The following article is a slightly-edited version of testimony presented before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, July 24, 1975 at hearings on southern Africa sponsored by the Subcommittee on Africa, and reprinted in SOUTHERN AFRICA magazine. Ms. Davis is Research Director of The Africa Fund (associated with the American Committee on Africa).

Hunting Reality—the myth of current change

One of the major problems for anyone trying to understand United States-South Africa policy and relationships is the long established tradition of double talking. To find the truth it is necessary to penetrate behind the coded language and recognize a series of myths which cloak a far more unpleasant reality.

The primary myth perpetuated by South Africa is that it is changing. Critics who call for radical international responses to South African racial oppression and exploitation have for many years been met by the "but things are changing" argument. The initial myth-maker is of course South Africa... but the device is most useful because it is so eagerly seized upon by powerful forces such as the United States government, seeking to justify a policy of perpetual tolerance for what is in fact, for those who suffer under it, an intolerable situation. Secretary New som articulated such a view very precisely in a 1971 speech:

"We believe change will come in southern Africa. Economic and demographic pressures make this inevitable. In South Africa itself there is a lessening of rigidity. Change is a central theme of discussion; there is psychological and intellectual ferment within the Afrikaner community; there have been isolated instances of acceptance of multi-racial activities; there is a growing realism among businessmen that Africans are important to them as skilled workers and as a market. They are beginning to focus on the need for improvement of working conditions for non-whites. We cannot expect change to come quickly or easily. Our hope is that it will come peacefully."

The system has indeed shown itself capable of considerable flexibility in the past decade. Ten years ago Prime Minister Verwoerd was proud to think of himself as a man of granite. Today's pragmatic South African leaders recognize that building in rock does not meet the needs of a rapidly expanding industrial economy.

At issue is not whether some changes are occurring both inside South Africa, and in that country's attitudes to Africa and the world. The argument revolves around
the nature and purpose of those changes and at this core level that there seems to be dangerous confusion. Perhaps it would be useful to re-state, at this point, the basic situation that calls for change.

The "problem" in South Africa is that of the dispossession of a majority black population and the total usurpation of all economic, political and social power by a white minority. The "problem" is a system—the apartheid system—deliberately designed to use blacks for the creation of wealth and to guarantee the exclusive benefits of that wealth to the whites. The primary purpose of the whole network of South African law and administration is the protection of this system, which produces for the whites, who benefit from it, the highest average standard of living in the world and for the blacks, who suffer under it, a life of perpetual poverty, violence and humiliation.

The changes that are presently being made are not intended to alter the pyramidal structure in which blacks, the majority, stand always at the bottom, supporting the whole society on their backs. They are designed to help white South Africa deal with internal pressures generated by continued economic expansion.

The increasing sophistication of the economy has for instance shifted the nature of the demand for labor—and so there are announcements that black workers are to be upgraded—what this means is that the pool of unskilled black labor is no longer useful and is to be replaced by a pool of semi-skilled black labor. The landless, voiceless, rightless non-person status of the Blacks remains unchanged. Changing labor demands may even bring in their wake some measure of unionisation and more permanent urbanisation—but the rate and direction of all such changes will be controlled by the whites—who will move cautiously to avoid generating dangerously irreversible trends. There are daily reminders of this truth in the South African press. The Cape Times of June 13 reports Deputy Minister of Bantu Education, Mr. T. N. H. Janson as saying, "The Government would train the Blacks, but it would not train them to be destroyers of the way of life in South Africa... one thing that was sure was that nobody wanted a recurrence of an Angola or Mozambique in South Africa."

Internal economic development has brought with it also a need for change in relationships to the world outside. South Africa now seeks external markets for its manufactured goods as well as for the vast stream of raw materials which still continue to flow to major industrial countries, making it a valuable member of the "Western world". The rational place to find such markets is close by, in Africa.

Foreign Policy—a design to protect apartheid's future

This thrust coincides with a second important set of South African priorities which revolve on its political/strategic requirements. For the past ten years South Africa has been "carefully" developing a four-pronged external policy designed to consolidate and protect its stability.

While working hard to build powerful friendships in the world South Africa has also sought to achieve three ends in Africa: Firstly, the extension of almost complete control over the so-called captive states—e.g. Lesotho, Swaziland. Secondly, neutralization of the independent African States, using where possible, the economic inducements associated with what was once Dialogue and is now Detente. (Where neutralization could not be achieved in a "friendly" manner South Africa was always ready to use the tougher techniques of economic strangulation and political subversion.) Thirdly, there was the attempt to construct a solid Southern Bloc, involving a close-knit alliance with Portugal and Rhodesia. In this way South Africa attempted to ring itself with a series of buffer states, hoping that the combination of a ruthlessly efficient internal security police and border buffers would prevent successful black organization or guerrilla incursion.

Now the buffer states are vanishing rapidly. Indeed Mozambique is not just a country with an independent black government, but one with a very directed political philosophy which is likely soon to be translated into a living model of an alternative society.

In the face of such far reaching upheavals South Africa has already shown signs of considerable re-thinking. It seems clear that the coming period will see attempts to win by political and economic activity what can not be won militarily. Hence the pressure on Rhodesia's Ian Smith to move towards some sort of "settlement", hence the generally very "correct" attitude towards the new Mozambique, with great restraint placed on those who might normally have been expected to foment about black savages, red perils and the need for intervention; hence also the tremendous drive towards Detente in Africa.

At the same time, looking realistically into the future South Africa has also embarked on a crash program to double and re-double its military strength, and to cement its international alliances.

In fact this dual response is more closely interconnected than might first appear. In attempting to project a new image of increasing reasonableness and flexibility, coupled with a constant emphasis on its potential role as a bulwark against communism, South Africa seeks to provide the major powers of Europe and America with greater incentives (and justification) for a continued policy of overt where possible, covert where necessary, alliances.

South Africa's Military Build-up—who are the enemies?

South Africa has doubled the size of its direct military budget in two years, expenditure rising dramatically from R470m ($658m) in 1973/4 to R700m ($980m) in 74/75 and a planned R948m ($1,327m) for 75/76. In fact a decision was made in 1974 to complete the ten-year plan in five years. This expenditure now represents something of the order of 18% of the entire budget, 3.7% of GNP and an estimated per capita expenditure of S$28, according to P.W. Botha, Minister of Defense.

Minister Botha's arithmetic seems alarmingly weak. Total South African population in 1974 was just under 25 million; this would mean a per capita expenditure of R237.00 ($331.80). In fact, a far more realistic way of looking at this expenditure is in terms of white per capita expenditure, because this money is obviously being spent to defend a privileged white society against its black members. On that basis per capita expenditure reaches R237.00 ($331.80)—a figure higher than that for the United States during the Vietnam years.

According to the Defence White Paper tabled in Parliament in March 1975, the main reasons for the increase in expenditure are the need to counter all forms of insurgency and to maintain "a credible and balanced conventional force." Land forces are to be re-assigned into an anti-insurgency force and a conventional force, and the Air Force is to be similarly restructured. The budget reflects this pattern, indicating particularly big jumps in expenditure on arms for land defense.

South Africa is not only spending much more on its defense but is also pushing very hard to develop self-sufficiency in the production of weapons, aircraft and ships. Using much imported technology, via licencing arrangements and specialized personnel, as well as internal "know-how", the South Africans now claim to be practically self-sufficient in the production of ammunition and rifles. Aircraft, armored personnel carriers and radio equipment are all being made internally, and Minister Botha recently announced that South Africa is to begin...
building tanks, and six corvettes for the navy. This self-sufficiency, which gives South Africa considerable independence and a great tactical advantage, has been deliberately fostered via the ten year old Armaments Board, and the state-controlled Corporation—Armscor—which is responsible for overseeing the production of all military equipment. South Africa has long sought to make itself relatively safe against the consequences of possible international actions such as an effective arms embargo, and has apparently succeeded to some extent.

South Africa’s Defense Philosophy.

It seems relevant to speculate at this juncture on the purpose of this continuing escalation of military might. South Africa already has a military force vastly superior to the combined force of most of Sub-Saharan Africa. (The Military Balance 1974-1975, published by The International Institute for Strategic Studies, London)

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute’s handbook for 1974, South Africa is the only country in Africa to have an indigenous designed missile system. The system is described as being air to air, with a solid propellant power plant and high explosive war-head. The design was begun in 1966 and production began in 1972. According to the same source, South Africa is also the only country in Africa which manufactures, under licence, foreign designed major weapons, including both aircraft and armored vehicles.

Under licence from Italy, South Africa produces the MB-326 M (Impala) trainer, a light strike aircraft, jet powered, with a speed of 800 km/hr; production was begun in 1967, the craft is 70% indigenous manufacture and by 1973 South Africa had 200 of these planes. A second licence obtained from Italy in 1973 will enable South Africa first to assemble and later produce the light strike jet powered MB-326 K, with a speed of 850 km/hr; production is reported to have begun in 1974. Licences have also been obtained from France for the assembly and subsequent manufacture of the jet powered Mirage F1 fighters, with initial plans for a run of 100, and the SA 330 Puma utility helicopter, of which 20 had been produced by 1973.

There are other significant areas in which South Africa is building a military capacity that seems either greatly in excess of any African threat, or totally irrelevant to countering such a threat. The increasing South African interest in nuclear development is one such area,* other striking examples include the development of a complex communications center at Silvermine, in the Cape—designed to maintain surveillance of a vast area stretching from the Indian Ocean to the southern Atlantic—and finally the expansion of facilities and construction of a submarine base at Simonstown, decided on despite the recent cancellation of the U.K. agreement involving the use of that port.

South African military strategy is in fact aimed at two fronts—an internal and an external one. Internally and on its borders the South African government is facing an increasingly threatening situation. Thus much military expenditure is designed to enable greater internal control and South Africa is concentrating on developing counter-insurgency capabilities very rapidly. There are numerous reports of regular ‘COIN’ (counter-insurgency) practice operations, and as has already been indicated there is growing expenditure on equipment suitable for such operations—armored cars, light aircraft, helicopters, etc. Growing pressure from SWAPO, the Namibian liberation movement has forced South Africa to replace the police that were defending the Caprivi strip with army units. A special volunteer corps is being established to take over the increasingly serious task of guarding the borders—and such border units will be paid special bonuses!

Cape Town—a new Gibraltar?

It seems likely that South Africa sees independent Africa as threatening primarily in this context—i.e. insofar as it provides a base for “internal disorder”. It is also probably true that South Africa fears a peasant rebellion in Pondoland more than it does a Chinese or Russian invasion.

Air Commando Officers

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The official U.S. position has long been that it “abhors apartheid” and has no common military or other interests with the white minority regime. In fact of course the reality has been very different. The wide publication last year of the NSRM 39 document (See Southern Africa, February, 1975) served only to confirm the observations of those who had warned that the U.S. was in fact closely linked economically, politically and strategically to the white racists and colonialists in Southern Africa.

The South Africans themselves have used their knowledge and understanding of Western strategy to push for alliances, and are now concentrating heavily on their potentially crucial role as defender of the gateway to the Indian Ocean, and watchdog of the Southern Atlantic.

They have been quick to recognize the implications of America’s Vietnam experience, realizing that U.S. strategic planners will have to rely on building strong regional alliances for the maintenance of U.S. interests, rather than on direct intervention. In particular South Africa seems eager to capitalize on U.S. interest in the Indian Ocean, seeing the Pentagon eagerness to fortify Diego Garcia as a hopeful sign for future joint working arrangements.

In this context the current direction of U.S. policy, particularly as it relates to military linkages and the arms embargo, is cause for considerable alarm.
NATO and South Africa

In May 1975 the South African press reported the eruption of a storm in the NATO defense and planning committee over American Defense Secretary Schlesinger’s proposal that a major monitoring installation be established in South Africa for NATO intelligence purposes. The proposal that such an installation be used to monitor all Soviet fleet movements in the Indian Ocean met with a violent reaction from the Dutch Defense Minister, who threatened to pull Holland out of NATO if there was any cooperation with the South African Government.

Already in 1974 work done by Sav Gervasi and others made it clear that the Defense Planning Committee of NATO had issued a secret instruction in June 1973 to the Supreme Allied Command, Atlantic (SACLANT) to undertake contingency planning for the defense of the southern African region and the Indian Ocean, although this was outside the NATO area. The justification for such a decision was the need to protect the southern entrance to the Persian Gulf, and the sea routes used by the oil tankers serving European and American ports. The secret plans reportedly concentrated on the development of air-naval task forces which would operate in the Indian Ocean and around the Cape and would stand ready to assist South Africa in case of need.

Most recently, in June 1975, the British Anti-Apartheid Movement released information alleging that several NATO members, including the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Holland and Denmark had been engaged in the planning and development of Project Advokaat, a naval surveillance system established by South Africa at Silvermine, which allows South Africa to keep under surveillance an area stretching from South America to Bangladesh. According to the Anti-Apartheid Movement, Advokaat has permanent channels linking it in with the United Kingdom admiralty and the United States Navy. The Anti-Apartheid Movement released documents showing that orders for parts of the system had been placed with companies in all the above countries, including the United States.

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At unit level:
1. Employment of armored cars.
2. Employment of light fixed wing aircraft.
3. Road movement.
4. Search and destroy operations.
5. Patrolling, road blocks, ambushes, counter penetration operations along a coastline. Follow-up operations.

According to the Paratus report the air arm was provided by a squadron of Citizen Force volunteer pilots with their own aircraft. They were used for visual recce, contact recce, evacuation of casualties, communication flights and special operations.

It is now increasingly clear that there have been even more serious erosions in the formal arms embargo, and that both light aircraft such as Cessnas and heavy transport planes, such as the Lockheed Hercules C 130 have been provided directly to the South African Government for military use, long after the supposed imposition of an embargo in 1963. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies there are now at least 7 C-130's operating in transport squadrons of the South African Air force. Cessnas are used in a squadron assigned to the army, and in both the Reserve squadrons and the Air Commando squadrons.

These aircraft play a direct military role in operations quite openly described by the South Africans in their publications. Thus, in an article depicting the role of Aircraft on the Border, Paratus refers both to the usefulness of the C 130s and to the invaluable role played by the Cessna, commenting that "without these aircraft, the helicopter, Cessna and Dakota, problems of supplies and communication would be insurmountable." Among the tasks performed by these planes are:

"Reconnaissance: Low-level visual reconnaissance with a pilot and observer is done with the Cessna because of its maneuverability and low fuel consumption. These small aircraft keep the one thousand mile border under constant surveillance"

"Aerial observation post: Cessnas can be used to control ground fire onto specific targets and to report subsequent enemy movement."

Thus US aircraft are being built into South Africa's system of military repression in the most direct way possible. It is these aircraft that will be in the forefront of the inevitably bloody suppression of any Black attempt to oppose continued white minority rule. It should be remembered that in South Africa a terrorist is defined, by law, as anyone who attempts to embarrass the affairs of state. Therefore, even peaceful demonstrators or striking workers might find themselves the targets of these US built airplanes, and it is certain that in any development of a liberation war such as that just ended in Mozambique, American planes would be used to search out and destroy African freedom fighters.