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Statement: by American Committee on Africa

on

SENDING AMERICAN OBSERVERS

TO

MONITOR RHODESIAN ELECTIONS

by

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For: Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Current United States foreign policy as expressed by the Executive branch of the government is one of non-recognition of both Rhodesian UDI and the provisions of the so-called internal settlement.

It is a grave concern of the American Committee on Africa that the concurrent resolution recently submitted by Senators McGovern and Hayakawa would seriously undermine present United States policy by recognizing the provisions of the Rhodesian internal settlement. The resolution provides for the sending of impartial U.S. observers to monitor Smith's proposed April elections. This is a serious matter, if the resolution is adopted, not only because Congress would be taking on foreign policy functions set for the Executive, but also because the resolution would have unfortunate consequences for the possibility of majority rule in Zimbabwe.

Sending Observers Would be an Action of the United States Government

While the resolution states that "this assistance (the sending of observers) should in no way be regarded as implicit or explicit support by the United States Government of the provisions of the so-called internal settlement", the American Committee on Africa believes this resolution will be interpreted as clear governmental support for the Ian Smith government.

Since Congress is to provide observers at Congressional expense, the action can only be interpreted as that of the United States government. The fact that the observers will not be public officials does not make this a private action. Rather, it will be a program designed and carried out by Congress. It will involve the Speaker of the House and the President pro tempore in appointing the co-chairpersons of the observer team. The observer team is instructed to report back to Congress, making a branch of the U.S. government the forum for debate and discussion. Both financial support and congressional staff involvement make it clear that this action would be undertaken by a branch of the United States government and would be reflective of government policy.

This Action Would be Support/Recognition of the "Internal Settlement"

It is our view that sending international observers to monitor an election carried out by the present Rhodesian government is an act of recognition of that government. The constitutional design
and its subsequent election plan are the work of the current Rhodesian government. The policies and the programs of the internal settlement cannot be separated from the government which created them and now supports them. The text of the resolution itself demonstrates that acknowledging the planned elections must be preceded by extending a kind of recognition to the present illegal Rhodesian government. Thus the resolution states: "Whereas the Rhodesian Government has approved its intention to hold an election on April 20, 1979 to install a new government..."

Certainly those in the internal settlement would view the presence of an American observer team as support for their election plan. A primary aim of the internal settlement government is to achieve U.S. support and recognition. This was the principal purpose of the visit of Ian Smith and other leaders of the interim government of Rhodesia to this country several months ago.

Further, this project of sending observers would involve shared responsibility between the U.S. and the Rhodesian governments. The observer team would be entirely dependent on the Rhodesian government for security. Furthermore, the team would probably depend on Rhodesia for internal transportation.

The Resolution Would Defy International Mandate

The United States Government, to this point, has in principle honored the decision of the United Nations not to recognize the Rhodesian government and therefore the provisions of the internal settlement.

The African group of States at the United Nations recently issued a statement condemning the sending of U.S. observers. Their statement notes that the elections "are inherently unfree as well as illegal. The rebel Rhodesian Government, which the Security Council has determined to be illegal, under International Law cannot conduct its own elections and have them accepted by the international community."

The statement continued that the internal settlement was "condemned as a colossal fraud by the Security Council resolution 425(1978) which inter alia declared as illegal and unacceptable any internal settlement under the auspices of the illegal regime and called upon States not to accord recognition to such a settlement. The United States voted positively for this resolution and is therefore bound by its terms..."
The statement concluded that "The international community will hold the United States government responsible for any action taken by any of its institutions or private citizens in violation of a United Nations Security Council decision or mandatory sanctions. The government cannot exonerate itself from bearing the responsibility of such a condemnable action."

If it acted upon this concurrent resolution, the United States would be acting alone and virtually unilaterally in the international arena. Such action would be viewed by the Patriotic Front of Zimbabwe as cooperative support for an election plan with which the Patriotic Front has refused to be associated because of the racist structure of the 'new' constitution. The Executive branch of the United States Government up to this time has maintained that any workable solution to the conflict in Rhodesia aimed at creating an independent Zimbabwe must include the Patriotic Front.

The provisions of this resolution are also inconsistent with the approach the United States has adopted in Namibia. There the U.S. government has worked cooperatively with the United Nations to devise an election plan. When the South African Government, despite international protest, proceeded with its own elections in Namibia in December, the United States joined other member states of the United Nations in refusing to acknowledge the results. In Namibia the United States has joined the United Nations in insisting among others upon two major prerequisites for elections: a) the approval of the plan by SWAPO and b) the use of United Nations forces to monitor and insure a free and open electoral process.

The acceptance by SWAPO of the electoral process has been regarded as essential because of its internationally acknowledged following among the Namibian people. Without the active participation of SWAPO, elections in Namibia could not be fully representative. Likewise, then, how can the United States Congress view it as possible to have representative elections in Zimbabwe without the approval and involvement of the Patriotic Front? The Patriotic Front is internationally recognized to have a mass following among the Zimbabwean people and elections held without their participation could not include the majority in that country.

The resolution states that the observers' task is to determine whether all of the people of Rhodesia and all organized political groups were given a fair opportunity to participate fully in the election without regard to ethnic identity or political affiliation." Without the active involvement of the Patriotic Front, full participation by all organized political groups is not possible...
for the April 20th election plan.

Further, with at least 85% of Zimbabwe under martial law, and with Rhodesian security forces scattered throughout the countryside, it is impossible to believe that the elections could be fair and voluntary.

A task of the observers as defined in the resolution is to determine the extent to which guerilla activities disrupt the election. The Patriotic Front has already publicly condemned the elections and hardly can be expected to encourage participation in the election process.

However, the real disruption in the elective process in Zimbabwe is contained within the constitution and the election plans devised by Ian Smith and his black associates.

The 'New' Constitution/Élections do not Represent Majority Rule

Although reasons suggested above outline why Congress should not violate U.S. foreign policy by passing this resolution, our concern is based also on the kind of government which would emerge from such an election. What will the people be voting for? How much participation will blacks have in a government of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe? The government which will emerge from elections under the new constitution drawn up by the internal settlement allows for considerably less than black majority rule.

The black majority was never given the chance to accept or reject the constitution which is to govern it. Whites were given such an opportunity in a January referendum. Further, unlike the work of the Pearce Commission, there has been no test of acceptability for this constitutional plan. It will not be an election held with the approval of the majority.

The key to power under the new constitution is the make-up of Parliament. Some 28% of the seats in the House and 33% of those in the Senate—enough to block any Constitutional change—are reserved for whites, who make up only 3% of the population. This is hardly a distribution in keeping with the principle of one person, one vote.

Added to the unfairness of the distribution of seats is the way in which candidates will be elected. While whites will run at large, black candidates will be forced to run from constituencies determined along ethnic lines. This is an obvious attempt to encourage so-called tribal animosities, thus further reducing black power, in an updated example of the colonial principle of divide and rule.

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A continual elective voice is also given to the Council of Chiefs. This again represents an attempt to keep the black majority of Zimbabwe from uniting. It is an attempt to sharpen and perpetuate ethnic differences in a manner similar to the South African separate development schemes.

At the end of ten years, a commission will be set up to review the situation. It will be composed of two persons chosen by the white members of Parliament, two other MP's, and the Chief Justice, who is certain to be white. Thus, a commission whose majority will probably be white, or identified with white interests, will decide the future of whites in Parliament.

If the qualifications for the Chief Justice border on the near-impossible for blacks to attain now or anytime soon (the candidate must have been a lawyer in Rhodesia for at least ten years or have been a judge in a country where the law is Roman-Dutch and the official language is English—essentially South Africa and Rhodesia), qualifications for other high posts currently rule out blacks altogether. The Police Commissioner, for example, must have held the rank of assistant commissioner for at least five years. All such known officials are and have been white. Similarly, the Commanders of the Army and Air Force will be appointed on the recommendation of a board dominated by former Commanders, all of whom are white. The Rhodesian Army only commissioned its first 13 black officers in 1977.

Another important issue addressed in the Constitution is land, nearly 50% of which currently is controlled by whites. Under the new Constitution, only a white-dominated High Court can authorize the acquisition of property in the public interest. Even then, the owner must be properly compensated and can take the money out of the country.

Whites also are provided by the Constitution with another guarantee of assistance should they want to leave. While whites will be recognized as citizens of the new country with a hyphenated name, Zimbabwe-Rhodesia (the name itself being an affront to black sensibilities because it honors the memory of Rhodes), they will also be free to remain citizens of their countries of origin. Thus, if the situation becomes too unpleasant, they can always go elsewhere.

The main rationale for this approach has been that to actually inaugurate true majority rule would provoke a massive white exodus from the country, thereby causing total economic collapse.

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This need not be the case. Other black-ruled nations (with white minorities) have made the transition with far fewer resources and less developed infrastructure than Zimbabwe. The Patriotic Front has acknowledged that whites can continue to make important contributions to the life of the country. It has stated that it is not struggling against whites, but against a system that has denied black Zimbabweans full self-determination.

It is difficult to understand how the three blacks in the current "internal settlement" government could have agreed to this Constitution. Certainly, it violates their positions of recent years. Perhaps they felt that going along with the new Constitution was the only way of gaining some power from Ian Smith while maintaining strong enough positions to be able to challenge the Patriotic Front for control of the country.

The fact is, however, that this Constitution will frustrate both of these purposes. It will neither get rid of Ian Smith and his white minority domination nor will it neutralize the Patriotic Front—in fact it strengthens their arguments against cooperation with Smith. No matter who wins the elections under the Constitution scheduled for April 20th, the struggle for true majority rule is certain to continue.

The United States Must Not Cooperate in Any Way With These Elections

The elections planned for April 20, 1979 are the work and design of the internal settlement government dominated by Ian Smith. The device of sending U.S. observers will serve the purpose of giving international recognition to the elections and to the government which emerges. The step will be recognized as an effort to bolster continued disproportionate control for the white minority. It will serve as a step towards lifting sanctions and ultimate recognition of a government not representative of the people.

As the resolution states, a critical stage has been reached in Zimbabwe. In the view of the American Committee on Africa, the United States Government should refuse to give implied support to the new Constitution in any way. Instead its efforts should be directed toward a commitment to true majority rule in the framework of international cooperation.