The U.S. Policy of "Containment" and The Southern African Challenge

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Summary: This paper argues that the Reagan administration's embrace of South Africa, while more developed, is not new for a U.S. administration. It secondly argues that that embrace plays a significant role in the dividing and polarizing of the American people. Finally it asserts that there must be a well informed, broadly-based, well organized and militant grassroots movement formed before any alternative policies towards Southern Africa are adopted.
Outline

U.S. "Containment" Policy and Southern Africa
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Southern Africa is under siege. The apartheid government of South Africa is today waging war against its neighboring states of Angola, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Namibia—the latter being illegally occupied by South Africa since 1960. It is a war that has meant over half a million war-related deaths of children under 5 in Mozambique and Angola alone and over 23,000 Angolan amputees since 1980. It is conservatively estimated that as a result of this war of South African aggression and destabilization the Southern African states together lost USA $25-30 billion in infrastructural damage, production and defense costs between 1980 and 1986.

The war South Africa is waging today must be seen as resulting from a specific and deliberate policy called the "total strategy." Drafted by the apartheid regime in the 1970's, it is a response to the collapse of Portuguese colonialism and the emergence of Angola and Mozambique as independent states. As South African Defense Minister Magnus Malan put it in 1983, "South Africans must learn to realize that war does not start and finish at the country's borders."

A second major starting point for understanding the struggle in Southern Africa is that South Africa's regional war must be viewed as accompaniment to the United States' global policies of containment and intervention. As South African government officials have regularly asserted: "We (South Africans') are protecting the African continent from the spread of communism as you in the United States protect the western hemisphere."
Since the end of World War II, the primary objective of U.S. policy in sub-Saharan Africa has been the containment of a perceived communist threat. This was to be accomplished in tandem with our NATO allies who were to take the dominant role in keeping Africa "safe." A special concern was to guarantee that the "Free World" would have total access to the mineral riches of Southern Africa. From the early 1940's onwards both the United States and Great Britain viewed South Africa as a part of the "Free World." In fact, in November 1950, according to a recently declassified U.S. Defense Department Document, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommended to the Secretary of Defense that: "Based upon current United States war plans, including logistic requirements and support thereof, the ability of the Union of South Africa to defend itself or to participate in the defense of the area of which it is a part is important to the security of the United States."

Throughout the 1960's, South Africa and the U.S. were an iron fist and velvet glove duo, providing political, economic, and military support to Portugal as it desperately sought to maintain its overseas colonies in Africa. South African troops fought side by side with the Portuguese both in Angola and in Mozambique. President Richard Nixon followed up the 1970 sanctions stemming from the contribution of 22 Cessna-duo purpose light planes to the South African military in December, 1971 with what he called a Christmas gift of $436 million in economic assistance to Portugal, all part of the Azores Pact between Portugal and the U.S. (The Azores Pact was a supplement to the over $320 million in direct military training programs, Boeing 707's, and regular shipments of napalm and herbicides.) Throughout the years of the struggles against Portuguese colonialism and against Rhodesian colonialism, the United States was a firm and indispensable ally of the white settlers.

The United States intervention into the Congo in 1960-64 and its 1975-76 joint efforts with South Africa in Angola are two episodes which dominate the historical landscape of post-World War II U.S. relations with sub-Saharan Africa. Both fully illustrate the main theme throughout this history, namely the extent to which the alleged "Cold War" competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union governs all policy decisions taken by the U.S. towards Africa. Throughout the 1960's, for both Democratic and Republican administrations the strategy was always the same: 1) prevent the emergence of radical African nationalist regimes; and 2) install African-led and moderate governents which would be friendly to the "Free World" and U.S. corporate capital.
John F. Kennedy summarized his general approach to third world nationalist movements in a 1957 speech on Algeria:

The sweep of nationalism is the most potent factor in foreign affairs today. We can resist it or ignore it but only for a little while: we can see it exploited by the Soviets with grave consequences. or we in this country can give it hope and leadership, and thus improve immeasurably our understanding and our security.

Four years earlier Dwight Eisenhower had explained that his commitment to the Cold War meant a relentless fight for the liberation and security of all the world...the grower of rice in Burma and the planter of wheat in Iowa, the shepherd in southern Italy and the mountaineer in the Andes." And in a related comment the same year at one of his famous stag dinners President Eisenhower revealed the racism that so often was (and is) the companion piece of the U.S. government's anti-communism when he quietly advised Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren that the racists in the Brown vs the Board of Education case were "not bad people. All they are concerned about is to see that their sweet little girls are not required to sit in school alongside some big overgrown Negroes."

Today, the Reagan Administration with its "constructive engagement" policy argues that the apartheid government is a "friendly country." A few weeks after taking office in 1981, Ronald Reagan, citing historically inaccurate information, said in a television interview:

As long as there's a sincere and honest effort being made, based on our own experience in our own land, it would seem to me that we should be trying to be helpful. Can we abandon a country that has stood beside us in every war we've ever fought, a country that strategically is essential to the free world? We should not in any way be surprised. The thirty million dollars which the U.S. government gave in 1987 to the South African government's proxy forces called UNITA, the defense, nuclear and intelligence connections which the United States shares with South Africa, the ongoing and strategic economic linkages between U.S. multinationals and the South African economy—despite loudly proclaimed withdrawals—all of these activities are conducted under a constantly sounding and very familiar refrain, namely, "keeping the world safe from communism." There has been no inconsistency in the role the U.S. has played throughout the years. Rather the U.S. record is an eloquent and clear pattern of backing the forces opposing African dignity, freedom and genuine independence.
III.

Meaning of U.S. Africa Policy 
for the U.S. Population

The History of U.S. administration policies towards Africa and national liberation movements in Africa is directly linked to the U.S. government's treatment of its citizens in the United States, especially its population of African-American descent.

Beginning with the federal government's 1920's efforts to destroy Marcus Garvey's U.N.I.A., through the attacks on Paul Robeson, W.E.B. DuBois and the Council on African Affairs, to the 1960's and 70's FBI-directed offensives on Dr. Martin Luther King and the Black Panther Party, there has been a constant effort by the United States to hinder, if not destroy, any efforts by the African American community to build meaningful and reciprocal links of solidarity and support to their African kith and kin.

In the schools, textbooks, media and general culture of the United States there has long been an institutionalized desire, reflective of government postures, to side with the white minority, or, at a minimum, to do nothing fundamentally against that group and the inability to see U.S. interests linked to those of the black majority. This combined with America's domestic practices of racism and bigotry, helps to deepen the wedges between black and white Americans and to make the vast majority of unwitting, unconscious white Americans the kith and kin of apartheid advocating white South Africans. In short, the U.S. government's containment policies in Africa, its derivative embrace of white settler governments provides sustenance for the growth of racism in the United States.

Lastly, the spectre of young black American youth, economically coerced into U.S. army ranks, being used to infiltrate, sabotage, or invade legitimate African governments or to be hired as assassins, or instructors for torturers'schools contributes to the depersonalization and self-denigration of black Americans. The U.S. military's recruitment of black youth for the Third World further contributes to a situation wherein violence and the profession of killing become, like dope-dealing, one of the few paths available for income and self-esteem.
IV

The Challenge of An Alternative Policy Towards Southern Africa

Any consideration of an alternative policy being pursued by a future U.S. administration must be based on three essential prerequisites:

1) The well organized and militant mobilization on a broad, grassroots basis of large segments of the U.S. population, especially the black urban and rural sectors, working class and middle class (additionally sectors like the Hispanic and Asian youth forces must be tapped);

2) That that mobilization becomes an informed, knowledgeable and militant constituency;

3) Which constituency is mobilized not simply because it is anti-apartheid but also because it is pro-national liberation struggles i.e., seeing their future and interests as linked to the future destinies of national liberation movements.

A proposed alternative policy by the U.S. government towards Southern Africa would include but not be limited to the following elements:

(i) comprehensive political, economic, cultural and diplomatic sanctions against South Africa looking to its total isolation;
(ii) full recognition of the People's Republic of Angola as a sovereign and legitimate state and the cessation of hostilities by the U.S. government and related bodies (e.g., IMF) towards Angola;
(iii) the United States government to work for South African withdrawal from Angola and Namibia and U.N. supervised elections in Namibia. Recognition of SWAPO by the U.S. government as representing the Namibian people
(iv) Military and security assistance to the Front Line States
(v) meaningful and substantive economic assistance to SADCC
(vi) in conjunction with the international community, moving the South African government to negotiate a post-apartheid constitutionally-based South African society with the African National Congress based on apartheid having been voided, political bans lifted and imprisoned leadership (e.g. Nelson Mandela) freed. Additionally, moving the South African government to pay reparations to the Front Line States.

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**GENERAL**


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**SOUTH AFRICA**


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**ANGOLA**


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**MOZAMBIQUE**


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**ZIMBABWE**

1. **NONE BUT OURSELVES: MASSES VERSUS MEDIA IN THE MAKING OF ZIMBABWE**, Julie Frederikse, *Ravan Press*, Johannesburg, PO Box 31134, 1982, 368 pp (Viking Penguin, New York will soon be publishing this book and a similar one on South Africa.)

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**ZAIRE**