention of allowing majority rule in South Africa. Most South Africans, including Vorster, concede that racial discrimination exists in their country, but they have also convinced themselves that apartheid, when perfected, will eliminate the most galling aspects of discrimination.

In the South African view, the Rhodesian situation is quite different from theirs; when the white Rhodesians rejected the South African course—apartheid—many years ago, they made a multiracial society inevitable. The South Africans believe that Salisbury must, as a result, either move toward majority rule at a pace that satisfies Rhodesian blacks or face a dangerous insurgency supported more actively than before by neighboring black African governments.

The Smith government, in an effort to make sure that South Africa does not desert white Rhodesia, has maintained contacts with right wingers in Vorster's Nationalist Party who share Salisbury's views. Nevertheless, the efforts of the right wingers to bring Vorster to view the cause of Rhodesian whites as identical with that of South African whites have been unsuccessful.

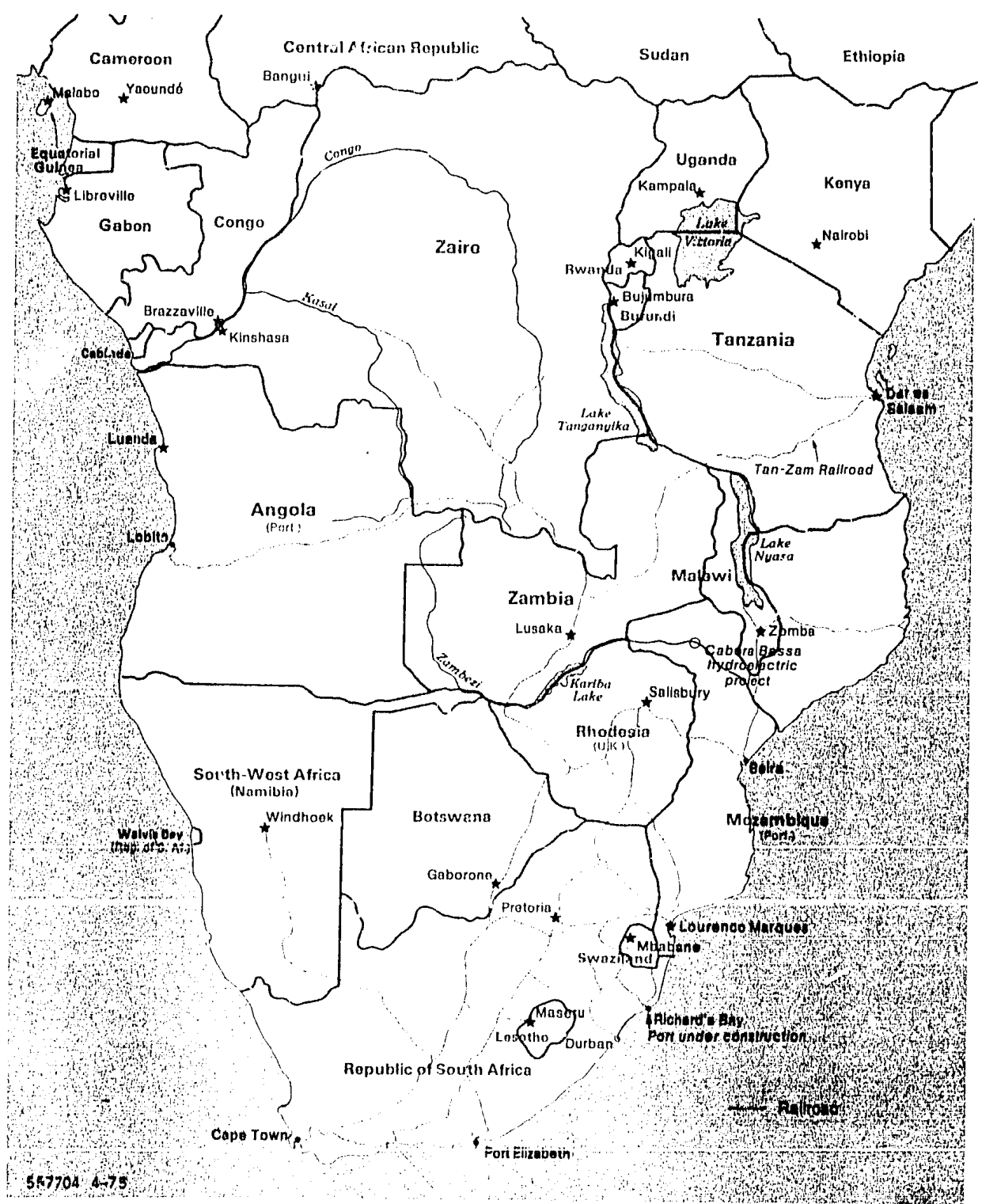
A Challenge on Namibia

The loosening of Portugal's grip on the reins in Angola has serious implications for Pretoria's ability to deal with any unrest that might develop in Namibia (South-West Africa).

Dissident Ovambo tribesmen, who inhabit northern Namibia adjacent to the Angolan border, found that Portuguese security forces in Angola, after the coup in Lisbon, were no longer apprehending refugees and handing them over to South African police. By mid-1974, an Ovambo exodus to Angola was under way, and a large

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SECRET

25X1

number of the refugees moved on to Zambia, where some 3,000 now live in refugee camps.

Some of the Namibian refugees in Zambia are said to have joined the insurgent South-West African People's Organization, which has maintained a headquarters in Zambia since its paramilitary structure in Namibia was destroyed by Pretoria in 1966. The membership of the organization is limited almost exclusively to the Ovambo tribe, the largest of 11 non-white groups in Namibia. Although militarily ineffectual, the group challenges Pretoria's control of the territory, advocating independence for Namibia as a unified state. It is the only Namibian political group to have gained support from the Organization of African Unity and several UN bodies.

In August 1973, agents of the South-West Africa People's Organization initiated an effective boycott of Ovamboland's first popular election to select a legislative council. Only 3 percent of the eligible voters turned out. Despite this warning, the South African government continued to back the territory's traditional tribal leaders and to suppress the dissident organization. Last September, however, the branch of South Africa's ruling National Party in the territory announced that it would eventually hold multiracial talks on the future of the territory and called on all non-white ethnic groups to choose spokesmen for the talks.

Keeping a Promise

Subsequently, Pretoria announced that a new election would be held in January 1975 for the Ovamboland legislative council, and that the People's Organization would be permitted to participate. The new election seems to be intended as a first step toward selecting genuinely representative Ovambo spokesmen for multiracial talks. Vorster apparently had decided to move toward eventual self-determination for the whole of Namibia, as he promised UN Secretary General Waldheim in early 1973.

Vorster's concept of self-determination does not, however, anticipate the independence of Namibia as a unified state, despite successive UN resolutions to this effect. Vorster's preparations

for self-determination still resemble, in fact, the National Party's blueprint for the separate development of the major tribal groups within South Africa itself. He has implied that Namibia might become independent as a federation of separate homelands for each ethnic group. Under such a scheme, the white residents would have direct control of the southern part of Namibia, where the territory's most valuable mineral resources are situated, and possibly retain indirect control of the whole federation.

Because the Ovambos make up roughly half of the territory's non-white population, the smaller tribes, who already fear Ovambo domination, might be induced to support the whites against the Ovambos. In the event that the Ovambos choose to stay out of a federation, the 90,000 white residents of the territory would be the largest of the remaining ethnic groups. Furthermore, an independent Ovambo state may be regarded in Pretoria as a useful buffer between the federation and a possibly unfriendly, independent Angola.

Zambian Involvement in Namibia

Zambian President Kaunda, who clearly shares Vorster's desire for political solutions instead of violent conflict, has long feared South African military reprisals for Zambian support of guerrilla strikes into Rhodesia or Namibia. Kaunda is, for example, convinced of Pretoria's complicity in laying the land mines that have occasionally exploded in Zambian territory adjacent to Namibia and Rhodesia.

Kaunda views a Rhodesian settlement as much more urgent than an accommodation between Pretoria and the Namibians, and he has acceded to Vorster's suggestion that once a Rhodesian settlement is under way, a summit could be held to preview Pretoria's measures to prepare Namibia for self-determination. Vorster would like international recognition for his work toward a Rhodesian settlement to help soften black African opposition to a continued South African presence in Namibia.

It is unlikely that Kaunda or the other Africans who have been involved in the

SECRET

Rhodesian mediation efforts would explicitly disavow the UN call for independence of Namibia as a unified state or the OAU policy of supporting the liberation struggle of the South-West African People's Organization. Vorster might at least succeed, however, in dissuading the black leaders from stepping up support for Namibian insurgents. He might argue that the Rhodesian truce is a valid precedent for Namibia, because it was accepted by both sides before agreement on constitutional terms was reached.

Divide and Conquer

Vorster's senate speech last October suggests that he will attempt to turn any discussions from political issues to the mutual advantages of economic cooperation, highlighting the economic and technical aid that South Africa is prepared to extend to black Africa.

Vorster probably has no illusion that the UN will come around to approving his version of self-determination by May 30, 1975, the latest deadline set by the Security Council for South Africa to relinquish control of Namibia. More likely, Vorster has decided to gamble that lifting some of the hitherto tight restraints on political expression in Namibia will foster tribalism instead of nationalism. If a program leading to autonomy or independence for each ethnic group actually mollifies Namibians who resent white rule, Vorster can well withstand international criticism.

If such is Vorster's game, he may have been encouraged by the outcome of the second popular election in Ovamboland last January. Although the South-West African People's Organization again called for a boycott, 55 percent of the 120,000 eligible voters went to the polls, an impressive gain over the 3 percent of the first election. Although opposition candidates were allowed to run, the traditional tribal leaders who are responsive to Pretoria were re-elected.

Although the election results may indicate the organization's support inside Namibia is waning, Namibian guerrilla bands based abroad have gained recruits from the recent exodus of Ovambo tribesmen and may step up their incursions into Ovamboland.

A Test in Mozambique

Since the coup in Portugal, South Africa has officially maintained that Pretoria will neither interfere with black governments that emerge in the two territories nor tolerate foreign meddling in South African affairs. The "non-interference" doctrine was put to the test last September after Lisbon came to terms with the Front for the Liberation of Mozambique and gave it the dominant place in a transitional government. When disgruntled whites in Lourenco Marques attempted to seize power, the South African foreign minister promptly declared Pretoria's readiness to cooperate with the transitional government and warned South Africans not to join mercenary bands that were said to be preparing to support the white dissidents.

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It now appears that South African distrust of the former Mozambican insurgents has been supplanted by a belief that they will want to retain the economic benefits of cooperation with Pretoria once they are in power.

A large portion of Mozambique's revenue is derived from port and rail earnings on South African trade and from the remittances of some 100,000 Mozambicans who work in South African mines. South Africans also anticipate that completion of the huge Cabora Bassa hydroelectric project will strengthen their economic leverage over an independent but impoverished Mozambique. South Africa is the only possible big consumer of power from the dam, but over the short term it could also do without.

Thus far, the Mozambique nationalist leaders seem willing to cooperate with Pretoria, but they are likely to stop short of diplomatic ties.

Vorster Seeks New Dialogues

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Vorster, Kaunda, Nyerere, Khama and Mozambican leader Machel, who have been working together toward a Rhodesian settlement, have

SECRET

25X1

agreed to hold a publicized summit conference in Lusaka as soon as Rhodesian negotiations are well under way. Such a summit reportedly was proposed by South Africa. Vorster apparently hopes he can parlay his quiet collaboration with the four black leaders on Rhodesia into an open and continuing association.

Vorster also wants his work on a Rhodesian settlement to smooth the way toward a general normalization of relations between South Africa and the black African states. Although Pretoria has sought for a decade to establish diplomatic relations with OAU members, only Malawi has an embassy in Pretoria. Vorster's earlier attempts to initiate dialogues with black African leaders were rebuffed by an OAU summit resolution in 1971 that condemned any diplomatic contact unless Pretoria modified its racial policies.

Since Vorster assumed a mediator role in Rhodesia, however, he has pursued new dialogues, approaching several West African leaders. In September 1974, Vorster visited Ivory Coast to meet with President Houphouet-Boigny and Senegalese President Senghor. Last February, he made another quick trip to Liberia and met with President Tolbert.

Although both trips were secret, the South African press made reference to the meetings with Houphouet-Boigny and Senghor two months afterward; Vorster and Tolbert publicized their meeting within a week.

Vorster Explains

According to Tolbert, Vorster asked for the visit in order to give his views on the problems that stood in the way of black African leaders who might accept his offer of a dialogue. During their talks:

- Vorster promised that the South African police in Rhodesia would be withdrawn as soon as guerrilla terrorism ceased, noting that he favored a compromise settlement.
- Vorster accepted Tolbert's stipulations that the whole of Namibia should be inde-

pendent and that Pretoria should set forth a definite program and target date for independence.

- In response to Tolbert's statement that racial problems within South Africa must be resolved on a basis of equality, Vorster said that the policy of separate development was designed to provide independence for blacks in their own homelands and that he was striving for a gradual removal of admitted racial injustices.

Back in South Africa, Vorster has been telling audiences that he is indeed seeking to normalize relations with the other African states, but that he has no intention of abandoning apartheid. He is reassuring influential Afrikaners privately that self-determination for Namibia will be attained without sacrificing the interests of the white residents of that territory.

Vorster's Apparent Strategy

After his trip to Ivory Coast, Vorster told a US diplomat that the leaders of black Africa are more concerned with Rhodesia than with Namibia, and that they are more concerned with their own economic needs than with South Africa's domestic situation. Vorster's simplistic assumption that black African leaders are grasping at straws to justify profitable dealings with South Africa may be the thread that binds his current activities together:

- The withdrawal of South African police from Rhodesia would fulfill Vorster's most immediate promise to Tolbert and thereby might sustain expectations from some Africans that Vorster intends to follow through with more difficult reforms in Namibia and South Africa proper.
- An eventual grant of independence to Namibia as a federation of autonomous homelands would, at least superficially, reconcile Vorster's promises to his white constituents and to Tolbert.
- Vorster's periodic meetings with South Africa's black Bantustan leaders can be used

Special Report

- 7 -

April 18, 1975

SECRET

to turn aside the challenge from the OAU to maintain a dialogue with South African blacks, yet the concessions he has made to them thus far have been so minor that white South Africans have not become apprehensive.

- The opening of a government-sponsored theater in Cape Town to mixed audiences in February was prompted by Vorster as part of his reported plans to desegregate some public facilities without dismantling the basic structure of apartheid.

A New Rebuff from the OAU

The aftermath of Vorster's meeting with the Liberian President may make him revise his strategy. Although Vorster's explanations of his policies convinced Tolbert that he should consult with other OAU members in order to determine their views, the OAU foreign ministers criticized the meeting when they met in Addis Ababa last February. Some also criticized Kaunda, Nyerere, and Khama for working with Vorster to bring about a Rhodesian settlement outside the framework of the OAU.

The debate at Addis Ababa led to a resolution calling for an extraordinary foreign ministers' meeting in April in Dar es Salaam to discuss a coordinated reaction toward Vorster's detente policy. This meeting, held last week, concluded with a declaration that approves negotiations with South Africa designed to bring about majority rule in Rhodesia and independence for Namibia.

The latest declaration went on, however, to call upon member states to help southern African nationalists prepare for intensified guerrilla warfare if their goals cannot be attained through negotiations. It also calls for a tightening of the boycott against South Africa until it ends apartheid.

The declaration is a significant gain for the black African leaders who have cooperated with Vorster in pushing the Rhodesian nationalists and Prime Minister Smith toward a negotiated constitutional settlement. Nevertheless, Nyerere had

to formulate the new boycott measures in order to counteract calls for a repudiation of efforts to mediate the Rhodesian conflict.

Outlook

A Rhodesian settlement that provides for a peaceful transfer of power to the black majority might pave the way for constructive relations between South Africa and a few moderate black African states. Vorster's dramatic turnabout—from militarily backing a white supremacist regime in Rhodesia to helping arrange its demise—will make it psychologically easier for black African leaders to meet him openly and discuss sensitive issues. It is unlikely, however, that Vorster's contributions toward a Rhodesian settlement will yield international tolerance for his concept of separate development in Namibia or in South Africa proper.

The OAU would probably condemn a member state if it tried to open diplomatic relations with Pretoria in return for economic assistance. Nevertheless, an end of UN sanctions against Rhodesia would open the way for economic integration throughout southern Africa. Vorster has remarked privately that he would like to make the states of southern Africa so economically interdependent that none could afford to move against a neighbor.

Vorster went ahead with his initial meetings with the three West African presidents before he was sure a Rhodesian settlement could be concluded. His domestic political situation hardly required diplomatic triumphs, and his party has a comfortable majority in parliament. Possibly, Vorster hoped that his meetings with the leaders of other OAU states would reduce pressures on the presidents of Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana while they were involved with him concerning the Rhodesian problem. Possibly, also, Vorster assumed that a satisfactory Rhodesian settlement would be in sight by the time his meetings surfaced in the press. Such a favorable outcome still seemed likely in early February when Vorster visited Liberia.

Recent events in Rhodesia, however, show that Smith will not easily go along with Vorster's plans, and the Rhodesian situation remains at an impasse. Vorster apparently had hoped the meager concessions that Smith had made to Rhodesian nationalists at his behest would soften the OAU boycott of South Africa. The declaration issued by the African foreign ministers at Dar es Salaam proved otherwise.

Of all the players in the Rhodesian game, Vorster seems to have the highest stakes on the table. He has depicted a Rhodesian settlement as the first step toward a solution of Pretoria's Namibia problem and toward full acceptance of South Africa by the black states of Africa. Unless settlement negotiations are salvaged soon, Vorster's further goals may fade from sight.

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