

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

31 August 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Henry A. Kissinger
The Secretary of State

FROM : George Bush
Director

SUBJECT : Present South African Attitudes on the Rhodesian
Situation

The attached memorandum may be of assistance to you in your discussions of African problems during the next few weeks. The memorandum was prepared within the Central Intelligence Agency and has not been coordinated with the other intelligence agencies. We are sending copies of this memorandum to Ambassador Schauffele and to the Director of INR, and plan no further dissemination.


George Bush

Attachment

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM*

SUBJECT: Present South African Attitudes on the
Rhodesian Situation

KEY POINTS

- Despite the ambivalent attitudes toward Rhodesia that exist among South African whites, South African policy toward Salisbury has by and large followed two key tenets: business-as-usual, and non-interference in Rhodesian affairs. Although Vorster has discreetly pushed Ian Smith toward a negotiated solution, the South African Government's commitment to these tenets has limited Pretoria's actions.
- South Africa has continued to provide Rhodesia access to vital military and economic support.
 - As long as the Smith government can pay for such support, it will be extremely difficult to persuade the South Africans to regard the continuing shipment of supplies to Rhodesia as anything other than normal business.
 - A change of South African policy in this regard would be seen domestically as a repudiation of Pretoria's long-held position against politically motivated economic sanctions.
- The strongest arguments in favor of a South African disengagement from support of Rhodesia may derive from Pretoria's concern about its own continuing racial strife, and worries about the South African economy.

Racial Strife

- South African whites are deeply concerned about the extent of the rioting in their country and indications that militant

* This memorandum has been prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency. It was drafted by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated within the Directorate of Intelligence and the Directorate of Operations.

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students are having some success in involving blacks in work stoppages that could, if continued, cause serious industrial disruption.

- There is a fair chance that the sense of emergency which has developed would favor public acceptance of any curtailment of support to Rhodesia that Vorster presented as essential to promote internal security.

The South African Economy

- When -- but only when -- the Rhodesians become unable to pay for purchases in South Africa, Pretoria's need to conserve dwindling foreign exchange reserves may become the most persuasive reason (within South Africa) for curtailing military support to Salisbury.
- We cannot estimate when this time will come, but even now, concern in South Africa over falling gold prices, recent currency devaluations, import controls, major increases in military expenditures, and increases in the general cost of living may be strengthening sentiment against support for Rhodesia.
- In sum, to the extent that the South Africans see their own domestic political and economic problems as likely to mount in coming months, the chances of a change in their present policies toward Rhodesia will increase.

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THE DETAILSBackground

1. Ever since the Rhodesian Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, Pretoria's dealings with the Smith regime have reflected ambivalent attitudes among South African whites. The Afrikaners as well as the English-speaking South Africans have a strong sense of solidarity with the white Rhodesians, due to kinship ties and a long-held belief that a white-ruled Rhodesia is an important defense perimeter for white supremacy in South Africa. Although most South Africans applauded UDI, government leaders recognized that it involved serious risks for South Africa.

2. The economic sanctions against Rhodesia that ensued from UDI posed hard choices for government leaders in Pretoria. South Africans have substantial economic interests in Rhodesia, but more important, they regard the UN sanctions against Rhodesia as a dangerous precedent, because international critics of apartheid have long advocated mandatory sanctions against South Africa. Responsible South African leaders feared that blatant participation in Rhodesian "sanctions busting" would spur new demands for mandatory sanctions against South Africa. South African leaders also saw early

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on that UDI would goad Rhodesian black nationalists toward insurgency, that Rhodesian appeals for military aid would strike responsive chords among South Africans, and that South African assistance to Rhodesia would further inflame hostile attitudes throughout black Africa.

3. Such considerations led then prime minister Verwoerd to say privately within a year of UDI that a Rhodesian settlement would be good for South Africa, provided the transition to majority rule was stretched out for many years. By mid-1974, when it became clear that the new government in Portugal would soon abandon its African colonies, Prime Minister Vorster perceived that Pretoria had to choose between openly propping up Smith or working toward coexistence with a black government in Mozambique. By the end of the year Vorster was discreetly pushing Smith toward a compromise settlement that, he hoped, would bring about an orderly transition to a moderate, black government within five to ten years. As the four "front-line" presidents became involved in the Rhodesian negotiations, Vorster envisaged a Rhodesian settlement opening an era of collaboration between Pretoria and black governments throughout southern Africa. Vorster's dealings with Smith, however,

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have been hampered by the gap between the strong pro-Rhodesia attitudes among South African whites and Vorster's own stated goal.

4. In the initial response to UDI, former prime minister Verwoerd declared "non-interference" and "business-as-usual" to be the principles governing South Africa's relations with Rhodesia; these watchwords have in fact marked the limits of subsequent South African actions. Pretoria has withheld diplomatic recognition of the Smith regime and refrained from open economic or military aid. Nevertheless, South Africa has provided Rhodesia with substantial economic and military support, which has become increasingly vital for the Smith regime under the cumulative impact of sanctions and insurgency.

5. The most important single aspect of South African support for Rhodesia since UDI has been providing transit for an increasing portion of Rhodesia's overseas trade. In 1973 some 70 percent of Rhodesia's overseas trade passed through seaports in Mozambique; since Mozambique closed its borders with Rhodesia last March, South African ports and railroads have handled almost all of Rhodesia's overseas trade. Much of the foreign capital invested in Rhodesia

since UDI has come from South Africa, and South Africans have bought significant amounts of the Rhodesian exports that have been embargoed elsewhere. Meanwhile, the South African government has stood ostensibly aloof, neither enforcing international sanctions nor openly facilitating the manifold rearrangements. In reality the government-operated railroads and harbors have made substantial preparations to handle additional traffic from Rhodesia, government officials have accepted patently false documentation that masks the origin of Rhodesian produce, and Pretoria may have provided some secret loans to Salisbury.

South African Military Aid

6. Although South African military aid to Rhodesia has not been extensive, it has become critical with the recent expansion of foreign-backed insurgency. Salisbury depends heavily on Pretoria for military materiel because UN arms sanctions have been more widely observed than the ban on non-military trade. Sparse reporting indicates that at least 12 Alouette III helicopters from the South African Air Force are stationed in Rhodesia, and that Pretoria is supplying some Eland armored cars, spare parts for ground equipment and aircraft, small arms, and munitions. It seems

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unlikely that the mounting tempo of Rhodesian counterinsurgency operations since last January could have been sustained without some increase in the flow of supplies from or through South Africa.

7. The South African and Rhodesian military establishments have long maintained close, albeit informal, contacts. A secret training agreement enables Rhodesians to receive training in South Africa and provides for small numbers of South African instructors and observers in Rhodesia. Pretoria, however, has kept its military presence to the minimum that is essential to implement its ancillary support for the Rhodesian counterinsurgency program. The only major exception was the gradual buildup of the South African paramilitary police contingent in Rhodesia from several hundred in 1972 to at least 1,500 by late 1973. Although casualties incurred by this contingent made apparent its combat role, official publicity glossed over the extent of the buildup and implied the force was in Rhodesia primarily to gain realistic training.

Efforts at Negotiation

8. The gradual withdrawal of the South African police from Rhodesia, completed in August 1975, was an integral

part of Vorster's joint mediation efforts, along with Kaunda, Khama, Machel and Nyerere, that aimed to bring about a compromise settlement between Smith and the black nationalists. The joint efforts began with discreet exchanges of views between Vorster and Kaunda. It was Vorster's urging that induced Smith in October 1974 to release imprisoned nationalist leaders for talks in Lusaka with Kaunda and the exiled insurgents, to conclude a truce with the newly formed ANC in December, to proceed with the settlement talks with the combined ANC leadership that collapsed a year ago, and to renew negotiations last December with Joshua Nkomo. Vorster's prime lever throughout was the police withdrawal. He warned Smith repeatedly that the withdrawal would proceed, even if he failed to conclude a settlement. Meanwhile, the withdrawal induced the four African presidents to restrain guerrilla incursions from their countries.

9. The agreement on modalities that preceded the Victoria Falls conference included a pledge that Pretoria, along with the governments of Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia, would guarantee any settlement that resulted from the conference. Vorster's leading role in the preliminary negotiations was further dramatized by his public

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meeting with Kaunda at Victoria Falls. Since the collapse of the talks and the resurgence of guerrilla warfare, however, Vorster has avoided any open move that might suggest he is pressuring Smith to compromise. He reportedly has warned Smith privately that South African troops will not come to his rescue if the insurgency grows worse, but a government minister's statement to this effect was denied when it appeared in print.

10. The sensitivity of South African leaders to pro-white Rhodesia sentiments among their own constituents is also reflected in Foreign Minister Muller's speech at a provincial congress of the National Party on August 13. Muller intimated disapproval of a recent Rhodesian strike against guerrillas inside Mozambique, implied that Pretoria might welcome a peaceful settlement that resulted in majority rule, but stressed approval of efforts to guarantee the rights and interests of the white minority.

11. Vorster's extreme caution since the abortive Victoria Falls conference indicates that sobering experience has inclined him to adhere more closely to the established guidelines of "non-interference" and business-as-usual." Smith has implied in press and television interviews that Vorster

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pushed him against his better judgment into negotiating with the insurgents instead of crushing them. Vorster's sensitivity to such criticism will make him very reluctant to show his hand again in settlement negotiations unless he feels sure the settlement will demonstrate that he is salvaging more than Smith could from the wreckage of white rule in Rhodesia. Only such an outcome could vindicate, in the South African political context, any significant departure from the "non-interference" doctrine.

12. Vorster will also find it difficult to impose any substantial restrictions on Rhodesia's trade with or through South Africa in order to coerce Smith. Any South African prime minister would be hard pressed to repudiate Pretoria's stand against politically motivated interference with normal international trade. Although Vorster reportedly warned Smith before Mozambique closed its borders with Rhodesia last March that the South African transportation system could not handle the volume of Rhodesian traffic then going through Mozambique, this in fact was accomplished. At the time, as Vorster knew, Smith's talks with Nkomo were stalled; the break-off was announced several weeks later. During the interval, Vorster could have coerced Smith by quietly impeding the rerouting of Rhodesian traffic from Mozambique to South Africa.

13. In the military field as well Vorster will find it hard to impose a substantial curtailment of supplies to Rhodesia. Vorster orchestrated the police withdrawal in order to push Smith toward settlement talks, but the two types of support for the Rhodesian counterinsurgency program are not analogous from Vorster's standpoint. The police buildup was a departure from the non-interference doctrine; when the withdrawal was completed, a South African spokesman said it was intended to avoid any suggestion of interference in Rhodesian affairs. By contrast, Rhodesia probably pays cash for South African military supplies; the Rhodesians would complain--and most South Africans would agree--that a cutoff of military sales would be a violation of the non-interference doctrine.

14. Furthermore, the police withdrawal was completed during a truce between Smith and the ANC leaders, and as the four African presidents who had joined Vorster in backing the truce were maintaining some restraints on the guerrillas. Since late 1975, however, the four presidents have been publicly backing the "liberation war," and as long as they maintain their belligerent stance, it will be politically very difficult for Vorster to curtail South Africa's current sup-

port for the Rhodesian counterinsurgency program. Rather, if the insurgency continues to expand with obvious foreign backing, Vorster will be under increasing political pressures to provide additional military supplies, and eventually to send combat troops.

Vorster's Present Position

15. Vorster's current attitudes suggest that while he will be reluctant to curtail military shipments, he will try to resist pressures to increase them. His hope is that a worsening military situation will make Smith, or a successor, come to terms with some grouping of black nationalists that might maintain a stable government. We believe that Vorster would do his utmost to avoid sending troops to Rhodesia, except to protect an evacuation of whites. Sending troops to defend Smith would incur a high risk of hostilities with Mozambique, which would forfeit the important economic ties that Pretoria has carefully maintained since Machel came to power. Furthermore, the outcome of South Africa's military intervention in Angola apparently has hardened Vorster's belief that South African troops in Rhodesia would provoke additional Communist aid to the insurgents. He appears especially anxious to avert the increased Soviet presence in

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Mozambique that would accompany a buildup of Soviet or Cuban aid to the insurgents.

16. Nevertheless, even though Vorster is the unrivaled leader of the ruling National Party, he usually avoids imposing a decision regarding any controversial issue. Rather, he straddles and temporizes until there is broad acceptance of whatever he believes should be done. Because he appears especially anxious to avoid a divisive showdown on the Rhodesia problem, the limits he sets on additional supplies to Smith are likely to be somewhat flexible. If the Rhodesian security forces appear to be hard pressed but staving off defeat, we cannot discount the possibility that Vorster would allow some increases in the flow of supplies as long as a truce was unattainable.

17. Vorster presumably will be more anxious to disengage from Rhodesia if the Rhodesian forces repeatedly conduct major strikes inside Mozambique, Zambia, or Botswana. He would regard such highly provocative actions as undercutting the ultimate purpose of his quest for a regional detente--to prevent neighboring countries from serving as staging areas for black insurgency in South Africa or Namibia. Many South Africans, however, are likely to take an opposite view; they

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discount the feasibility of detente with the black states, and would applaud aggressive actions by the Rhodesians as showing that Rhodesia is still an effective bulwark for South Africa.

18. Any escalation of the Rhodesian conflict is likely to intensify current controversy on the subject among South Africans. A dramatic expansion of foreign-based insurgency in Namibia would similarly heat up the inconclusive ideological debate that has simmered within the National Party. Whenever such untoward happenings abroad touch off rhetorical fireworks at home, Vorster is likely to sidestep doctrinal debate and focus on the practicalities, assessing proposed actions in terms of costs and resources.

Restraints on South African Supplies

19. Confronted with calls for increasing the flow of weapons to Rhodesia or for sending combat troops, Vorster is likely to ask whether South Africa can afford such outlays. The costs of increasing military shipments to Rhodesia would sooner or later exceed Rhodesia's limited foreign exchange holdings and pose the issue of whether South Africa should assume the financial burden. Furthermore, South Africa cannot export large amounts of indigenously produced

arms, equipment, and supplies without depleting reserve stocks for its own armed forces.

20. Deciding the affordable limits of South African military aid to Rhodesia would involve Pretoria in assessing a broad range of variables, from needed troop strengths in South Africa and Namibia to prospects for the South African economy, which is highly vulnerable to adverse international trends. If Vorster does feel it necessary to take a public stand against aid for Rhodesia, he might well rest his case on the persistence of serious rioting among South Africa's urban blacks since last June, and on the economic exigencies.

21. The rioting that has spread from Soweto to many black townships across the country is by far the most extensive urban violence in South African history. So far the regular and paramilitary police have coped fairly effectively, and the military forces, with minor exceptions, have not been directly involved. Hence there is no immediate conflict between internal security needs and sending some combat troops to Rhodesia. On the other hand, South African whites are deeply worried over the extent of the rioting and the indications that militant students are trying--with some success--to involve blacks in work stoppages and other actions that

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could, if continued, cause serious industrial disruption. Although the rioting has spurred some public criticism of the government's performance, on balance we believe the sense of emergency would favor public acceptance of any curtailment of aid to Rhodesia that Vorster presents as essential for internal security.

22. Pretoria's need to conserve dwindling foreign exchange reserves may become the most persuasive reason--to South Africa--for curtailing military support whenever the Rhodesians are unable to pay for procurement or openly appeal for South African troops. South Africa's foreign exchange bind, due to falling gold prices and other international trends since early 1975, has been brought home to the public by appreciable currency devaluations, import controls, and increases in living costs. Even before the Soweto riots, commentators were warning that unemployment among urban blacks was increasing at a rate that could fuel smoldering unrest. Government leaders have acknowledged that major increases in military expenditures since 1974 are a significant factor in the foreign exchange bind.

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