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SOUTHERN AFRICA CONFLICTS- a threat to world peace?

This article was originally printed in *New World Outlook*, June, 1976. The author, George M. Houser, is executive director of the American Committee on Africa. For reasons of space, the original article has been edited.

The world is full of little-known places which most Americans only become conscious of when a catastrophe brings them to notice, or when they become the focus for a clash of big power "interests" threatening world peace. Vietnam was such a place. Until the middle 1960's when American soldiers were sent there in the thousands, few Americans would have known where to look for Vietnam on the map. Africa is another area of the world which has been obscure for many Americans. Only a few times have African countries been brought dramatically to world attention. Ghana's independence in 1957 brought the continent into focus as symbolic of a new era of Africa's emergence from colonial domination. The Congo was headlined in 1960 when long years of Belgian colonial domination was ending and Patrice Lumumba was briefly the Prime Minister of a new country with Russian backing and American opposition. In the last few months Angola has been the center of world attention.

A relatively small number of Americans would have known Angola was an African country until late in 1975.

But quite suddenly Angola was catapulted into the headlines. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger made a speech in Detroit on November 24, 1975, in which he accused the Soviet Union and Cuba of intervening in an internal struggle for power in Angola

and warned that continued intervention would affect "other relationships." For about three months after this Angola events were featured in the news because the near confrontation between the United States and the USSR threatened the uneasy detente between the super powers. The critical question now is whether this near confrontation between the big powers in Angola has ended as far as Africa is concerned or whether it will emerge again over the issues at stake in southern Africa. My conviction is that conditions are present which make southern Africa one of the areas of the world where internal conflicts can produce major big power confrontations and that this can threaten world peace. This conviction needs analysis and is based on the following factors:

The Stakes in Southern Africa

First, the stakes in southern Africa are great. Geographically the area



stretches from Zaire and Tanzania in the north to the Republic of South Africa in the south, encompassing twelve nations in a region larger than the United States. Whites are something less than 5% of the total regional population of 700 million, and live mainly in South Africa (about 4.2 million), and Rhodesia (280,000).

The area as a whole is rich, but not all the countries in it are. Every important mineral is found there. The region is the world's number one producer of manganese, gold, diamonds, chrome, cobalt, and platinum. In addition there is vast hydroelectric power and an abundance of fisheries, and productive agricultural and pasture lands. It is suspected that there are large untapped resources of oil such as was found in the Cabinda region of Angola and offshore from Zaire. South Africa alone is a very rich country. It is responsible for 60% of the world's gold production and is the third ranking producer of uranium.

Military strategists point to the critical location of southern Africa. In the east it fronts on the Indian Ocean and in the west on the South Atlantic. The shipping lanes around the Cape of Good Hope are used constantly and are the only effective alternative to the Suez Canal.

Oppressive Conditions Persist

Second, oppressive condition.

and resistance to change in the areas of southern Africa still under minority white control make for bitter conflict. Southern Africa is an area of racial, political, and economic exploitation. In Rhodesia only about 5% of the total population of some 6½ million are white. Yet the whites have 50 of the 66 seats in parliament. African protest has been strictly controlled by the Unlawful Organization Act (under which major African political organizations have been banned). Thousands of politically active Africans have been arrested under the Preventive Detention Act. The Law and Order Maintenance Act grants further powers to the police to arrest nationalists and ban meetings. The Land Apportionment Act and the Native Land Husbandry Act puts the best land in the hands of the whites. 71% of the country's most arable land is owned by Europeans. The Africans have only 13% of this best land.

The Industrial Conciliation Act limits trade union rights so that Africans are virtually powerless to change their working conditions. The average annual income of blacks in 1974 was \$641. For whites it was \$7,152. The white-controlled government spends only \$68.14 per black child in school while spending \$746.00 for each white child. Henry Kamm wrote in the *NY Times* March 17th, "There are no visible poor whites, no whites in menial jobs and it seems unlikely that there is a white who has one of this country's 6.1 million blacks as his working superior. There appeared to be few (white) Rhodesians to whom this state of affairs does not seem to be worth fighting for. . . ."

In Namibia, out of a population of something less than a million, only 13% are white. Africans do not have voting rights and none are represented in the legislature. 65% of the land is in the hands of the whites. All African land is under an agency called "The Bantu Trust." The South African government has controlled Namibia since the end of the First World War when the territory, previously a German colony, was put under the Mandate system of the League of Nations with South Africa administering it.



By Andy for the Philadelphia Inquirer

The South African government has encouraged the division of the country among ethnic groups. At present a Constitutional Conference is in session which may take several years to do its work if it follows the South African proposal. It is assumed that out of these discussions will emerge a loose federation of tribal groups that then can be controlled economically and politically by South Africa. The principal liberation movement in the area, The Southwest African Peoples Organization (SWAPO), recognized by the United Nations and the OAU, (Organization of African Unity) as the legitimate representative of the Namibian people, refuses to participate in the Conference under the restrictive terms and framework established by South Africa.

The Economy of South Africa

In South Africa, approximately 19% of the nearly 25 million population are white. Yet the black majority is not allowed to vote or be elected to public office. The major African political organizations have been banned. 87% of the land is reserved for whites, and only 13% for Africans. Africans are not

permitted to travel within the country without special permission. An intricate system of passes regulates the Africans if they wish to leave the areas designated for them.

The economy of South Africa rests upon the labor of the Africans. Theoretically Africans are permitted to live only in their "homeland", ethnic areas which only a few years ago were called "native reserves." A system of migratory labor has been imposed on the Africans, who cannot sustain themselves economically in the areas to which they are restricted and therefore must travel periodically, with special permission, either to European farms or to urban areas for jobs. About 47% of the African people live in the "homelands" or Bantustans. Over half of the blacks live below the poverty datum line which for a family of five is set at \$120.00 monthly. The ratio of white earning power to black is 6:1 and higher.

The white minority in South Africa intend to hold on to their privileged way of life indefinitely. As in Namibia, the South African government, under its system of apartheid, is imposing the division

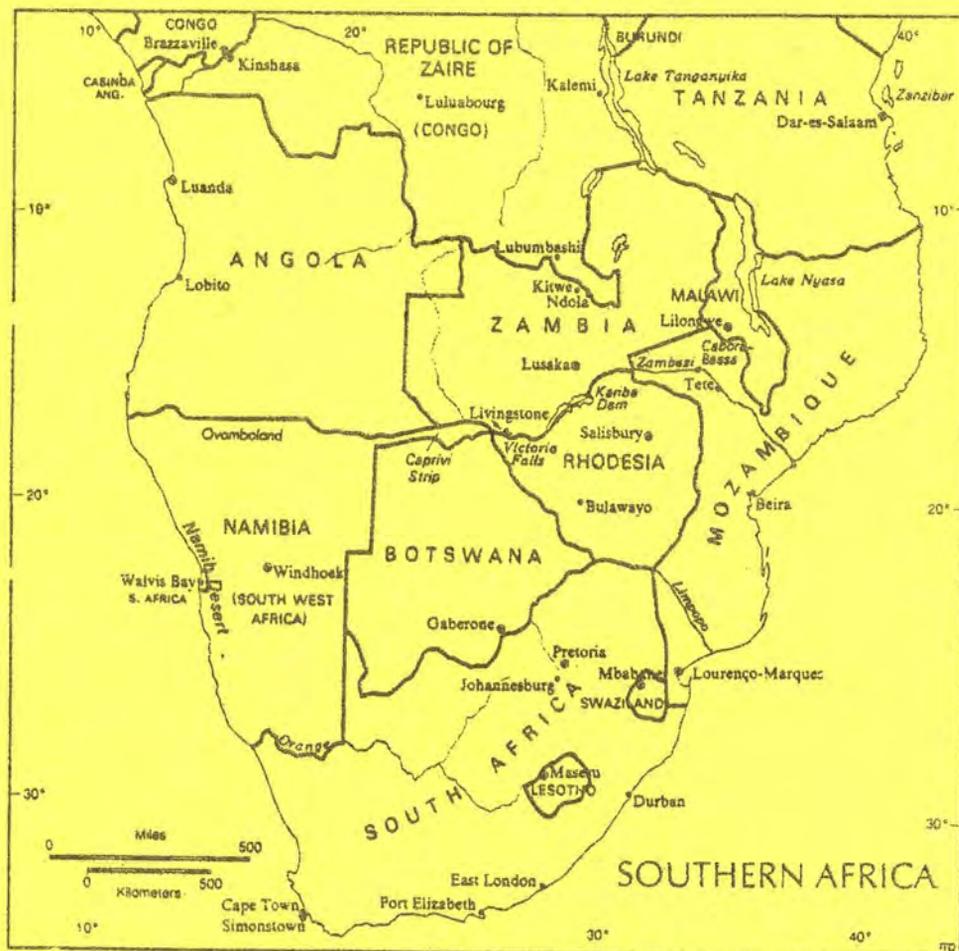
of the country according to tribal origins. And yet this division is being carried out in such a way as not to hinder the economic growth of the white areas. A myriad of laws curtail African nationalist opposition through the Suppression of Communism Act, the Sabotage Act, etc. Africans who are in active opposition to the regime are working deeply underground, are in prison, under banning orders, or in exile. In spite of the highly touted "changes" which are supposed to have taken place in the pattern of apartheid (with some few hotels now open to black overseas visitors, or park benches no longer designated "for Europeans only") there has been no shift whatsoever in the basic laws of prohibiting the Africans from participating in the political or economic decision-making of the country.

The Resort to Violence

Third, African reliance on violence as a means of bringing change has been accepted as a necessity. The struggle for independence in Africa over the last 20 years has not primarily been characterized by violence. Up until 1961, most African countries achieved independence through negotiations with the colonial power involved. With the exception of the independence war in Algeria against the French and the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, the French, British, the Belgian Congo, and the Spanish colonies gained their freedom with little violence. The African National Congress of South Africa was one of the movements most dedicated to non-violence until 1960. But this changed suddenly and dramatically with the Sharpeville Massacre of March, 1960, in South Africa when police fired on unarmed Africans peacefully demonstrating against the pass system, killing 69 and wounding about 170. The African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress of South Africa were banned. Constitutional methods of change were impossible.

The Lusaka Manifesto

In April, 1969, independent states of East and Central Africa met in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, and adopted what became known as the Lusaka Manifesto. This was directed



toward the white minority regimes of southern Africa. It reflected the desire of African independent states for change by peaceful methods. The statement said in part "We would urge our brothers in the resistance movements to use peaceful methods of struggle even at the cost of some compromise on the timing of change. But while peaceful progress is blocked by actions of those at present in power in states of southern Africa, we have no choice but to give the peoples of those territories all the support of which we are capable in their struggle against their oppressors." In effect this statement was saying, "We hope that change can be peaceful, but if not then we will support the armed struggle."

The African independent states hoped that the white minority governments of Rhodesia, Namibia and South Africa would learn something from the Portuguese experience. The independence of Mozambique and Angola flowing from the coup of April 1974, brought new realities

into southern Africa. Rhodesia was now bordered by three independent states—Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana; South Africa by Mozambique and Botswana; Namibia by Angola and Botswana. Because of South Africa's great strength, the two countries most exposed to the pressure of change were Rhodesia and Namibia.

Rhodesia's Vulnerability

Rhodesia is the most vulnerable to change, and yet the small white minority of that country seems determined to hold on to the bitter end, inviting a conflict which Prime Minister Vorster of South Africa has called "too ghastly to contemplate." On March 3rd, 1976, in spite of the sacrifices that were involved, Mozambique closed the border with Rhodesia. This meant that Rhodesian goods could no longer be sent by rail through Mozambique to the Indian Ocean port of Beira. President Samora Machel of Mozambique said that his country would now go on a war footing.

An estimated 20,000 troops of Zimbabwe, the Africans' name for their country, are in Mozambique prepared for attacks on the white minority regime of Rhodesia. The negotiations between Smith and Nkomo have been halted. Even President Kaunda has said that there now is no alternative except armed struggle.

In Namibia and on its borders, SWAPO has been rapidly building up its military potential and now has thousands of men trained for military action. Despite the recent internal conflict in Angola and despite the presence of South African troops in northern Namibia and possibly still in southern Angola, Angola is a sanctuary for the forces prepared to act for majority rule by military means.

Recognizing the pressures, South Africa has gone to great lengths towards the creation of a militarized police state. Within the last three years military expenditures in South Africa have more than doubled and now amount to more than a billion dollars a year. South Africa produces about 80% of its light weapons, more than 100 kinds of ammunition, rifles, explosives and armored cars. White South Africa is preparing itself for a struggle which will in part take military form.

The International Implications

Fourth, the struggle in southern Africa has assumed major international dimensions. Those who may have thought that the conflict in southern Africa would remain local or regional should now have learned differently from the Angolan experience. Angola reflected at least two things about the struggle in southern Africa: (1) That South Africa was prepared to commit significant military force in the southern Africa conflict. The Defense Minister of

South Africa said that at least 4000 to 5000 South African troops were either in southern Angola or in northern Namibia near the Angolan border during the contest for control of that country. (2) The major powers of the world could very easily be involved in southern Africa.

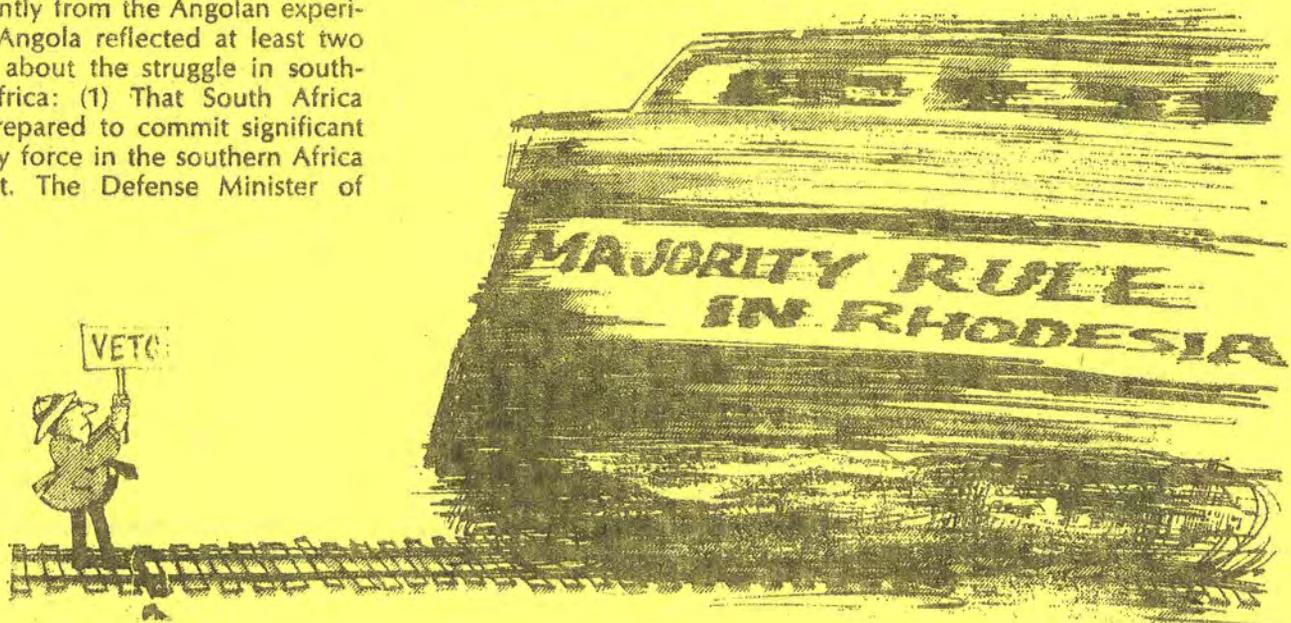
The struggle for majority rule in Namibia and South Africa is quite a different story. The conflicts are internationalized inevitably. The United Nations, with support from all the major powers, has voted to end South Africa's administration of Namibia. A Council for Namibia and a Commissioner for Namibia have been established. SWAPO has received assistance politically and militarily from both the Soviet Union and China. South Africa has been defying the United Nations and the present Constitutional Conference which it is sponsoring runs counter to basic principles which the UN General Assembly has adopted calling for a united and independent Namibia. It is very likely that South Africa would make Namibia its first line of defense and would make a major commitment of military force against black nationalist encroachments.

The apartheid system and racism in South Africa have been international issues ever since the United Nations was created after the Second World War. Virtually all the nations of the world have condemned apartheid including the United States. Yet the United States maintains a vested interest in the economy of white-ruled South Africa. American investments have risen by a billion dollars within the last decade and now are approaching 1.5 billion dollars. Between 300

and 400 American corporations have interests in South Africa, in-

cluding such major companies as International Telephone and Telegraph, General Motors, International Business Machines, and Union Carbide. Although the United States has time and again attacked the scheme of apartheid in public statements, the government has avoided any known assistance to the African liberation movements there. In contrast with the position of the United States, the other two major powers, China and the Soviet Union, have no economic interests in South Africa and have actively been supporting one liberation movement or another. These movements are not likely to appeal to the United States or Western Europe for assistance as their struggle against the white minority regime of South Africa develops. Some of the same issues may be involved in the South African struggle as were involved in Angola. The difference may be that white South Africa is committed to an all-out military defense and has strength to back it up. Also American interests in South Africa both economically and logistically in a geo-political

sense are extensive. White South Africa already depicts the issue, not just in South Africa but in all of southern Africa, in communist vs. anti-communist terms. Judging from Angolan experience, this fits entirely within the frame of reference of the United States. The consequences of the United States commitment to give any degree of support to the preservation of a white supremacy government of South Africa will be disastrous.



By Anita for the Philadelphia Inquirer