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'We Should Not Sit in Judgement on a Difficult Social and Political Problem Six Thousand Miles away.' Dwight D. Eisenhower and Apartheid South Africa

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ABSTRACT

My article explores how geostrategic and economic factors dictated the nature of the bilateral relationship between Washington and Pretoria during the Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower. In the context of the early Cold War, the vehement anti-communism of the National Party government combined with the vast mineral wealth of the apartheid state led to friendly relations with the practitioners of apartheid. The growth in trade and investment ties further tightened the bond between the two nations. While the Eisenhower administration occasionally offered a mild critique of South African racial policy, the White House sought no tangible disassociation from Pretoria even in the aftermath of the shootings at Sharpeville.

Introduction

On 28 March 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower held a bilateral summit meeting with British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan at Camp David, Maryland. As the topic turned to the question of apartheid in South Africa and protecting Pretoria by obtaining a innocuous resolution at the United Nations (UN) in the aftermath of the police shootings at Sharpeville, Eisenhower stated he firmly believed that 'We should not sit in judgment on a difficult social and political problem six thousand miles away'. This comment while made towards the end of his administration's time in office was a particularly apt description of the geopolitically centred approach adopted by the White House to the issue of United States policy towards racial discrimination in South Africa during the 1950s.[1]

During the Eisenhower era, hard policy interests dominated Washington's relationship with Pretoria. The deepening geostrategic rivalry with Moscow meant that Cold War considerations including the vehement anti-communism of the apartheid regime and South Africa's rich mineral

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resources, especially uranium, were of paramount importance to the Eisenhower administration. The developing South African economy and its possibilities for profitable trade and investment also impacted policy towards Pretoria. While the international impact of the domestic move towards greater civil rights for African-Americans and the growing diplomatic pressure at the UN for the White House to take a stronger stance against apartheid led to on occasion to tensions, nevertheless, the strategic and economic ties ensured that Washington maintained close relations with the practitioners of apartheid.

In terms of military association, Eisenhower approved US assistance to improve Pretoria's radar defence system, continued to allow the navy to make port calls to South Africa, opened negotiations for a missile and satellite tracking station and signed an atomic energy agreement which including supplying a research reactor and enriched uranium to the South African Atomic Energy Agency. Bilateral economic ties also deepened during the 1950s with the support and encouragement of the Eisenhower administration. While, US officials periodically cautioned their South African counterparts about the danger of their racial policies, at the UN Washington sought to avoid overly critical resolutions against Pretoria. Even after the shootings at Sharpeville in 1960, while for the first time taking a tougher line in critiquing apartheid, nevertheless, Eisenhower sought to reassure the National Party leadership that US criticism did not mean a change in policy towards Pretoria.

Historiography

There is a wealth of existing scholarship that offers a range of arguments that purport to explain U.S. foreign policy towards southern Africa during the Cold War and decolonisation eras. A number of scholars, including John Lewis Gaddis and Odd Arne Westad, have argued that the 'containment' of global Communism was the principal concern of policy makers during the entire Cold War era. Indeed, it has been suggested that the wider Third World was integral to the broader struggle for supremacy as both Washington and Moscow realised that full scale conflict in North America, Europe or Asia was unwinnable therefore the Cold War descended into a contest that in the words of Nancy Mitchell comprised of 'shadow-boxing in the periphery'.[2]

Some historians have noted that that US support was primarily restricted to regimes that displayed anti-communist credentials, opposed radicalism and were willing to act as regional policemen in the broader defence of Western interests. Policymakers in Washington typically exhibited little concern if such allies displayed repressive internal policies provided the governments remained firmly in the US sphere of influence. Indeed, it has been noted that the white minority regimes in southern Africa deliberately employed Cold War rhetoric to obtain US aid.[3]

A number of scholars have noted the role of economics in shaping policy towards Africa during this period. According to this school of thought, the promotion of free market capitalism, specifically access to raw materials and markets, was the principal objective of policy makers. The mineral wealth, industrialised economies and cheap labour costs of the South African regime proved to be especially enticing for corporate investment and trade. Thomas Borstelmann, in particular, has contended that the growing economic ties between South Africa and the United States, together with geostrategic concerns, were a significant factor impacting US support for the white minority government during the 1950s.[4]

It has been further posited, notably by Westad, that for the US Government the ideological struggle of capitalism versus Soviet collectivism heightened the importance of trade with and investment in Africa and the wider Third World. He has asserted that Washington sought a greater economic predominance globally in order to demonstrate the superiority of the free market system over the rigid state centric economy of the Soviet Union.[5]

Historians have discussed the impact of race, specifically the rise of African-American political power during the Cold War era, on policy towards southern Africa. It has been argued that as early as the 1950s, African Americans considered the liberation of colonial peoples of colour as inseparable from the struggle for racial justice in the United States itself. They have further argued that the occupants of the Oval Office were not only aware of the growing importance of the African-American vote but also that the apartheid question represented a test of the White House's stance on racial issues.[6]

Indeed, in *The Cold War and the Color Line* Borstelmann underlines the struggle faced by successive US presidential administrations in balancing Cold War concerns with the growing movement for racial justice both in the United States and southern Africa. *Cold War and Black Liberation* by Thomas Noer explores US relations with the white minority regimes of southern Africa with a particular focus on the influence of domestic Civil Rights movements in shaping foreign policy and further highlights the complex and emotive clash between the question of majority rule and immediate hard policy interests. The work of Robert Massie provides a detailed account of how anti-apartheid groups in the United States waged a campaign seeking divestment from and sanctions upon South Africa.[7]

The Eisenhower era has also been explored by a number of scholars. In *Eisenhower and the American Crusades*, Herbert S. Parmet offers a meticulously researched assessment of Eisenhower's time in office arguing that he was a conservative stabilising force in a time of deep uncertainty and conflict. William I. Hitchcock's recent work, *The Age of Eisenhower*, also considers Eisenhower to be skilled political leader who despite his natural conservatism found a middle path in guiding the nation through the great crises of the 1950s.[8]

In a similar line, Charles C. Alexander, in *Holding the Line*, views the characteristic feature of the Eisenhower era as an effort to hold the line against global and domestic threats including communism, big government and disruptive social change. In *Eisenhower and the Cold War*, Robert A. Divine investigates Eisenhower's broader foreign policy highlighting his successes including ending the Korean War. Divine interestingly further observes that it was Eisenhower's admirable self-restraint and refrain from excessive involvement in the domestic affairs of other nations that led to his success in foreign relations.[9]

While the wider literature is extensive, there is, however, a comparative paucity of literature comprehensively examining the bilateral relationship with Pretoria through the lens of the Eisenhower administration and the specific dynamics that influenced White House decision making. A magisterial overview of US policy towards South Africa during the apartheid era focusing on the clash between human rights and strategic or economic concerns is offered by Alex Thomson. In terms of the Eisenhower era, Thomson argues that Washington sought to continue the friendly ties with Pretoria based on geopolitical cooperation and economic assistance, South African racial policies led to a more critical US stance and a downturn in the bilateral relationship.[10]

In this article, I seek to clarify and add to the previous scholarship especially the work of Thomson. I entirely concur that with his argument there certainly existed a struggle between the moral issue of human rights and strategic and economic interests but I also suggest that there was an equally geopolitical advantage in advancing the cause of racial equality, both domestically and overseas, in part as it countered Soviet propaganda portraying the United States as an imperialist state. Equally Washington fretted over the impact of racial developments on US commercial interests in South Africa. Thus, when weighing up decision-making on South Africa it was a not a clear-cut question of hard policy concerns or human rights but also required considering the different pragmatic consequences of US actions.

This article offers a comprehensive investigation considering both the global and domestic determinants that shaped Eisenhower's policies towards Pretoria as well as the persona of the President himself. I argue that Cold War geopolitics and economic interest dictated the need, in the view of the White House, for close bilateral ties with South Africa. The strategic need, however, to position the United States as a supporter of national independence in Africa at the United Nations and the international implications of the moves towards greater civil rights domestically for African-Americans began to lead to unease and tension in the traditionally friendly relationship with Pretoria forcing the Eisenhower administration to warily walk a diplomatic tightrope.

The difficulties in obtaining official archival documents in South Africa relating to government policy and foreign relations during the apartheid era

forces historians of the relationship between Washington and Pretoria to primarily rely on records originating from archives based in the United States. While this poses a challenge to any traditional bilateral narrative it is far less problematic when analysing the rationale behind the changing nature of Washington's approach towards the apartheid state through the lens of the Eisenhower years and the actions taken by his administration.

Background

In May, 1948, the National Party (HNP) led by Daniel Francois Malan defeated long term South African leader Jan Christian Smuts in an election that heralded the onset of the strict system of racial discrimination, known as apartheid in Afrikaans, that would become the prevailing theme in South African politics and society for the following half century. The Population Registration and Group Areas Acts of July 1950 forced all South African residents to be classified into racial groupings and empowered the Governor-General to declare geographical areas, including urban residential and business neighbourhoods, to be for the exclusive occupation of specific racial groups. Pretoria also passed legislation that would enforce what became known as petty apartheid. The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 was followed in 1950 by the Immorality Amendment Act which prohibited extramarital sex between whites and individuals of any other race.[11]

During the previous Harry S. Truman administration, the White House had, despite Truman's own public and private support for racial justice in the United States itself, nevertheless developed a policy of closer ties with Pretoria due to the vehement anti-communism of the National Party, Pretoria's support for Western actions against Moscow during the early Cold War era and its willingness to provide uranium for the post war US atomic programme. For the Truman administration, the moral issue of racial equality in southern Africa, was overshadowed by an increasingly 'hot' Cold War and the presence of a solidly anti-communist government in a key strategic location on the tip of Africa, trumped any concerns the White House may have had regarding bilateral ties with the practitioners of apartheid.[12]

Eisenhower

On 20 January 1953, Dwight David 'Ike' Eisenhower became the 34th president of the United States. The likeable former Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force in Europe during the Second World War and five-star General described himself as a 'progressive conservative' and a non-isolationist moderate Republican who vigorously opposed the global spread of communism and sought to end the Korean War. Indeed, it is noteworthy, in

the context of this article that the primary focus of the Eisenhower White House was international not domestic affairs.[13]

During the Eisenhower administration, Cold War geopolitics loomed large as a major determinant shaping White House policy towards Africa. A key element of Eisenhower's foreign policy, guided by staunch anti-communist and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, focused on the containment of the international communist threat especially the spread of Soviet influence and ideology. The African continent with its vast manpower, extensive natural resources and important strategic position represented a rich prize in the global struggle for supremacy.[14]

While communist influence remained limited in Africa, Washington was well aware that Moscow was deploying its military political, economic and psychological capabilities to stir up unrest especially in colonial areas of European allies. Indeed, in the words of Congresswoman Frances P. Bolton, the ranking minority member of the Subcommittee on the Near East and Africa, who compiled an extensive report on Africa the Kremlin used the 'club of colonialism' to both gain 'control of men's minds but also for the exploitation of their territories'. Within the Eisenhower administration itself, both Vice President Richard Nixon and Christian Herter, who served as both Under Secretary of State and later Secretary of State, believed the Soviet Union posed a serious peril to the stability of the African continent. As observed by Nixon, 'We do not have to only count card-carrying Communists as a measure of the Communist threat. In Africa ... .the Communists will clothe themselves in Islamic, racist, anti-racist, or nationalist clothing' leading to a high potential danger of Communist penetration.[15]

In response to this threat the CIA and National Security Council (NSC) counselled the White House to promote political and economic stability in Africa as a necessary bulwark against communist machinations. It was deemed necessary to minimise differences with European nations over colonial policies which tended to divide the West at the UN while at the same time cooperating with allies and non communist nationalists in seeking to promote an end to racial tensions. On a strategic level, the White House sought friendly relations with independent African nations and the colonial powers in order to achieve air and naval bases and transit rights with adequate security for related facilities and transportation while also seeking cooperation and collaboration to eradicate any potential communist threat to the region.[16]

In the case of South Africa the vehement anti-communism and pro-Western stance of the National Party government combined with its powerful military, the strongest in Africa, and strategic position on the Cape sea route made Pretoria an important partner in the global struggle against the communism threat both in Africa and further afield. This salient point was not lost on the respective US Ambassadors to South Africa Waldemar Gallman and

Henry Byroade. The claims of the apartheid state to be a staunch Western ally were also bolstered by its record of supporting US military actions in the post-World War II era including South African Air Force participation in the Berlin Airlift and the Korean War.[17]

While South Africa had traditionally been viewed by Washington as part of Britain's sphere of influence, following the electoral victory of the HNP in 1948, the historic hosility of the Afrikaner leadership towards London combined with the decline of British global power led Pretoria, as observed by the State Department, to increasingly look towards Washington 'as its model, leader and source of assistance'. While the United States on occasion consulted with Britain regarding how to approach the increasingly problematic diplomatic question of domestic South African racial policies, especially their inclusion on the UN agenda, by the 1950s Washington had its own well established bilateral ties with Pretoria strategically, economically and in terms of access to natural resources.[18]

Indeed, the vast mineral wealth of South Africa was also particular importance to Washington not only economically but also on strategic grounds. A key concern of the Eisenhower administration was to ensure the availability of critical and strategic raw materials in times of both war and peace ideally from a reliable anti-communist ally. Of high concern, according to the CIA, was ensuring a reliable supply of asbestos, chrome, copper, diamonds and manganese for the defence of the United States and the security of the free world. All of these minerals, as well as gold, were found in abundance within South Africa. Indeed, Pretoria produced 12 of the 23 strategic minerals listed by the National Security Resources Board as so critical that stockpiling was deemed essential.[19]

Of paramount importance to the White House was access to uranium. As the nuclear arms race escalated this heightened the need for a reliable supplier of uranium a key component of both atomic and thermonuclear bombs. This was of particular concern as the vast majority of US uranium supplies stemmed from diminishing reserves in the potentially unstable Katanga region of the Belgian Congo. Retaining close ties with fiercely anti-communist South Africa, which both possessed both the largest undeveloped uranium ore reserves in the world available for rapid commercial development but also large quantities of uranium in low concentrations in the gold ores of its mining industry on the Witwatersrand near Johannesburg became crucial to the geostrategic objectives of the Eisenhower administration.[20]

The rapidly expanding and highly developed South African economy also provided lucrative opportunities for trade and investment. As observed by David Post, US Economic Officer to South Africa, in the decade after 1947 GNP had increased 134%. By early 1950s, Washington, after London, had become the second largest trading partner of Pretoria, with an extremely favourable balance of payments. US exports to Pretoria also accounted

for around 20% of all South African imports. In terms of direct assets, by 1956 there was over $300 million in US capital invested in the apartheid state by over 100 US corporations including Ford, General Motors and Firestone.[21]

The global shift towards decolonisation, however, posed diplomatic pitfalls for the bilateral relationship between Washington and Pretoria especially at the UN. The White House was well aware of the geopolitical need to position itself globally as a supporter of national independence to counter the Soviet narrative that the United States was an imperialist Western nation. This issue was exacerbated by the dramatic expansion of the UN as numerous former colonial nations in both Africa and Asia began to gain their independence. Between 1945 and 1960 over 30 former colonies joined the UN developing into an important voting bloc which supported independence for the remaining colonial areas and vociferously opposed racial discrimination in South Africa. Washington was therefore, especially by the late 1950s, forced to walk a diplomatic tightrope between the required support for colonial Cold War allies as well as South Africa without losing the goodwill of the independent and soon to be independent African nations on other US diplomatic initiatives.[22]

The growth of the domestic civil rights movement also impacted policy towards white minority rule in South Africa. During the 1950s, African Americans and liberals began to challenge the mass disenfranchisement and racial segregation that they faced in the southern states as well as the widespread discrimination across the United States. Eisenhower, is not widely regarded as a champion of domestic civil rights, indeed in 1952 many southern segregationist leaders supported him based on his opposition to federal efforts to compel integration. Eisenhower also privately opposed the landmark supreme court ruling in Brown v. Board of Education, which declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students to be unconstitutional stating that all the southern whites want to avoid is that 'their sweet little girls are not required to sit in school alongside some big overgrown Negroes'.[23]

Despite his racial prejudice and sympathy with southern segregationists, Eisenhower nevertheless took a number of actions to advance the cause of civil rights. The White House moved quickly to end resistance to desegregation of the military by using government control of spending to compel compliance from military officials. The Civil Rights Act of 1957, signed into law by Eisenhower was the first federal law designed to protect African Americans since the end of Reconstruction and both created the United States Commission on Civil Rights and established a civil rights division in the Justice Department. Later that same year, Eisenhower federalised the National Guard in Arkansas to ensure the enrolment of nine black students at Little Rock Central High School.[24]

The international aspect of the civil rights struggle was not lost on the Eisenhower administration. Continued segregation and discrimination domestically had a negative impact on the US relationship with black African nations and other newly independent former colonies, provided fertile propaganda for Moscow and damaged Washington's aspiration to be seen a champion of human freedom and democracy. Equally importantly, the White House was also aware that it could not apply a double standard when it came to opposing racism and racial oppression either domestically and overseas. The administration believed that apartheid was 'morally wrong' and the US had to act accordingly. While not specifically referring to Pretoria, it was nonetheless noteworthy that in his October 1956 address to the nation Eisenhower himself stated that 'There can be no peace without law. And there can be no law if we were to invoke one code of international conduct for those who oppose us and another for our friends'.[25]

The Eisenhower administration, nevertheless, as noted by Borstelmann expressed a marked condescension towards non-white nations and their leaders. Indeed, White House Special Assistant Charles Douglas Jackson was appalled at the 'swirling mass of emotionally super-charged Africans, Asiatics and Arabs' which Washington had to deal with. Racism and racist tropes were commonplace among senior members of the White House when considering black Africa and black African capabilities. In March 1960, at an NSC meeting Vice President Richard Nixon commented that 'some of the peoples of Africa have been out of the trees for only about fifty years' at which point Budget Director Maurice Stans quipped that he was convinced 'many Africans still belonged in the trees'. Such views were shared by Ambassador Gallman who described South African 'natives' as 'totally incompetent to properly use the franchise'. In his final dispatch to the State Department, he urged Washington to remember that it was the white South Africans who had brought 'Western civilization' to the tip of Africa and built a new country in 'virgin territory' while dealing with a 'baffling race problem' for practically all their history.[26]

The theme of a common heritage and history between the United States and South Africa was remarked upon by US and South African diplomats. Gallman commented on the friendliness and hospitality of the white population and remarked that he had never 'served in a country where close, informal working relations with officials were more quickly established'. Interestingly, however, US officials stationed in South Africa also displayed a certain cultural arrogance and disparagement towards Afrikanerdom and the National Party leadership. In reports to the State Department Afrikaners were described as 'provincial' 'stubborn' and ignorant of the main currents of European intellectual thought. Even Gallman, in his final dispatch described the Afrikaner as living a 'self-satisfied, isolated existence . . . .shut off in a fool's paradise of his own creating'.[27]

While Eisenhower's foreign policy priorities, given the context of the early Cold War, focused on containing the spread of communism in Europe and ending the Korean war, nevertheless it would be wrong to characterise the White House as apathetic towards Africa. Indeed, in the early spring of 1957 Vice President Nixon embarked on a month-long official trip through Africa visiting eight countries including Ethiopia, Ghana and Liberia. Somewhat surprisingly, given his racial prejudice, Nixon made a very favourable impression on African leaders and it was observed in a 1958 report by the Council for Foreign Economic Policy that 'No American has higher prestige in Africa than the Vice President'. Upon his return Nixon, emphasised to Eisenhower the importance of Africa to the U.S. and pressed the President to create a Bureau of African Affairs at the State Department.[28]

It is also noteworthy the importance accorded by the Eisenhower administration to the Special Study Mission to Africa undertaken by Congresswoman Bolton in 1955. The ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee had spent three months in Africa travelling to twenty-four countries and territories to the east and south of the Sahara and compiled a comprehensive report on the region. When Bolton presented her findings at the White House it was requested the all the staff members made an 'exceptional effort' to attend the important meeting to examine her findings and proposals.[29]

Strategic ties

During the Eisenhower years Cold War concerns were paramount when considering military ties with South Africa. In October 1951, during the Truman era, Washington had included Pretoria in the Mutual Security Act which provided military economic and technical assistance to friendly nations in the interest of containing communism. While the Eisenhower White House was more focused on supporting nations in greater immediate peril than South Africa and was not prepared to subsidise or support all items on, in the words of Thomson, 'Pretoria's shopping list' particularly regarding an armoured division for a proposed regional expeditionary force the White House was amenable to reasonable requests for equipment and training to be used closer to home.[30]

On 10 November 1955, the South African Defense Minister François Christiaan Erasmus requested US assistance for the establishment of an early warning radar screen for South Africa. Washington agreed to such a proposal and the US Air Force dispatched their 'best six member team' to advise and help the South African Defence Force (SADF) set up a radar defence system. In 1956 the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), following a request from Erasmus that South Africa be allowed to purchase modern jet fighters from the United States in the event of hostilities, recommended that Pretoria be encouraged to

purchase 'military aircraft, including fighter-bomber types' from Washington.[31]

The White House was also urged by the CIA and JCS as well as the NSC to ensure base and transit rights in South Africa to allow for continued port call and ship repair for US naval vessels and the establishment of US military bases. Washington re-established the Office of a Naval Attache which had been removed in 1949 and dispatched both a Naval Attache and Naval Attache for Air to the US mission in South Africa. In terms of port calls, in mid-January 1955, the USS Midway docked at Cape Town for what Captain Reynold D. Hogle described as a 'very pleasant' visit.[32]

Liberal figures on Capitol Hill including Senator Hubert Humphrey and Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. along with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were particularly outraged by the port call especially the idea of US personnel being subject to apartheid laws. According to Hogle, however, Pretoria offered 'real and special concessions', including non-segregated attendance at a baseball game between the USS Midway and a local Cape Town team as well as evening entertainment and local transportation passes offered regardless of race. This account of events was also supported by Consul General John F. Stone. In addition 23,000 South Africans visited the USS Midway with no segregation on board.[33]

The Eisenhower administration also opened negotiations for a US missile and satellite tracking station inside of South Africa. Washington viewed the apartheid state as a 'uniquely necessary location for tracking of Soviet missiles and satellites' and in 1960 the White House dispatched US Air Force General Donald Yates for a survey and briefing trip to South Africa, although in aftermath of Sharpeville (see later section) it was made clear to Pretoria that the opening of the tracking station in no way constituted approval of South African racial policies. Following the agreement of Pretoria, a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) deep space tracking station was established in 1961 at Hartebeesthoek, near Johannesburg. The facility also served as the terminus of the Atlantic Missile Range.[34]

The White House, though was wary of a formal military alliance with Pretoria. During the Truman era, South African efforts to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) had been politely rebuffed. Under Eisenhower, the US maintained this posture despite continued suggestions from South African officials including Prime Minister Malan and Defence Minister Erasmus concerning that either Pretoria join NATO or develop an affiliated African Regional Defense Organization which would have indirect assurances of support from NATO as some of its members would be members of NATO at the same time. US officials, however, pointed out that the racial problems in the southern African region would make it difficult to get the agreement of other NATO members to such an arrangement.[35]

In the field of nuclear collaboration however, Washington had no qualms about official agreements with the practitioners of apartheid. As the nuclear arms race heated up in the early 1950s, following the successful production by Moscow of an atomic weapon in late 1949, this heightened the need for a reliable and secure source of uranium for the US nuclear programme. Since the beginning of the Manhattan Project in 1942, the Shinkolobwe mine in the Katanga region of the Belgian Congo had produced the vast majority of US uranium supplies. Indeed, the fissionable material in the bombs that had exploded over Japan in 1945 had originated from Congolese mines.[36]

During the Truman era, however, US officials had already begun to express concerns over the potential implications of Washington's dependence on Congolese uranium for national security. Belgian nationalisation of the mines, political or social unrest in the Congo, and the threat of Soviet sabotage were particularly troubling possibilities. In addition, as noted by Borstelmann, US Atomic Energy Commission Chairman David Lilienthal and other figures expressed reservations over the extent of the uranium supply at the mine.[37]

As early as 1944, surveys undertaken by geologists working for the mining company Union Carbide, which was acting as a subcontractor for the Manhattan Project, revealed that South Africa possessed the largest undeveloped uranium ore reserves in the world available for rapid commercial development. Significantly, South Africa not only contained mineable reserves of uranium but also could extract large quantities of uranium in low concentrations from the gold ores of the mining industry on the Witwatersrand near Johannesburg. Indeed, during the Truman administration, in November 1950, representatives of the Combined Development Agency (CDA) which comprised of the US, the United Kingdom and Canada reached an agreement with the South African Atomic Energy Board regarding the procurement of uranium.[38]

Eisenhower was certainly well aware of the strategic importance of the presence of vast uranium deposits located in a friendly pro-Western allied nation. Both the CIA and the NSC as well as the State Department highlighted the critical importance of maintaining access to a reliable supply of uranium from the apartheid state. Ambassador Gallmann also noted the salient fact that for the US aim of 'building up a strong free world to counter Soviet armed power, we need South African strategic supplies and, very importantly her uranium'.[39]

Closer atomic ties with Pretoria also fitted with Eisenhower's broader 'Atoms for Peace' initiative which opened up non-weapons related nuclear research to friendly countries that had not previously possessed nuclear technology as part of a geostrategic efforts to promote the peaceful use of atomic energy and avoid the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The vehement anti-communism of the South African government combined with its vast

uranium reserves made Pretoria a crucial part of US strategic atomic planning.[40]

On 8 July 1957, Eisenhower signed a ten-year agreement of cooperation with the Union of South Africa concerning the civil use of atomic energy. Under the terms of the agreement, Pretoria agreed to supply unenriched uranium to the United States and allowed International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards over its nuclear energy programme. In return, Washington supplied South Africa with the technology and training to develop and expand its existing nuclear research. Indeed, under the agreement over two thousand South Africans were trained as nuclear scientists in the United States. Uranium extraction proved to be a fiscal windfall for the apartheid regime, by 1959 annual exports of uranium oxide reached over 6,400 tons with a value of over 100 million rand.[41]

In addition, the White House agreed to fund and deliver a research reactor to the South African Atomic Energy Commission for the civilian use of atomic energy. The Allis-Chalmers experimental 20-megawatt reactor subsequently arrived at the Atomic Energy Commission's research facility at Pelindaba, outside of Pretoria, in 1964 during the Lyndon B. Johnson era. Under the agreement, Washington further provided fuel rods containing approximately 4.5 kilograms of 90% enriched U-235 necessary for the initial startup of the reactor.[42]

Trade and investment

Hard policy considerations also dominated broader economic relations between the two nations. During the Eisenhower administration there was a steady deepening of trade and investment ties between Washington and Pretoria. The South African economy had developed strongly after World War II, indeed, as noted by US Economic Officer to South Africa Post, in the decade or so after 1947 its GNP had increased by around 134% primarily due to the development and export of its abundant minerals as well as the expansion of agriculture and the manufacturing industry. This economic development, combined with South Africa's traditional sources of supply from Britain suffering disruption due to World War II, led to opportunities for US corporations and investors.[43]

During the 1950s, commercial ties between the United States and South Africa expanded considerably. Between 1950 and 1960, direct investment by US corporations doubled to around $300 million and by the end of the decade over 160 US businesses operated in the apartheid state including Chrysler, Ford, General Motors and Goodyear. US exports to South Africa also increased significantly during the Eisenhower years to $288 million with a favourable balance of payments of around $180 million. US companies and investment also assisted in the development of South African industrial

capabilities. Notably, the SASOL coal liquefaction plant at Sasolburg in the Orange Free State, which was intended to reduce South African dependence on imported oil, was completed in 1955 by a US engineering firm.[44]

Under Eisenhower, the White House was also encouraging and supportive of the 'very friendly and harmonious' economic ties between Washington and Pretoria. By 1955, South Africa had received over $150 million in loans from the Export-Import (Ex-Im) Bank, the official credit agency of the US Government, to modernise its roads and harbours in part to help with the transportation of strategically critically minerals. In December 1959, US influence over the World Bank allowed for an additional loan of $25 million to the Railways and Harbours Administration. The administration further facilitated commercial intercourse by signing a double taxation treaty with South Africa in 1952 and two years later renewing the bilateral civil aviation agreement with Pretoria.[45]

Despite the booming South African economy, US officials did on occasion demonstrate concern that the political and social implications of Pretoria's repressive racial policies could have a detrimental impact on both the stability the South African economy and by extension US investments in the apartheid state. Indeed, as early as April 1953, Secretary of State Dulles requested that Ambassador Gallman, when congratulating Prime Minister Malan on his electoral victory, also point out Washington's concerns over racial developments and their impact on US business interests in South Africa. The State Department also advised against any US government program that would publicly advocate support for accelerated US investment in South Africa due to the possible 'explosive' consequences of South African apartheid legislation.[46]

Concern over the potential fiscal consequences of Pretoria's racial policies for US corporations, however, did not reach levels that would lead to any public or private warnings for businesses from the administration as to the potential for instability in South Africa or end assistance programmes for US investors in the apartheid state. Indeed, for the White House as well as State Department officials, a principal objective of US economic policy towards Pretoria was to encourage the creation of conditions favourable to a growth of US capital both for fiscal reasons but also to maintain good relations with and influence over the National Party government. While the NSC observed that the US Government should encourage corporations to set an example by practicing non-discrimination in their operations this should only be to the 'maximum extent consistent with local laws'.[47]

Bilateral diplomacy and the UN

Both in bilateral diplomacy and in the international forum of the UN, for the majority of his term in office, Eisenhower and his administration took

a cautious approach in its criticism of South African racial policies primarily to avoid antagonising what was otherwise considered to be a pro Western ally. Indeed, on occasion in private US officials appeared to be tacitly condoning the concept of apartheid but wished that Pretoria would be more pragmatic in its approach to how it was applied practically on the ground. In July 1957, the Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy William P. Maddox told South African Undersecretary for External Affairs Dr. Willem C. Naude that 'there is much to be said for the strict vertical territorial theory of apartheid' and that 'as Americans, we realize the importance of western civilization, and of White leadership and control, remaining in South Africa'. He cautioned, however, that Washington had a stake in South African stability and that 'we disagree that the measures you are taking will lead to a healthy social order'.[48]

The State Department did, periodically, offer mild critiques of the apartheid system. In April 1953, Ambassador Gallman queried Prime Minister Malan as to why native leaders could not be invited for direct talks with the National Party government. Later that same year Secretary of State Dulles warned South African Ambassador Gerhardus Jooste that he feared that the white population of South Africa was 'sitting on a keg of dynamite' and present policies would lead to an explosion. Seven years later, US officials in bilateral discussions continued to offer only concerned advice of the trajectory of Pretoria's racial policies. In the fall of 1960, Secretary of State Herter expressed gratitude to Foreign Minister Eric Louw for South African assistance for US evacuees during the political upheaval in the Congo and while reiterating Washington's opposition to apartheid also proposed a merely qualified franchise to allow some non whites to vote.[49]

The caution of the White House to avoid overtly offending Pretoria was clearly demonstrated by the question of hosting mixed race receptions at the US Embassy or Consulates in South Africa. During Eisenhower's first term in office, official US diplomatic events in South Africa remained white only in accordance with apartheid law. In the early spring of 1956, in the run up to the US presidential election later that year, the issue of inviting black South Africans to diplomatic functions became a concern for the US Mission to the UN due to potential negative publicity of the existing policy. In response Secretary of State Herter skirted the issue by stating that while 'invitations should not be issued on a basis of caste, color or creed at any of our public functions' nevertheless regarding the 'applicability of this principle to specific posts abroad, I believe our people should apply it to the extent the traffic will bear. The equally American characteristic of good common horse sense should also apply'. The receptions would remain white only until changed by the Johnson administration in the mid 1960s.[50]

At the UN the White House adopted a similarly guarded approach to issues relating to South Africa. As noted by the Acting Director of the Office of

Southern African Affairs Fred L. Hadsel, Pretoria had 'demonstrated a special talent for becoming a party to international harangues' in which Washington sought to exercise a 'mediating, or at least moderating influence'. The issues of continued de facto control of South West Africa under a League of Nations mandate in defiance of international opinion and its discriminatory treatment of its Indian minority had been on the UN agenda since 1946 during the Smuts era. In September 1952, the whole apartheid system was placed under UN scrutiny when thirteen Arab and Asian states put forward a resolution addressing the 'racial situation' in South Africa in response to the Defiance Campaign launched by the African National Congress (ANC).[51]

For the majority of the Eisenhower era, Washington warily walked a diplomatic tightrope on these issues. On one hand, the White House saw little geopolitical advantage in overtly condemning and antagonising an anti-communist ally with whom Washington enjoyed 'traditionally friendly relations' but this equally needed to be balanced against its both its position as moral leader of the free world and the pragmatic need to win the support of the emerging nations of Africa and Asia as a counter to the spread of communism.[52]

In the case of South West Africa, the US delegation at the UN made it clear that while it opposed any effort by South Africa to annex the territory and favoured the transfer to a UN trusteeship it opposed any efforts to compel Pretoria to do so and opposed any overly condemnatory resolutions against South Africa. The White House specifically sought to support the implementation of a 1950 International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion which stated that while Pretoria was not obliged to cede South West Africa it had no authority to alter its international status and must submit regular administrative reports to the UN. Washington also reluctantly agreed to serve, along with Brazil and the United Kingdom, on the UN Good Offices Committee (GOC) on South West Africa which submitted reports to the UNGA. A 1958 report by the GOC recommending the possible partition of the territory was summarily rejected by the UNGA. Washington, while urging Pretoria to be flexible in its negotiations with the UN, also sought to avoid developments that would inflame the situation and tried to dissuade Liberia from bringing a 'contentious' case of South African administration of the territory to the ICJ.[53]

In the diplomatic squabble between India, Pakistan and South Africa over its discrimination against its Asian community, Washington encouraged direct negotiations between all parties and backed general resolutions calling on all member states to support human rights and bring their national policies in line with ideals of the UN Charter. The White House, however, sought to avoid any explicit criticism of Pretoria over the matter and expressed irritation at the constant annual return of the dispute to be addressed by the UNGA. In addition to protecting an ally the State Department also feared that South African resentment over the 'unwarranted interference' in their domestic

affairs could lead to both greater domestic support for the the NP and apartheid as well as Pretoria's departure from the UN.[54]

The Eisenhower administration also favoured, at least initially, a broader approach when the question of apartheid itself was raised at the UN. Washington argued than rather than unfairly signalling out South Africa over its racial policies as an infringement of human rights, rather all member nations should take the appropriate steps to improve their human rights record. Furthermore, it was pointed out by US officials that racial segregation was but one violation of human rights and liberties and Pretoria was also not the only nation guilty of racial violations. Indeed, in December 1954, Secretary of State Dulles specifically highlighted to the US Mission to the UN that the stance of Washington was not to focus on individual member states but rather the broader context of the 'world-wide human rights situation'.[55]

During the latter half of the 1950s, however, Washington began to take a slightly tougher stance on Pretoria in the UNGA. In part this stemmed from domestic action on racial issues including Eisenhower's decision to use federal troops in Little Rock and the the civil rights legislation. As observed by USUN Ambassador Lodge in late 1957, these domestic events made it even more imperative that the US take a stronger position on racial discrimination globally. He further pointed out that Afro-Asian support for US actions against the Soviet Union would wane if Washington continued to provide diplomatic support for South Africa at the UN. In 1958, for the first time the US voted in favour of a UNGA resolution that confronted Pretoria although US delegate George McGregor delicately stated that Washington did not 'condemn" South African policy it did cause 'concern' for the United States. Even this carefully phrased criticism, however, led to according to Foreign Minister Louw 'considerable irritation' among the practitioners of apartheid.[56]

Verwoerd and Sharpeville

Following the death of Prime Minister Johannes G. Strijdom in August 1958, he was succeeded as South African leader by Hendrik F. Verwoerd. Verwoerd who had previously served as Minister of Native Affairs, was known as the architect of apartheid due to his role in shaping policies including the Population Registration and Group Areas Acts which were passed in 1950. Indeed, as observed by US Charge d'Affaires Maddox that by 1957 Verwoerd, was increasingly convinced of both the legal and moral justification of apartheid and indeed that such policies were 'just and right by the highest Christian standards'.[57]

Upon assuming power Verwoerd moved swiftly to advance the apartheid agenda and within twelve months had passed further legislation including the Promotion of Bantu Self-government Act authorising transformation of

traditional tribal lands into independent black homelands or Bantustans, the Bantu Investment Corporation Act and the Extension of University Education Act which made it a criminal offence for a non-white student to register at a formerly open university without the written permission of the Minister of Internal Affairs. In July 1959, Albert Luthuli, President of the African National Congress (ANC), informed US Ambassador Philip Crowe that the Verwoerd government was the worst that he had ever experienced and this was likely to lead to violence. Crowe himself stated after meeting Verwoerd that while he was 'extremely friendly' there was no mistaking that he was 'a fanatic with a fanatic's absolute faith in his own righteousness'.[58]

On 21 March 1960 in the township of Sharpeville, near Vereeniging in the Transvaal, a large crowd, although as noted by Thula Simpson, less than the 20,000 later claimed, of black Africans many armed with homemade weapons and rocks, gathered outside the police station in protest over the pass laws. These had been recently expanded, by the Verwoerd government to require women as well as men over the age of sixteen to carry passbooks with their personal identity details to control the movement of the black population. When the crowd or 'mob', in the words of Ambassador Crowe, attacked the police barricades in the early afternoon the police opened fire killing 69 protestors and leaving a further 186 injured.[59]

While, Crowe informed the State Department that he believed the police had no choice under the circumstances, the killings led to outrage among liberals and labour unions in the United States. George Houser of the American Committee on Africa urged Eisenhower to make a statement condemning the 'massacre of unarmed Africans' while Walter P. Reuther the President of the Industrial Union Department of American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organizations called for an official economic boycott of South Africa due to its 'brutal and inhuman policies'.[60]

On March 22, the State Department issued a press release stating that 'While the United States, as a matter of practice, does not ordinarily comment on the internal affairs of governments with which it enjoys normal relations, it cannot help but regret the tragic loss of life resulting from the measures taken against the demonstrators in South Africa'. The press release was praised by African and Asian nations and well received by 'informed non-whites' inside South Africa. The action, though was 'bitterly resented' among Afrikaners who felt that Washington had 'sold out Whites in order to curry favor with Blacks'. In Pretoria, Ambassador Crowe was summoned to meet Foreign Minister Louw and given an aide memoire expressing South African displeasure at the comments by the United States.[61]

Ironically, it transpired that the press release criticising Pretoria had not been approved at the highest levels of the State Department. Upon hearing of the statement Secretary of State Herter was 'furious' at the mistake as he regarded it a breach of courtesy between nations and

observed it was a real mistake to have 'clearly taken sides' on the matter. Ambassador Crowe was also displeased observing that the US statement had exacerbated an already 'very tense atmosphere' and requested that he be consulted in the future before such statements were made. Eisenhower himself, was irritated by the action stating that 'the fat was in the fire' and ordered that Crowe 'assuage their feelings' in Pretoria by expressing official regret about the statement and reassure National Party leadership that there had been no change in US policy towards South Africa.[62]

At the UN, however, Washington faced pressure from an enraged Afro-Asian bloc who were not prepared to merely accept a 'routine solution' in response the shootings at Sharpeville. Other allies were also under increasing diplomatic pressure, at the bilateral meeting at Camp David, Prime Minister Macmillan told Eisenhower that Britain was concerned about its balancing its interests at the UN between the emergent African states and South Africa and perhaps London and Washington could find a compromise with an 'innocuous resolution' at the UN Security Council. Eisenhower agreed and further stated that he personally had 'strong feelings that we should not sit in judgment on a difficult social and political problem six thousand miles away'. He additionally warned Herter than the resolution shouldn't be too 'tough' on Pretoria.[63]

On April 1, the United States voted in favour of Security Council Resolution 134, a compromise resolution that Herter thought was 'surprisingly mild' but nonetheless, deplored the policies of Pretoria and urged South Africa to abandon apartheid and bring about racial harmony and equality. Eisenhower initially thought the resolution was 'mighty tough' but was subsequently convinced by USUN Ambassador Lodge that given the difficult diplomatic situation it was as moderate as it could be and better than the extreme alternatives. While Pretoria, was unsurprisingly 'unhappy' with the US stance, Lodge considered the modified resolution a success as it prevented Moscow from either presenting itself in the 'role of champion of the Africans' or inducing the Afro-Asian bloc to press for a radical resolution calling for sanctions.[64]

The response by the White House to the shootings at Sharpeville while mild, was nevertheless significant as the first occasion when Washington publicly registered direct criticism of Pretoria over its domestic racial policies. The close strategic and economic relations between the two nations, however, dictated that ties remained close for the remaining duration of Eisenhower's time in office. Indeed, just days after the UN vote, when Verwoerd was the victim of an attempted assassination attempt, Eisenhower immediately sent a personal message to the South African Prime Minister expressing his 'distress' at the news and was most thankful that his injuries were not of a critical nature.[65]

Conclusion

In conclusion, for the Eisenhower administration, Cold War geopolitics was the defining factor shaping the bilateral relationship between the United States and South Africa. During the 1950s the anti-communist stance of the National Party leadership combined with the mineral wealth controlled by Pretoria including many minerals deemed critical for US national security led to close military and strategic association with the apartheid state. Under Eisenhower the United States continued to sell arms to Pretoria, improved the South African radar defence system, continued naval port calls, negotiated the establishment of a missile and satellite tracking station and signed a ten year atomic energy agreement which included supplying enriched uranium to the apartheid state.

Under Eisenhower, hard policy considerations also dictated closer commercial ties between the two nations. The decade of the 1950s witnessed a doubling of direct US investment in South Africa and a major increase in US exports. South African industrial development was also assisted by US corporations and investment. The White House encouraged and facilitated this economic relationship through loans, including from the Ex-Im Bank, and by signing a dual taxation treaty with Pretoria in 1952. While the administration privately expressed unease that apartheid policies could have a detrimental impact on US investments this did not reach a level where the White House felt it needed to warn US corporations or end assistance programmes for US investors.

In terms of apartheid itself, in bilateral discussions the State Department was instructed to offer mild criticism of the racial discrimination in South African society but the administration was careful to avoid harsh statements or provocative actions. At the UN the US Mission took a similar stance trying to balance Washington's objective of gaining the support and trust of the newly independent post colonial states yet avoiding damaging its close geopolitical relationship with its ally on the southern tip of Africa. Even in the aftermath of Sharpeville, the White House was at great pains to avoid an overly hostile UN response and to emphasise to Pretoria that despite US criticism the bilateral relationship was as strong as ever. In Eisenhower's own words, it was not Washington's place to 'sit in judgment' over a strategic ally's domestic racial policies.[66]

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