

ZIMBABWE LIBERATION: 1976

Problems and Prospects

On March 31, 1976, David Ennals, Great Britain's minister of state for foreign affairs, told the House of Commons that Britain will not intervene militarily in Rhodesia.

Why did he make this announcement?

Probably because the draft prepared last year outlining Britain's plans for armed intervention says that "premature disclosure of such plans could prove harmful" to their effectiveness.

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As the struggle to liberate all of Southern Africa from white minority domination intensifies, the spotlight is now on the fight being waged by the people of Zimbabwe to free themselves of the tyrannical grip of Ian Smith's Rhodesian government.

The freedom fighters led by the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) face new obstacles. The main danger now threatening their success is the possibility that Britain may intervene to install a neo-colonial regime headed by one of the so-called "moderate" black leaders.

A document prepared for the British Foreign Office in 1975 indicates that armed intervention may be imminent. The document was obtained and exposed by Tapson A. Mawere, chief representative of ZANU in North America and the Caribbean.

(In mid-February of this year, British Foreign Secretary James Callaghan announced publicly that the Labour government might order troops to Rhodesia, but he implied that this would only happen if Cuban troops fighting in Angola were to enter the Rhodesian conflict. The 1975 document reveals, however, that plans to send British or Commonwealth forces were being considered before there were any Cuban troops in Angola. Ennals' more recent announcement, appearing to cancel Callaghan's statement, actually only continues the subterfuge.)

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Written some time after the biennial meeting of the Commonwealth Prime Ministers held in Kingston, Jamaica, April 28-May 6, 1975, the document begins by asking the question, "What would be the most appropriate and acceptable form of peace-keeping force to minimize violence during the transition to majority rule?"

It goes on to consider three possible "scenarios" that might develop as power is transferred from minority (white) to majority (black) rule, with a number of different variants -- a total of seven

different military/political situations. The use of troops is recommended in five of the variants.

For one of the scenarios, only British troops are recommended. Troops from Zambia, New Zealand, Australia, Mozambique, Tanzania, Canada, Ireland, Botswana, and South Africa are suggested in other situations.

If there is "a sudden collapse of the white administration" and if a strong and united black government takes power, the document concludes that "it is difficult to see how or when a peace-keeping force could become involved."

Even if this were to happen, the document suggests that it might be "appropriate" for British and South African troops to "assist in the evacuation of those whites who wished to leave the country or who had been declared undesirable."

If neighboring black governments side with different Zimbabwe nationalist groups, the document says, the political problems associated with the introduction of foreign troops would be "almost insurmountable."

But if the governments of Zambia, Mozambique, and Tanzania would all put pressure on the black politicians to achieve a settlement "which might exclude the most militant nationalists," the problem "would be considerably eased." In that case the document suggests that during the transfer of power troops from those countries should patrol the northern and eastern borders of Rhodesia, possibly augmented by units from Britain, New Zealand, Australia, and Canada, while South African troops would patrol the southern border, possibly augmented by troops from Britain and Botswana. This scenario assumes that South African Prime Minister B. J. Vorster will play the role of "Trojan Horse" in Rhodesia, persuading Ian Smith to accept that result.

In the event that Ian Smith's Security Forces stage a coup and establish a multi-racial government "pre-empting a take-over by a guerrilla army," the document suggests sending a relatively small contingent of British troops to "act as an arbiter of any inter-community conflicts." (British intelligence seems to think that the Special Air Force is less loyal to Smith than the Rhodesian Light Infantry.) This possibility is considered "very remote."

If a military stalemate forces the two sides to seriously negotiate the transition to majority rule, a "relatively large" armed force might be sent on "Commonwealth initiative," consisting of troops from all the countries mentioned earlier. Here Britain would be "taking advantage of perceived cultural affinities between whites in Southern Rhodesia and those in Australia and New Zealand." Their tasks would be to guard the borders, to occupy the major urban centers, and "to have a mobile force which could interpose itself between the areas held by the administration and those under the control of the nationalist guerrillas."

The final "scenario" is the one that seems closest to what is now happening: a breakdown of negotiations, intensified guerrilla warfare, and military action by Rhodesia against the territory of one of its neighbors. (Rhodesian troops crossed the Mozambique border in "hot pursuit" of guerrillas. President Samora Machel of Mozambique retaliated by closing the Rhodesian border on March 3.)

The document's recommendation in this situation is "intervention by Britain as the theoretically responsible colonial power," noting that the Zambian government had previously made "offers of facilities" to supply troops.

"Any intervention force would have to take into account the fact that Rhodesian security forces (assuming they chose to resist external intervention) would be fighting on home ground and have the advantages of a defending army. An intervention force would also have to look beyond the military task of capturing major urban centers (presumably by dropping sufficiently large numbers of parachutists since the airfields, initially at least, would not be available) by including a unit of Engineers (to repair and maintain communications and transport), a signals unit, a back-up capability (for supplies, etc.), medical teams and an administrative staff (to supervise during the transition period). Given these requirements an intervention force would probably have to be at least a division -- probably nearer two divisions in strength."

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Is this the British plan? By now it may have been superseded by a more detailed version; the author of this document wrote that the report contained "no more than hasty and tentative suggestions," recommended that plans should be "worked out in greater detail and more rigorous fashions," and warned that it was important to have "a plan worked out in advance" rather than "relying on last minute, ill-considered ad hoc responses to situations."

"What has any party to gain from setting up such a force?" asks the document's author. "Preservation of existing economic infrastructure" and "preservation of western interests" are two of the answers given.

Who is likely to lose?" Smith and his backers, of course, but also ZANU, "whose fighters have put minority rule at risk." In other words, the people who have most effectively fought to free their country are to be the victims of the British plan.

Meanwhile, pressure from right-wing Tories in Parliament calling for armed assistance to "kith and kin" white Rhodesian settlers may play into the hands of the Labour architects of this neo-colonialist scheme, tipping the scales in favor of intervention, and providing an excuse to reverse Ennals' policy statement.

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Britain is not the only government whose contingency plans have been laid out in order to preserve "western interests" and the "existing economic infrastructure" in Southern Africa. In October 1974 columnist Jack Anderson and *Esquire* writer Tad Szulc exposed the U. S. government's plan detailed in National Security Study Memorandum 39 of 1969:

On April 10, 1969, a memo from Henry Kissinger to the U. S. Secretaries of State and Defense and the CIA Director directed them to draw up "a comprehensive review of U. S. policy towards southern Africa (south of CongoK. and Tanzania)." In December of that year, after considering five possible options submitted by the National Security Council, Nixon approved the "Tar Baby" choice, which called for secret support for the white-supremacist states and sharply curtailed aid to neighboring black governments.

The policy called for relaxing the sanctions against South Africa, and said that in Rhodesia the U. S. should "retain the consulate, gradually relax sanctions and consider eventual recognition." It called for military aid to support the Portuguese colonial regimes.

So when the U. S. officially closed its Rhodesian consulate in 1970 under heavy pressure, it remained faithful to "Tar Baby" by keeping open an unofficial liaison office with Rhodesia in Washington. In late 1971, as Congress passed the Byrd Amendment, exempting minerals from the ban on Rhodesian trade, the Treasury Department licensed Air Rhodesia to step up its business in New York. Shortly after that, the Treasury and Commerce Departments licensed Hertz, Avis, and Holiday Inn to establish franchises in Rhodesia. These were important concessions, because tourism is Rhodesia's second largest source of income, after minerals.

And four months later, the first chrome shipment arrived in Burnside, Louisiana. (There were also attempts to smuggle in items not covered by the Byrd Amendment. When Reynolds International imported 197 tons of Rhodesian petalite, the invoice listed the cargo as "South African Feldspar.")

The importation of chrome sparked a mass movement of opposition in the United States, primarily composed of black workers and students, to prevent these blood-stained cargoes from being unloaded, and demanding repeal of the Byrd Amendment.

While the struggle was unfolding in public on this level, the government, behind the scenes, was preparing military to enforce the "Tar Baby" policy. In 1970, a U. S. Navy research team proposed a multinational naval presence in the Indian Ocean, in violation of United Nations policy, and that ". . . the Navy of the Republic of South Africa should be invited to participate. . . ."

The South African government, for its part, opened up a naval communications complex buried in a mountain near Capetown, designed to withstand

nuclear attack, which can accurately chart ship movements as far away as Latin America, the Antarctic, and the Bay of Bengal.

Also in 1970, the Nixon administration began to allow the U. S. aviation industry to sell aircraft to South Africa in violation of the United Nations resolutions against arms sales to South Africa by calling the planes "non-military." Communications equipment has also been supplied under a similar ruse.

The South African air force, brazenly pushing the same fiction, arranged to acquire an additional 200 new planes over a four year period, including 48 Mirage F1 fighters, the latest and deadliest of the French line of aircraft. These will be built entirely in France, but South Africa's state-run Atlas Aircraft Corporation will also be building Mirages, under license, by 1977.

At the same time, South Africa has greatly expanded its capacity to manufacture its own arms: rifles, revolvers, grenades, mortars, ammunition, tear gas, rockets, anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, bombs, napalm, and armored cars.

The collapse of Portuguese colonial power in Africa created panic in the State Department, so efforts were stepped up to shore up the eroding white-supremacist domination of Southern Africa. In January of 1974, South Africa's Information Minister to the United States, Dr. Cornelius Mulder, held talks with influential Senators and Congressmen. (Mulder is often mentioned as the likeliest successor to South Africa's Prime Minister, B. J. Vorster.) And in May, the South African Defense Force Chief, Admiral Hugo Biermann, visited Washington to hold talks with Admiral Thomas Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Navy Secretary William Middendorf.

According to the Southern Africa Committee, Mulder also held secret talks with a high official in the Pentagon, Vice Admiral Ray Peet, the man in charge of International Security Affairs. The assumption is that the subject of these talks concerned closer naval collaboration between the U. S. and South Africa, as well as increased violation of the arms embargo, since that was the same month that the U. S. announced it planned to build a \$20 million air and naval support facility on Diego Garcia, an island in the Indian Ocean.

In May, 1974, the United Nations Decolonization Committee uncovered a secret plan authorized nearly a year earlier by NATO's defense ministers in Brussels, authorizing NATO's Supreme Allied Commander in the Atlantic Region (SACLANT) to plan for contingencies "outside the NATO area." The Supreme Command, headed by U. S. Admiral Ralph W. Cousins, based in Norfolk, Virginia, had already begun to concern itself with the bases and facilities that might be needed in the Southern African area. The authors of the U. N. report quote a NATO official as saying that the plan

was to make it possible "to go to the aid of our potential allies in southern Africa if the need should arise."

Naturally, as all this was going on, the liberation struggle continued. ZANU, with the most effective fighting force in Zimbabwe, was able to strike within 30 miles of the Rhodesian capital. Armed struggle and strike activity both stepped up in Azania. And international pressure, mostly from the Third World, intensified. In November, 1974, the United Nations General Assembly voted 91-22 to expel South Africa.

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The fall of Portuguese colonial rule in Africa marked the beginning of the last stage of the struggle to liberate all Africa from European political domination. The previous stage, which began with the successful Gold Coast revolution that freed Ghana in 1957, had ended with the political independence of almost all of the former European colonies in Africa.

Though neo-colonialism remained a serious danger that imperialism posed to all of independent Africa, the struggle against this form of imperialist penetration sharpened as the struggle to free Zimbabwe, Azania, and Namibia from the illegal governments of Rhodesia and South Africa intensified.

Now that Angola no longer guards the Namibian flank for white South Africa, and Mozambique doesn't shield half of the Zimbabwe frontier for white Rhodesia, the armed liberation struggle, particularly in Zimbabwe, has been immeasurably strengthened. When the people of Zimbabwe overthrow the Ian Smith government, the northern frontier of Azania will be naked, exposing the Transvaal region, the source of South Africa's great riches and prestige, to easy armed attack from the north.

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These rapid shifts in the political makeup of Southern Africa brought on a major change in the public conduct of western foreign policy.

A new approach, designed to gain additional time for political/military regroupment, was launched by the U. S., Britain, South Africa, and some of the pro-western black-led African governments.

The name of the new policy was *detente*.

The idea was to sacrifice, or at least compromise, Ian Smith's government in exchange for a guarantee of continued white rule over Azania. While Kissinger and Vorster put pressure on Smith to negotiate with black leaders of Zimbabwe, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia applied similar pressure to the liberation movements.

Both sides collaborated to remove or isolate those members of ZANU who opposed detente. ZANU's national chairman, Herbert Chitepo, was assassinated in Lusaka, Zambia, in March, 1975. All the members of the DARE -- the ZANU high command -- were arrested by Zambian authorities when they arrived for Chitepo's funeral.

Kaunda ordered the detainment of 1,400 Zimbabwe freedom fighters who were based in Zambia.

Edson Sithole, public relations director of the African National Council, was kidnapped in Salisbury last October 15. He was reported seen as a prisoner at an army camp at Umtali, near the Rhodesian-Mozambique border on March 2, so hope remains that he is still alive and will eventually be released.

With the most vocal militants out of the way, negotiations between Smith and moderate leaders began, first in a railroad car over the cataract which the whites call Victoria Falls. Since then, Joshua Nkomo, former head of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), has continued negotiations with Smith inside Rhodesia.

These talks were doomed from the outset, since the most minimal terms acceptable to black Zimbabweans would end white rule immediately; Smith would have to commit political suicide for a meaningful result to occur.

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While officials were dancing to the tune of detente in public, more traditional instruments of foreign policy were being employed offstage. In the winter of 1974-1975, Kissinger appointed Jeffrey Davidow as political officer to the U. S. embassy in Pretoria, William Bowdler as Ambassador to South Africa, and Nathaniel Davis as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Deane J. Hinton was confirmed as ambassador to Zaire in June of 1974. All four were top-ranking State Department officials in Guatemala between 1966 and 1972 when the U. S. conducted a massive counterinsurgency program there. Davis, Hinton, and Davidow were in Chile immediately preceding or during the 1973 coup. Of the four, only Hinton had even limited experience in Africa.

The purpose behind these appointments, particularly that of Nathaniel Davis, fooled no one. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) denounced the Davis appointment, while the South African press hailed it. A massive protest campaign failed to prevent confirmation of the nomination by the U. S. Senate. (Some liberal commentators, including Jack Anderson, attempted to paint a picture of Donald Easum, Davis' predecessor who was fired by Kissinger, as an opponent of the U. S. "tilt" toward the white-minority governments. But in 1974, during a tour of ten Southern African countries, Easum was reported to have depicted South Africa as holding the

key to the future of the subcontinent; his speech upon his return to the U. S., endorsing the policy of "separate development" (apartheid), was hailed by the South African press. Davis brought new skills (as a "destabilization" expert), not new politics, to the Assistant Secretary's post.)

Davis was so thoroughly exposed, however, that he was ineffective, and he was finally forced to resign. Just as in the case of his predecessor, the cover story claimed that he was a "liberal" opponent of Kissinger's policy.

The CIA covertly attempted to install FNLA and/or UNITA in power in Angola, and again Kaunda of Zambia supported U. S.-South African policy.

(The question often arises: why has Kaunda, who once hosted Zimbabwe freedom fighters, made such an about-face? Even when Zambia was economically hostage to Rhodesia pending completion of the TanZam railroad, Kaunda gave aid and comfort to ZANU. But in those days the price of copper, Zambia's chief export, was at an all-time high. Since then, the price of copper has plummeted; Zambia was plunged into a depression. A *Manchester Guardian* correspondent wrote last November: "One of the factors that has assured Zambian participation in the settlement has been the promise of a large, interest-free, secret loan from South Africa. The loan, described as 'massive,' will carry a 15 year grace period before repayment begins." Even that may not save Kaunda. Unrest is growing in Zambia: Kaunda recently sent troops to put down student protesters and closed the University of Zambia; he declared a national state of emergency in March.)

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None of the U. S.-South Africa strategems have stopped the advancing liberation forces. The "Settler '74" campaign, designed to bring a million white immigrants to Rhodesia in 1974, fell short by 999,405. An attempted coup failed to topple Samora Machel's FRELIMO government in Mozambique. Agostinho Neto's MPLA government has emerged victorious in Angola. The charade of talks between Smith and Nkomo has been branded a failure by everyone. Mass pressure has forced Kaunda to release the members of the ZANU high command from prison.

The guerrilla forces led by ZANU have already liberated one third of their country. The government of Mozambique is backing them, and it, in turn, is backed by the United Nations and the OAU.

ZANU is poised for victory.

There is only one potential obstacle which remains -- the possibility of western military intervention.

Voices around the world must speak out, now, against that possibility.

Ken Lawrence
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