southern africa: The United States Record at the United Nations, 1973

United Nations, New York, October 5, 1973. African and other delegations leaving the General Assembly Hall as the Foreign Minister of South Africa, Hilgard Muller, is announced as the next speaker in the general debate.

United Nations/Chen
Southern Africa:
The U.S. Record at the U.N., 1973

United Nations decisions and actions in relation to southern Africa during 1973 generally built upon steps taken in 1972. They took account, however, of two new developments in the area: Guinea-Bissau’s declaration of independence; and the failure of the Secretary-General’s “mission” to South Africa to arrange the transfer of the administration of Namibia to the UN.

The US reaction to these developments was, typically, negative: It refused to recognize the new state of Guinea-Bissau (and, by implication, threatened to veto its anticipated application for UN membership). And it clung to the illusion that the Secretary-General’s negotiations were making progress (undefined) and therefore argued that they should be continued despite strong African sentiment to the contrary.

During 1973 the US edged closer than ever before to the white minority regimes of southern Africa although it continued to criticize apartheid. Its voting record diverged from an exposed hardline position on racism and colonialism resolutions and frequently abstained instead. On one issue the United States stood alone with Portugal and South Africa while all other states votes against them or abstained.

Most of the significant issues concerning southern Africa were considered by the General Assembly. The Assembly followed the 1972 precedent—opposed both years by the US—in admitting representatives of the concerned OAU—recognized liberation movement as observers during committee discussions of the territory represented by the movement. It also again affirmed—over US opposition—the legitimacy of the struggle against apartheid and colonialism by all “necessary” means (in effect by armed force).

Important provisions of the most significant resolutions, (classified generally by subject) are summarized below and the US vote indicated as to each.

ANTI-COLONIALISM RESOLUTIONS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3163 (XXVIII)
Implementation of Independence
For Colonial Peoples

The key provision (Para.5) of the 17 operative paragraphs reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggle of colonial peoples for self-determination and independence “by all the necessary means at their disposal” and notes with satisfaction the progress made by the national liberation movements of colonial territories. Paragraph 7 calls for moral and material assistance to struggling colonial peoples, and Paragraph 10 calls on UN agencies to ensure representation of colonial territories by national liberation movements when matters concerning the territories are considered.

The United States joined France, Portugal, South Africa, and the United Kingdom in voting AGAINST this resolution.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3118 (XXVIII)
Implementation of Independence by Specialized Agencies

This resolution also reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggles of colonial peoples and urges all moral and material assistance by UN specialized agencies to the peoples of colonial territories, “including especially the populations in the liberated areas . . . and their national liberation movements.”

The US, Portugal, South Africa, and the United Kingdom OPPOSED this resolution.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3117 (XXVIII)
Activities of Foreign Economic Interests

Operative paragraph 2 reaffirms that foreign economic, financial, and other interests operating in Southern Rhodesia, Namibia, and the Portuguese territories “constitute a major obstacle to political independence and to the enjoyment of the natural resources of those Territories by the indigenous inhabitants . . . ” Paragraph 6 calls on all governments to prevent their nationals from participating in the Cabora Bassa and Cunene River basin projects (in Mozambique and Angola respectively). Paragraph 9 calls on all states, in the language of the World Court’s 1971 Advisory Opinion, to refrain from relations with South Africa which may support the continued illegal occupation of Namibia or in which South Africa acts on behalf of Namibia.

Only Portugal, South Africa, and the US voted AGAINST this resolution. Twenty-three states abstained.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3103 (XXVIII)
Legal Status of Freedom Fighters

This relatively short but revolutionary resolution declares that national liberation wars are “legitimate and in full accordance with the principles of international law” (Paragraph 1) and that attempts to suppress such struggles are “incompatible” with the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, etc. (Paragraph 2) The following paragraphs declare that armed conflicts by subject people against colonial and racist regimes “are to be regarded as international armed conflicts in the sense of the 1949 Geneva Convention,” which shall apply to the combatants; and captured freedom fighters are to be accorded the status of prisoners of war. Paragraph 5 declares that the use of mercenaries against freedom fighters is considered a criminal act, and mercenaries shall be punished as criminals.

The US was one of 13 countries—mostly European, but including Brazil, Uruguay, Israel, and South Africa—voting AGAINST the resolution. Nineteen states abstained.

SOUTH AFRICA—APARTHEID

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3151G (XXVIII)
Situation in South Africa

This is the last and most controversial of seven resolutions on South Africa grouped under one resolution number. The resolution condemns South Africa for “its repeated acts of inhumanity and aggression,” as well as other states which continue to provide military equipment and supplies to the Republic. (Paragraphs 1.4) Paragraph 5 condemns “in particular, the unholy alliance between Portuguese colonialism, South African racism, Zionism and Israeli imperialism . . . ” It calls on states to take certain specified actions as a first step to bring pressure on South Africa. (Paragraph 8) Paragraph 2 reaffirms the legitimacy of the struggle against apartheid by all available means, and paragraph 11 declares the OAU-recognized liberation
movements (ANC, PAC) as the "authentic representatives" of the overwhelming majority of the South African people. Finally, the resolution condemns South Africa's Bantustan policy. (Paragraph 14)

The US, in company with Bolivia, Israel, Nicaragua, Portugal, South Africa, and the UK, OPPOSED the resolution.

The US ABSTAINED on five other parts of the resolution, but voted FOR Part F, a purely formal resolution calling for voluntary contributions to the UN Trust Fund for South Africa.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3055 (XXVIII)
Political Prisoners in South Africa

The US SUPPORTED a short resolution condemning South Africa for failing to comply with UN requests to release persons "imprisoned, interned, or otherwise restricted" for opposing apartheid.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3068 (XXVIII)
International Convention on Apartheid

The US OPPOSED adoption of a draft convention on apartheid, along with Portugal, South Africa, and the UK. The US justified its opposition on the basis of several controversial technical provisions in the convention as drafted—although those flaws may not, in fact, constitute the true basis for American opposition.

RHODESIA (ZIMBABWE)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3115 (XXVIII)
Question of Southern Rhodesia (general)

This relatively innocuous resolution reaffirms the right of the people of Zimbabwe (Rhodesia) to independence (Paragraph 1) as well as the principle of no independence before majority rule there (Paragraph 2). It calls on the UK to end the illegal Rhodesian regime and to bring about conditions (expulsion of South African forces, release of political prisoners, repeal of discriminatory laws, etc.) necessary for the people "to exercise freely and fully their right to self-determination and independence...." (Paragraphs 3-5).

The US joined Portugal, South Africa, and the UK in OPPOSING the resolution.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3116 (XXVIII)
Question of Southern Rhodesia (Sanctions)

This stronger and more pointed resolution condemns: the UK for failure to end the illegal Rhodesian regime (Paragraph 1); South African and Portugal for collaborating with the Rhodesian regime (Paragraph 2); the US for continued importation of Rhodesian chrome and nickel in violation of mandatory sanctions (Paragraph 3); and other unspecified states for failing to enforce such sanctions (Paragraph 3). Paragraph 7 "invites" the Security Council to widen its sanctions by taking three specified steps. The following paragraphs call on the Security Council to consider imposing sanctions against Portugal and South Africa, to force them to adhere to Rhodesian sanctions; they also appeal to permanent Security Council members not to frustrate Security Council actions against Rhodesia by casting vetoes.

France, Portugal, South Africa, the UK, and the US OPPOSED this resolution.

* i.e., voted by the Security Council and binding on all UN members.

PORTUGUESE COLONIES

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3061 (XXVIII)
Illegal Occupation of Republic of Guinea-Bissau

This resolution welcomes the accession to independence of the peoples of Guinea-Bissau. It condemns Portugal for "perpetuating its illegal occupation of certain sectors of the Republic" (Paragraph 2) and demands that it desist from further violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guinea-Bissau.

The US interpreted the resolution as constituting virtual recognition of Guinea-Bissau and therefore cited all the classic arguments against recognition (inadequate control of population and territory, foreign-based administration, etc.) in explaining its vote AGAINST the resolution. Brazil, Greece, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and the UK joined in voting no. Thirty states—mostly European and Latin American—abstained.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3113 (XXVIII)
Question of Territories Under Portuguese Administration

This long resolution starts by reaffirming the legitimacy of the struggle for independence of the people of the territories "by all means and means at their disposal" and recognizes the national liberation movements in territories as the "authentic representatives of the true aspirations" of the peoples. (Paragraphs 1,2) It recommends that UN specialized agencies deal with the liberation movements when considering matters which affect the territories (Paragraph 2) and give assistance to the people in the liberated areas to help them continue their struggle. (Paragraph 6) It condemns Portugal's continued repression (Paragraphs 3-5) and appeals to NATO allies and others to withdraw assistance which enables Portugal to continue its colonial wars and to refrain from collaboration with Portugal. (Paragraphs 7-9)

The US joined Bolivia, Brazil, France, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, and the UK in OPPOSING this resolution.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3114 (XXVIII)
Inquiry into Reported Massacres in Mozambique

This resolution established a 5-nation committee of the Assembly to look into alleged massacres of Africans in Mozambique by Portuguese troops, as reported by local missionaries and others.

The US joined Portugal, South Africa, and Spain in OPPOSING this resolution.

NAMIBIA (SOUTH WEST AFRICA)

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3111 (XXVIII)
Question of Namibia

This resolution opens by reaffirming the legitimacy of the Namibians' struggle for independence "by all means," recognizing SWAPO as the "authentic representative of the Namibian people" (paragraph 18 provides for defraying SWAPO expenses when accompanying certain UN missions), and condemning South African occupation and repression. (Pt. 1, Paragraphs 1-4) Paragraph 7 states that contacts between the Secretary-General and the South African government should be terminated "as being detrimental to the interests of the Namibian people...." Paragraphs 11-17 call on states and UN agencies to comply with UN resolutions and the recent World Court Advisory
Opinion on Namibia; to cooperate with the UN Council for Namibia and invite its participation in their affairs when Namibian interests are affected; and to assist Namibians so that they can continue their struggle for independence. Part II requests more concrete assistance from specialized agencies. Part III calls for more information and publicity about Namibia; its last provision decides to commemorate each August 26 as Namibia Day.

Although the US has adopted a cautiously correct position on legal issues involving Namibia, it was unwilling to approve liberation by armed struggle, and it also disagreed with paragraph 7. It therefore ABSTAINED on the resolution.

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 3112 (XXVIII)**

The two crucial provisions of this resolution allocate $100,000 to the Fund from the UN's regular 1974 budget (Paragraph 2) and appoint the UN Council for Namibia as trustees of the Fund (Paragraph 6).

In spite of some question as to the advisability of making the Council trustees—since the delegates (not the states) sitting as the Council change from meeting to meeting—the US joined the entire UN membership (except Portugal and South Africa) in voting FOR the resolution. It appears that the UN may make a substantial contribution to the Fund.

**SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 342 (1973)**

Discontinuation of Efforts Under Resolution 309 (1972)

In response to Assembly resolution 3111, paragraph 7 (see above) and the urgings of the OAU, the Council for Namibia, and SWAPO, the Security Council voted to discontinue the Secretary-General’s contacts with South Africa, undertaken in accordance with its resolution 309 of early 1972.

The US, which had strongly supported the Secretary-General’s negotiations as a central feature of its policy on Namibia and expressed a hope that events would allow a revival of the negotiations, nevertheless voted FOR the resolution.

**MISCELLANEOUS**

The US supported the appointment of Sean MacBride, former Irish Foreign Minister, Executive Secretary of the International Commission of Jurists, and Director of Amnesty International, as the new UN Commissioner for Namibia.

The US opposed an amendment to the report of the credentials committee (A/9179) rejecting the credentials of the representatives of South Africa to the General Assembly. Although the amendment succeeded, the chair ruled the amendment was hortatory only, and South Africa was not excluded from the Assembly.

To understand the U.S. position at the U.N. read:

*United States Policy and Southern Africa* by George M. Houser.

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