

The Effect of American Policy toward South Africa  
on Black Africa's Policy toward the United States

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It is open to speculation whether American policy toward the American Negro or American policy toward the Republic of South Africa is the more profound in its conditioning of African attitudes toward the United States. There is, however, no question at all that these are the two most important factors affecting relations between the United States and the newly-independent African nations.

This is worth noting at a time when we are being asked both directly through foreign aid appropriations and indirectly through United Nations technical assistance, to make substantial increases in our contributions to African development and economic growth. Every dollar we spend in Africa by way of aid and development projects is literally discounted to something in the neighborhood of a nickel as a consequence of the continued plight of the American Negro and continued support through investment and indifference of the apartheid regime in South Africa.

This is of necessity a highly subjective report of public opinion, particularly among leadership groups in East and West Africa. However, I cannot conceive of anyone working in newly-independent African states who would not have formed opinions similar to those that I am about to express, and I am sure there will be others at our Conference whose verification of my subjectivity is the nearest I can come to scientific proof.

We will be hearing from others something about the extent to which American and British investment continues to buoy the South African economy and the extent to which trade with Western nations continues to allow that economy to expand. The first point to note is that the sort of information that is being made available to us at this Conference is also made available to Africans throughout the rest of the Continent and particularly to the urbanized and leadership groups. In all of the conventional communications media -- which are becoming "conventional" in Africa also: newspapers, radio, and television -- South African events receive great and continuous prominence. This is in very large part due to the fact that no other subject, except the most imminent political crises at home, so interests Africans as does the persecution of their brothers in South Africa. The sole possible exception is that of alleged persecution of their "Afro-American" brothers in the United States. It is not quite irrelevant to say that the influence in new African states of far-leftwing sympathizers has tended to concentrate in the communications media and that there are few occasions when an opportunity is missed to point out the extent of American capitalist involvement with the Republic of South Africa. On the other hand, this comment (which I have made softly, I hope) must be balanced with the observation that there has in recent months also been a small crisis in relations between the Organization of African Unity and the Peking Government of China because of allegations made by that organization, and widely publicized in the African press and radio, of increasing trade between Communist China and South Africa.

Adding up these two integers should not, however, give us cause for complacency, let alone satisfaction. To say that blame is fairly apportioned between East and West by Africans would be to say nothing more than that most of the blame fixes to the United States and to Britain.

To gauge the reaction of African states to our continued economic support of the Republic of South Africa, one need merely recall the feeling in this country toward nations that, during the war, traded with Nazi Germany. Black Africa feels itself nothing else than at war with the Republic of South Africa, and it does not accept America's right to be neutral.

This raises an important question of ethics and policy.

I have often asked Africans why they will not accept our claim to be neutral in their controversy with South Africa, while they, at the same time, demand of us their right to be neutral in the controversy between the United States and the Communist nations. The reply, which I find persuasive, is that South Africa has repeatedly been found to be in violation of its international obligations under the United Nations Charter, that the United States and Britain by their votes in the Security Council have at last subscribed to this almost universally-held view, and that no nation that is a member of the United Nations has a right to remain neutral in the defence of the obligations of the Charter. Secondly, it is pointed out that the African states do not, by their neutrality, provide the principal financial and moral wherewithall of either Capitalism or Communism. On the other hand, continued United States "neutrality" toward South Africa is a very primary cause of South Africa's continued ability to withstand the pressures of world opinion and to defy the United Nations Charter. Finally, Afro-Asian neutrality between democracy and communism is designed to effect a balance of power with which both sides can live in peace. No such balance is being preserved between the Africans in South Africa and the white supremacists. To remain neutral between the oppressed black and the oppressing white in the South African situation is like remaining neutral in the fight between a cat and a canary.

Finally, it is also pointed out, also quite rightly in my opinion, that nothing allegedly being done to suppress human freedom in Russia or its Eastern European neighbors compares with the inhumanity of South African apartheid.

Not only is there a keen awareness of the actual size of American economic commitments to the Republic of South Africa, which produces deep resentment, virtually cancelling out the good our diplomatic strictures against South Africa and our economic aid to under-developed countries have done, but there is a deep and realistic sense of despair that grows out of an awareness that nothing African states may themselves do by way of economic action against South Africa does much good so long as the support of the United States and Britain has not been enlisted for the cause. It was, for example, decided by the Organization of African Unity that South African airplanes would not be permitted to use stop-over facilities in any independent African country. The effect of this, however, has merely been to increase the air traffic carried by American and British lines. Similarly, commodity boycotts by African states have proven puny and ineffective when set against growing markets for South African products in Britain and the United States. Brave African efforts to rally independent black nations in a series of actions short of war have repeatedly broken against the cliffs of American and British non-participation. As a result, these actions by African states have for

the most part proven ineffective and have not infrequently done the African states more harm than they have the Republic of South Africa. This is both discouraging and humiliating; and the sum of discouragement and humiliation is not unjustly billed to the nations that, by their laissez-faire policies toward South Africa, have made the failure of African efforts inevitable.

Not only frustration and humiliation has resulted from attempts to impose African boycotts without American and British support, but also sharp divisions within the camp of African nationalism. Countries like Malawi and Zambia, which have a close dependence on the Republic of South Africa as outlets for trade and surplus labor, have felt themselves compelled to leave the main stream of active African measures against South Africa in circumstances where these measures, because of lack of British and American support, would be unlikely to bring results within a time-limit set by the ability of these new nations to withstand the economic consequences on their own economies. Dr. Banda, in other words, is unlikely to order Malawi labor to boycott South Africa until there is a substantial likelihood that such a boycott would be part of a campaign likely to bring rapid and conclusive results. On the other hand, his failure to take a stronger line against the Republic of South Africa tends to set him against other African leaders. Indirectly, therefore, it is felt that British and American policy has made this baleful division among African states inevitable.

In the final analysis, however, the real consequence of American policy toward the Republic of South Africa is in the form of a psychological alienation that makes all Americans, and all American aid, however genuinely and understandingly tendered, suspect in black Africa. It cannot be otherwise, for how can a nation genuinely and disinterestedly proffer to black Africa a hand of friendship while the other hand is in the till counting the earnings of apartheid? To the average African, United States policy by its very bi-polar hypocrisy in supporting both South Africa and the new nations of Africa has become a totally amoral one. Indeed, United States foreign policy and United States democracy itself is increasingly being seen in terms of such bi-polarity and hypocrisy: a policy of one standard for me and another for you, a policy of the high preachment and the fast buck. Derived from an assessment of our policy toward the Republic of South Africa, this image serves Africans to explain American policy in Vietnam, in Mississippi, and, indeed, in the rest of Africa itself. All our fruit is being known by the rottenest.