

The Carter Administration and the Institution of the 1977 Mandatory Arms Embargo against South Africa: Rhetoric or Active Action?

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Introduction

Jimmy Carter was elected President of the United States of America (hereafter US) in late 1976. He faced a difficult task when he took office as president in January 1977: human rights activists world-wide expected him to take serious action against the South African government (hereafter SAG) because of its policy of apartheid; the military build-up of the SAG, despite the United Nations (hereafter UN) arms embargo instituted against it in 1963; and the question of independence for South West Africa (Namibia), where South Africa's administrative and military presence was regarded as illegal. In addition, after a relatively quiet period in the first few years of the 1970s, the situation in South Africa exploded once more in 1976 with the Soweto uprising. Carter declared himself a fierce supporter of human rights, and vowed that he would do anything in his power to act against violators of human rights. Consequently, there was much anticipation among the growing US anti-apartheid movement and the African countries that an end to US-South African cooperation was in sight. This anticipation was enhanced when Carter voiced his regret that he had not done much to support the struggle for black civil rights in the US, and that, as president, he would do anything in his power to rectify this fact.¹ The question is,

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1. P.J. Schraeder, *United States foreign policy toward Africa: Incrementalism, crisis and change* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), p 215; Study Commission on US Policy Toward Southern Africa, *South Africa: Time Running Out* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1981), p 356; P.J. Rich, "US containment policy, South Africa and the apartheid dilemma", *Review of International Studies*, 14, 1988, p 186.

did he seriously mean to take action against South Africa, or was it again just the same verbal rhetoric that previous US governments had made themselves guilty of?

The aim of this article is to scrutinize the first eleven months of the Carter administration's foreign policy regarding South Africa, and the reasons why that administration instituted a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa in November 1977.

US Policy Reviewed

The first indications of a possible change in US foreign policy surfaced when Carter appointed strong proponents of racial equality in South Africa to positions of authority within the Department of State. These included Andrew Young, a black human rights activist with links to the US Civil Rights Movement, as US Ambassador to the UN; Cyrus Vance as Secretary of State; and Anthony Lake as Director for Policy Planning. These individuals were bound by a common desire to downplay the importance of the Cold War in their approach to understanding the conflicts of the African continent. They favoured a more regionalist approach towards new relationships in which power was more diffuse, and emphasised the internal economic, cultural, political and historical aspects of regional conflicts. Vance especially would give form and substance to Carter's foreign policy. As Under-Secretary of Defense during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, he was well informed about the situation in South Africa, especially as far as the institution and implementation of the 1963 arms embargo was concerned. He regarded the Kissinger approach as too narrowly rooted in terms of the Cold War geopolitical struggle, and was of the opinion that human rights abroad should be enforced through sanctions or the threat of sanctions, if necessary.²

Carter and Vance spent their first two months in office seeking a way to balance their foreign policy between the tacit US-South African cooperation of the past and an outright break with South Africa. One of their first practical moves was to propose a Declaration of Principles opposing racism in Southern Africa to the UN Security Council. This

2. A.J. DeRoché, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador* (Scholarly Resources, Wilmington, 2003), pp 71, 74; R.K. Massie, *Loosing the bonds* (Nan A. Talese, New York, 1997), p 407; Schraeder, *United States foreign policy toward Africa*, p 215; Study Commission, *South Africa: Time Running Out*, p 356; L.E.S. de Villiers, "US sanctions against South Africa." DPhil thesis, University of Stellenbosch, 1994, p 118.

was followed by the establishment of a Policy Review Committee under the chairmanship of the Department of State. The committee had to undertake a review of US policy towards Rhodesia, South Africa and South West Africa (Namibia), to be finished by the end of January 1977. It had to include an analysis of options for future US policy in the light of possible US roles in the negotiations for the independence of Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia), and a review of the likely reactions by the US Congress and the American public to various US policy options with regard to South Africa. It was made clear that the review should be undertaken with the focus on the broader context of the national interests of the US, and within the following principles: Firstly, it had to be true to the ideals of the American nation, being a commitment to human rights, which required a firm and clear opposition to racial and social injustice wherever it existed. Secondly, the people of Africa held the key to the solution of African problems. The US therefore had to fully refrain from imposing its own ideas and solutions on Southern Africa, although it should use its political and economic influence and diplomatic offices to support racial and social progress. Thirdly, African solutions to African problems would avoid situations that would make Africa an arena for great-power rivalry, which happened in Angola. Racial discrimination, as well as social and political injustice could breed prolonged violence, opening the door for foreign intervention and confrontation. The Carter administration believed that its best defence against such possibilities was to support policies that would limit potential conflict. Finally, the US had a stake in Southern Africa because of a firm belief that political harmony had to be achieved in diverse societies like the US, and that ethnic, racial and religious differences did not constitute a cause for discrimination and violence.³

According to William Schaufele Junior, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs⁴, the concern of the Carter administration with Southern Africa differed in many respects from its interest in other parts

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3. Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, pp 407-408; Schraeder, *United States foreign policy toward Africa*, pp 216-217. Carter Presidential Library and Archives, Atlanta (hereafter CPLA): Presidential Review Memorandums, 1977-1981, PD 5, Southern Africa, Memorandum, Z. Brzezinski – Vice-President and Secretaries of State and Defense, 21 January 1977; DeRoché, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, p 71; A.J. DeRoché, “Standing firm for Principles: Jimmy Carter and Zimbabwe”, *Diplomatic History*, 23, 4, Fall 1999, p 657; P.C. Habib, “Southern Africa in the Global Context”, *Department of State Bulletin*, 4 April 1977, pp 318-319; L.E.S. de Villiers, “US sanctions against South Africa”, p 118.
 4. In 1978, Schaufele was replaced with Richard Moose, Junior, as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

of the world important to the US. The Carter administration did not have a strategic interest in Southern Africa, since it did not wish to play a military role anywhere in Africa.⁵ Also, its policy was not based on economic interests, although it was hoped that access to the mineral wealth of Southern Africa could be retained. Instead, the Carter administration's Southern African policy was essentially based on a concern for human rights and human dignity. Thus, the general thrust of the policy review was to find ways of strengthening the commitment of the US to social justice and racial equality in Southern Africa, and of demonstrating that commitment in tangible and meaningful ways.⁶

In February 1977, the Department of State outlined possible steps that could be taken against South Africa in a secret memorandum to Carter. These included the withdrawal of US military attachés, ending the exchange of intelligence information, reducing export-import bank loan guarantees, refusing visas to South Africans, et cetera. However, the policy at this stage did not include punitive actions designed to pressurise the SAG. Although the Department of State's Africa Bureau favoured a decrease in military cooperation to underscore the removal of South Africa from the list of countries with which the US had "normal" relations, others were opposed to any form of disengagement. The Department of Defense for example argued that further restrictions on military cooperation would have severe repercussions on intelligence collection activities. The CIA supported this view, and questioned the wisdom of pressurising a valued regional power like South Africa at the same time that the communist pressures in Southern Africa necessitated access to South Africa's vast intelligence network.⁷

While Carter and Vance worked on a new foreign policy for Southern Africa, Andrew Young prepared himself for assuming the presidency of the Security Council for a month, where he would face a demand by the African nations for a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. The African nations declared that the way the US would vote on the issue, would be regarded as a test of the sincerity of the Carter administration. The embargo resolution would be one of four that had

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5. This signified a total new policy in this regard, when the CIA involvement in 1975 in Angola is taken into consideration.
 6. W.E. Schauffele, Junior, "United States relations in Southern Africa", *Department of State Bulletin*, 9 May 1977, p 464; Habib, "Southern Africa in the Global Context", p 318.
 7. CPLA, Atlanta: Presidential Directives, 1977-1981, PD 5, Southern Africa, Directive: J. Carter – Vice-President and Secretaries of State and Defense, 9 March 1977.

been drafted for submission to the Security Council by the African nations. They tried to elicit the support of Young, but he antagonised them somewhat because of his often contradictory views on South Africa. Initially, during the first month of the Carter administration, he raised their expectations by stating that it was likely that the administration would pursue a very aggressive policy towards majority rule in all of the Southern African countries. He also stated his support of a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, in fact proclaiming that it was an irreversible policy pursued by the Carter administration. Yet, when he was called upon to fulfil these expectations in late February 1977, he suddenly took on a cautious note, asking if it was wise at that stage to support a mandatory arms embargo, and if it was the sort of prelude that would encourage an acceptable solution in South West Africa (Namibia).⁸

Young's change of tack makes one wonder whether he had suddenly realised the considerable political and legal consequences of a mandatory arms embargo. One effect would be that the embargo would have to be enforced under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which would in turn give substance to the claims of the African nations that South Africa was a threat to international peace and security. That, in turn, would support the frequent Third World demand for international action against South Africa by way of a "Unite for Peace" resolution in the General Assembly, where the US had no power of veto as it had in the Security Council. The SAG however did not trust Young's change of tack one bit. They regarded it as Young playing all his cards in an effort to find his feet in the UN, with whose dealings he was, as yet, unfamiliar. He was also still unfamiliar with diplomacy, according to the South African delegation to the UN.⁹

Young's contradictory remarks initially made life difficult for Vance and Carter. Often during the early months of the Carter administration, Vance had to make hastily retractions or corrections to remarks by Young. For example, Young stated that South Africa could

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8. "Young expects new Administration to 'be aggressive' in advancing majority rule in Southern Africa", *The New York Times*, 3 January 1977, p 7; "Embargo of South Africa to be pressed in U.N.", *The New York Times*, 19 March 1977; National Security Archives (hereafter NSA): South Africa: The making of United States policy, 1962-1989, microfiche collection, 00735: United States Embassy, Pretoria – Secretary of State, 23 February 1977.
 9. NSA: South Africa: The making of United States policy, 1962-1989, microfiche collection, 00735: United States Embassy, Pretoria – Secretary of State, 23 February 1977; "Weapon, Time, Place – All wrong (Editorial)", *Los Angeles Times*, 3 March 1977, Part II, p 4.

force Rhodesia to negotiate, to which Vance responded that it was not quite so simple. Also, Young described the Cubans in Angola as bringing a certain stability and order to the region, but Vance quickly corrected him by saying that any outside forces were not at all helpful in obtaining a peaceful solution. Another blunder by Young was a remark to a reporter that he considered the SAG as illegitimate. Although the answer was an honest reflection of Young's own opinion, it was not the official position of the Carter administration, which regarded the National Party as the legitimate ruler of South Africa. Accordingly, both Carter and the Department of State issued a formal retraction of Young's remark. The latter did have a role to play, however, despite placing the rest of the Carter administration in uncomfortable situations through his outspokenness. He was the first government official since Mennen Williams, President J.F. Kennedy's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, to link the Civil Rights Movement with US policy towards South Africa. Thus his appointment was of great significance in the sense that it helped to set course to the debate on US policy towards South Africa – something that previous US administrations tried to avoid for various reasons.¹⁰

Despite Young's contradictory remarks, the initial rhetoric of the Carter administration promised a significant departure from the anti-apartheid policies of the previous US administrations. The Carter administration seemed to be set profoundly against any racial discrimination and thus the apartheid policy of the SAG. On 4 May 1977, Vance elaborated on the Carter administration's definition of human rights and the new US policy towards South Africa at a news conference. He explained that the Carter administration was trying to explain the concept of human rights by expanding it in terms of the various sub-components included in the concept, as well as setting out the considerations that would have to be taken into account when deciding on how to proceed in given human rights cases on a country-by-country basis. He also stressed the importance of using international and regional forums to have discussions about these cases. In the light of this, Vance was asked how rapidly he thought there should be moves towards majority government, including all people in South Africa. His answer was that the Carter administration's policy with respect to South Africa was and would remain an inalterable opposition to apartheid. This would be emphasised during a meeting between US Vice-President Walter Mondale and South African Prime Minister John Vorster from

10. DeRoché, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, pp 76-77, 82; Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, p 410; NSA: South Africa: The making of United States policy, 1962-1989, microfiche collection, 00727: Secretary of State – United States Embassy, Dublin, 30 January 1977.

19 to 20 May 1977 in Vienna. The meeting would centre on the questions of Rhodesia, South West Africa (Namibia) and South Africa, and how the SAG planned to make progress in the ending of apartheid and in dealing with the problems of minorities. Vance reiterated that the Carter administration did not expect that Vorster, who was widely regarded as a candid and experienced man, would merely absorb a lecture on the dangers of racism without vigorously defending his government's justification for the system of apartheid. Even then, the Carter administration felt that the talks would nonetheless be an opportunity to remind South Africa that US concern over the South African racial situation under a human rights conscious president like Carter went very deep, even to the point of reassessing US policy in an effort to ensure that changes actually occurred.¹¹

On 19 May 1977, Mondale and Vorster met in Vienna, where Mondale made it clear that the official US attitude towards South Africa had changed. He emphasised that the new policy would no longer only focus broadly on Southern African problems, but also directly on South Africa. In other words, the time for anti-apartheid rhetoric had passed, and the US would now back up its words with actions. Mondale strongly registered total disagreement with Vorster's contention that separate development was not discriminatory. He stated that unless South Africa was willing to commit to full and equal participation of all its citizens in political affairs, the Carter administration would have no choice but to apply diplomatic pressure. He also made it clear that the administration, unlike the Ford administration, would not trade progress in South West Africa (Namibia) and Rhodesia for inaction on apartheid. Vorster, as expected, was unbending to what he regarded as US interference in South Africa's internal affairs. He bluntly resisted the suggestion that South Africa should soften its apartheid policy, saying it was not a multiracial country, but a multinational one. Therefore, the apartheid design would guarantee the maintenance of the various distinctive forms of culture in the country. On the other hand, he accepted regional involvement by the US with the aim of hastening solutions in Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia), and promised South African cooperation.¹²

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11. Department of State, "Secretary Vance's News Conference of May 4", *Department of State Bulletin*, 23 May 1977, pp 516-517; Schraeder, *United States foreign policy toward Africa*, p 216; G. Godsell, "Mondale, Young test new policy in S. Africa", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 May 1977, pp 1, 11; B. Gwertzman, "Vance reports no arms progress as two sides prepare for Geneva", *The New York Times*, 5 May 1977, p A1; "A toughening on South Africa", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 May 1977, p 6.
 12. G. Godsell, "Carter faces credibility test on Africa", *The Christian Science*

Meanwhile, Young was attending the Special UN Conference on Southern Africa in Maputo, Mozambique, where he denounced colonialism and minority rule, and explained that the aim of his visit to Africa was to start implementing a new US approach to Southern Africa and to demonstrate his own commitment to human rights. At this conference, general agreement was reached on a series of embargoes against South Africa, including proposals for a mandatory arms embargo. Young however told reporters that the US would for the time being not join a consensus on the action plan, as it would hamper efforts to bring about a peaceful transition to black rule in Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia). He nonetheless added that Carter had openly warned the SAG of the possibility of economic sanctions if the latter continued to defy UN resolutions concerning the independence of South West Africa (Namibia). Yet, in June 1977, Carter made a somewhat contradictory statement to this and other public utterings by members of his administration in the preceding months, saying that although South Africa had a very bad reputation in many regions of the world, the US was not trying to overthrow the SAG. In fact, in its dealings with South Africa, the Carter administration was trying to let the SAG know that the US recognised its value as a stabilising influence in Southern Africa to the extent that they worked with the US to resolve questions in the region.¹³

In early July 1977, Vance warned the SAG that its relations with the US would surely deteriorate if it failed to make rapid progress to end apartheid and bring about the full political participation of all South African citizens. Concerning the form of government that a transformed South Africa should have, Vance said that it was a decision for the people of South Africa to make, since there were many ways in which the individual rights of all citizens could be protected. He was of the opinion that the key to the future was a dialogue between South Africans of all races on how to achieve a better future. Like Mondale, he rejected the South African policy of separate homelands for black people, which he asserted had been devised without concern for the

Monitor, 23 May 1977, p 1; Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, p 412; Study Commission, *South Africa: Time Running Out*, pp 357-358; De Villiers, "US sanctions against South Africa", p 119.

13. DeRoché, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, p 81; J. Foisie, "U.N. parley agrees on tough embargoes in Southern Africa", *Los Angeles Times*, 21 May 1977, p 11; M.T. Kaufman, "Young sees a tactic in Rhodesian foray", *The New York Times*, 19 May 1977, p 5; "Magazine Publishers Association interviews President Carter", *Department of State Bulletin*, 11 July 1977, pp 46-48.

wishes of these black people. Vance further said that the Carter administration had decided to actively pursue solutions to all three Southern African problems, since they were intertwined. To ignore the apartheid system in South Africa while concentrating on achieving progress with independence for Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia), would be wrong and would not work. He thereby again rejected Kissinger's policy of ignoring apartheid for the sake of Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia). On the communist threat in the Southern African region, Vance said that he had heard many suggestions that the US ought to support the white minority governments in the region, since they were anti-communist. However, Vance emphasised that the continued denial of racial justice in the region encouraged the possibilities for outside intervention.¹⁴

It should be noted at this stage that although Vance's statement of July 1977 was a forceful restatement of concerns expressed by Mondale to Vorster in their meeting in Vienna in May 1977, the increasingly vocal anti-apartheid movement in the US felt it clearly indicated an unwillingness to move beyond rhetoric to active action. Accordingly, they decided to exert more pressure for more progressive policies towards Africa. One of the new mouthpieces calling for comprehensive sanctions against South Africa, as well as support for the armed struggle against the white minority governments in Southern Africa, was TransAfrica, a foreign policy lobby officially incorporated in July 1977. TransAfrica was to organise and mobilise the African-American electorate in support of more progressive policies towards Africa. In addition, a task force on Africa was created by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which called for the adoption of comprehensive economic sanctions against South Africa, including a mandatory arms embargo, and the complete withdrawal of investments from the country.¹⁵ Both organisations were fully supported by the Congressional Black Caucus under the leadership of Charles Diggs.

Arms for South Africa

Another factor that would play a role in pressurising the Carter administration to take active action against South Africa, was the extent of the latter's military and nuclear build-up, despite the voluntary arms embargo instituted against it in 1963. Furthermore, in October 1976, the

14. "U.S. urges rapid S. Africa Reform", *Los Angeles Times*, 2 July 1977, pp 1, 19; Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, p 413.

15. Schraeder, *United States foreign policy toward Africa*, p 217.

US had vetoed a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, and in March 1977, efforts by the Security Council to strengthen the embargo proved abortive. The issue greatly concerned anti-apartheid lobbyists in the US Congress, because it gave the impression that nothing was effectively being done by the US to block the flow of arms and related items that could be used by the SAG to enforce apartheid. Accordingly, in March 1977, the House of Representatives introduced a joint resolution calling for a comprehensive presidential review of US policy and practices with respect to the shipment of arms to South Africa. The resolution followed a two-month investigation by the Committee on International Relations that revealed that from 1975 through 1976, the US government had permitted the export of nearly \$500 000 worth of weapons like shotguns, rifles, teargas and other so-called non-military weapons to South Africa.¹⁶

In addition to the House's resolution, newspaper reports on sharp increases in the 1977 South African budget outlays for defence (21,3 per cent) and the police (15 per cent) in reaction to growing pressures both domestically and abroad, also caused concern. These increases brought the South African defence budget to 18 per cent of the total budget. This was the result of the SAG strengthening its defences against the mounting threat to white supremacy. Vorster had declared that the position of whites in South Africa was not negotiable. Accordingly, he had commissioned the development of a "total strategy" to stave off pressures for majority rule. In other words, South Africa was put on a war footing. The new strategy had unfolded since the beginning of 1977, trimming civil liberties, strengthening the economy against the threat of embargoes, and expanding the already powerful armed forces. Furthermore, it was indicated that more far-reaching measures would also be pursued in order to maintain essential democratic principles. The strategy emerged from a policy review by Vorster in the wake of the widespread rioting following the 1976 Soweto uprising. The riots were the most serious internal challenge ever mounted against apartheid, and provoked an international outcry that added momentum to the campaign by communist and third-world countries for concerted efforts to be taken against the SAG. Most serious for South Africa, it weakened the hand of the Western countries in resisting calls in the UN for an arms and investment embargo against South Africa.¹⁷

16. United States Congress, Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, Hearing: *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, 14 & 20 July 1977, p 53.

17. "South Africa increases outlays for defense", *The New York Times*, 31 March 1977, p 7; J.F. Burns, "Afrikaners dig in against threat to their

Another issue that raised concern was South Africa's nuclear capabilities. On 30 April 1977, *The New York Times* reported that South Africa had a secret nuclear plant that was suspected of working on a nuclear bomb. The report stated that if South Africa was developing nuclear weapons, it was almost certainly taking place inside a top-secret uranium enrichment plant at Pelindaba near Pretoria. The plant was the focus of attention among a growing number of political and military analysts who believed that the SAG intended to build atomic bombs. They alleged that these bombs would be used to deter black-ruled states to the north of South Africa, who had vowed to use all means to overthrow the SAG. They were also of the opinion that the uranium enrichment plant was being used to develop weapons-grade uranium. What made South Africa's case even worse, was that it was one of the nations that had not yet signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, banning the spread of nuclear weapons. The SAG reacted by insisting that its nuclear programme was for peaceful application only. Concerning the treaty, it said that the international inspections required with the signing thereof, could compromise the secrecy of the South African enrichment process, which was unique and cheaper than systems elsewhere. The South African Atomic Energy Board (AEB) in turn said that the reports were absurd, that the Pelindaba plant was *not* manufacturing nuclear weapons, and that a nuclear weapon would be of little use in controlling either guerrilla warfare or urban unrest, the most likely strategies of black militants.¹⁸

rule", *The New York Times*, 4 April 1977, pp 1, 8; J. Goodwin, "S. Africa girds with arms, laws", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 5 April 1977, p 4.

18. J.F. Burns, "South Africa's secret atom plant suspected of working on a bomb", *The New York Times*, 30 April 1977, pp 1, 6. The AEB statement was only half-true. While it was true that the Pelindaba nuclear plant did not manufacture nuclear weapons, and that a secret uranium plant was not situated at the Pelindaba site, there was a secret uranium enrichment plant next to Pelindaba at a site called Valindaba. Also, despite continuous denials, South Africa indeed had a nuclear weapons programme that had produced six-and-a-half nuclear bombs by 1989, as revealed by South African State President F.W. de Klerk in 1993. The manufacturing was highly secret and was not done at the Pelindaba site, but at a top-secret site called Advena, of which the world knew nothing until De Klerk's revelation in 1993. Information about this never leaked, therefore the issue would, until the climax in 1993, continue to draw much attention and speculation. The US specifically would find itself in the crossfire in the years to come, because of the fact that 120 South Africans were sent for training at nuclear establishments in the West at the outset of the South African nuclear programme. Many of these establishments were in the US (P. Liberman, "The rise and fall of the South African bomb", *International Security*, 26, 2, Fall 2001, p 56; D. Albright, "A curious conversion", *Bulletin of the Atomic*

In the light of the House's resolution and the media coverage on the South African defence issues, the Carter administration suspected that it would face a renewed demand for a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. The Department of State was requested to compile a report on US practices with respect to the 1963 arms embargo, in order to ensure that it was implemented effectively. However, when the report was sent to the National Security Council (NSC) for approval in June 1977, it raised some eyebrows, since it stated that the US was unable to account fully for certain figures of arms-related equipment finding its way to South Africa. This would have put the Carter administration in a bad light. The NSC therefore suggested that the report should be adapted to state explicitly what was licensed for export to South Africa in 1975 and 1976, indicating that it was due to loopholes, followed by a detailed account of what the Carter administration had done to close those loopholes. The Department of State also had to indicate that the NSC supported efforts to close the loopholes in the current US arms embargo policy towards South Africa, and therefore had no objections to a study of this issue, should it be requested by the UN.¹⁹

In mid-July 1977, a SAPA/Reuters news report asserted that the Carter administration had presented a general report on arms embargoes to the US Congress. The news report alleged that although South Africa was not explicitly mentioned in the arms embargo report, it was clear that it was directed against a proposed mandatory arms embargo. The Carter administration warned Congress not to implement an arms embargo too strictly against countries that ignored human rights according to US standards, as it could become a blunt tool if not used cautiously. In essence, it held the possibility of offending smaller countries that were important to US security. An arms embargo also contained the danger that countries under an embargo could turn to other countries for their military needs. This could destroy the US influence in these countries. Instead, US arms should only be withheld from the most serious offenders of human rights, for example where there was no hope for improvement in applying human rights. The report also touched briefly on the dangers involved in an arms embargo, such as that numerous other countries would not follow the US example of instituting an arms embargo, which in turn would only encourage the target of the embargo

Scientists, 49, 5, June 1993, pp 8-12; R.J. Smith, "South Africa's 16-year secret: The nuclear bomb", *The Washington Post*, 12 May 1993, p A1).

19. United States Congress, *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, p 1; CPLA, Atlanta: White House Central File, CO 141, Box CO-53, 20 January 1977-31 May 1977, Memorandum: National Security Council – Office of Management and Budget, 30 June 1977.

to buy its arms from other countries. In the last place, the possibility of control over arms sales rather than an embargo was mentioned. This led the writer of the news report to believe that although the Carter administration had declared that it would act more severely against South Africa, it in fact still did not have a clear-cut action policy and was wondering whether a mandatory arms embargo would be the right means to the desired end.²⁰

The US anti-apartheid movement strongly disagreed, and on 14 July 1977 launched into a hearing on the 1963 arms embargo implementation before the Subcommittee on Africa of the Committee on International Relations in the House of Representatives, chaired by Charles Diggs. Diggs was of the opinion that the timing of the hearing was fitting because of the rapidly evolving political situation in Southern Africa, and the role that arms and arms-related material played in retaining the SAG in power. Diggs asserted that there were several loopholes in the implementation of the embargo: firstly, there was no legal standard by which to judge the enforcement of the embargo; secondly, there was an exception that enabled South Africa to receive arms and equipment for its external defence; thirdly, there was no clearly specified prohibition of items with dual civilian military use; and lastly, there was no uniform standard for controlling the resale of armaments by third parties. The aim of the hearing was to examine the extent to which the loopholes had permitted South Africa to continue receiving arms and military-related equipment from major powers like the US, the principal violators of the voluntary arms embargo and the nature of the arms trade with South Africa, as well as South Africa's response to the embargo, its development of an own arms industry, and ways of strengthening the embargo.²¹

During the hearing, it was alleged that major Western countries, including the US, had helped South Africa to stockpile a secret arsenal of sophisticated weapons in violation of the 1963 arms embargo. The objective of the embargo was to prevent South Africa from acquiring foreign weapons with which to build a modern military machine. The embargo was also meant to aid growing internal demands for the ending of apartheid. However, by 1977, industrial and governmental sources showed that the arms embargo was practically non-existent, and that there had been a thriving international trade in arms for South Africa for nearly

20. "America's dilemma with arms embargo", *Sapa/Reuters*, published in *Die Suidwester*, 13 Julie 1977, p 4.

21. United States Congress, *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, pp 1-2.

a decade. In some cases, South Africa had been able to purchase arms quite openly, but a great deal had been obtained secretly or through certain loopholes in governmental policies, like third-country or grey area transfers. By 1977, it was estimated that South Africa's arms stockpile was worth more than \$3-billion, which far exceeded all previous estimates. A good proportion of this was re-conditioned, but very serviceable equipment of US origin. There was however no proof as yet that the Carter administration was involved in the arms traffic, since the available information was mainly applicable to previous US administrations. Nonetheless, the shipment of such large quantities of arms indicated some kind of military commitment in support of the SAG at a very delicate stage of its history.²² Indeed, when observed closely, it was consistent with the reversal of policy by the previous two US administrations of Nixon and Ford.

In light of the above, the US Congress faced two immediate problems: firstly, to find out why major US equipment, whether produced in the US or under licence abroad, was able to reach South Africa. This immediately raised a variety of questions: Was it the policy of previous US administrations to allow the shipment of major arms systems to South Africa, and if so, did they deliberately ignore the arms embargo? Or, if that was not the case, were regulations governing the arms trade so loosely drafted that it permitted sales to South Africa? If these regulations were adequate, were they then simply not enforced for a long period of time? Secondly, if arms sales to South Africa continued, they had to be stopped immediately, as a matter of some urgency, since Africa was nearing a final confrontation over apartheid. Indeed, continued arms sales to South Africa at that time would have been regarded world-wide as evidence of a commitment to support apartheid.²³

The Carter administration immediately denied that the US had helped South Africa to build up a secret stockpile of sophisticated weapons in defiance of the 1963 arms embargo. In a statement to the

22. "S. Africa secret arsenal violates UN treaty", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 July 1977, p 2; "Stockpiling for S. Africa?", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 15 July 1977, p 2; "West reportedly helped S. Africa stockpile arms", *Los Angeles Times*, 14 July 1977, p 6; United States Congress, *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, pp 1-7; S. Gervasi, *The United States and the arms embargo against South Africa: Evidence, denial and refutation* (State University of New York Press, Binghamton, 1978), pp 20-23.

23. United States Congress, *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, pp 7-8.

press, a spokesman of the Department of State described the allegations as false and tendentious. He said that no licences had been issued for the sale of arms or equipment to South Africa, as well as no approvals for the transfer of US-made equipment and arms from third countries. The only equipment permitted since the embargo came into effect in 1963, were spare parts for C-130 aircraft previously purchased, and some items like sporting shotguns and small private aircraft for sale to civilians. Concerning transfers of US arms and equipment from third countries, he said that if it had happened, it was without US knowledge and approval.²⁴

In South Africa, in what can perhaps be viewed as an effort to quench the storm that broke loose after the allegations, the chairman of Armscor, Commandant Piet Marais, held an extensive interview with the *South African Financial Gazette*. He however did not reply to the allegations directly. He only said that South Africa was self-sufficient in guns, ammunition, armoured cars, et cetera, but naval vessels and modern bomber aircraft would be impractical and uneconomic to manufacture. These needs, Marais stated, could and would be met by foreign suppliers.²⁵ Through this statement, it can be asserted that Marais did not deny the fact that South Africa was indeed able to obtain the armaments it needed from foreign suppliers, despite the arms embargo.

On 20 July 1977, the hearing on the arms embargo implementation continued, with two members of the Carter administration testifying. They explained that the basic statutory authority for control over US exports was the Export Administration Act. Restrictions on exports to South Africa rested on the foreign policy authority of the Act. In conformity with the UN Security Council resolution of 1963, the US (through the Act) embargoed shipments of arms, munitions, military equipment and material for their manufacture and maintenance to South Africa. Items that were strictly military in nature, were controlled by the Department of State. Items that could not be exported without a valid licence, as well as items with multiple uses, such as civil aircraft,

24. NSA: South Africa: The making of United States policy, 1962-1989, microfiche collection, 00760: Department of State – American Embassies in Pretoria, London, Paris, Rome, New York, 15 July 1977; 00761: American Embassy, Rome – Department of State, 18 July 1977; “V.S.A. ontken hulp aan SA oor wapenvoorraad”, *Die Volksblad*, 15 Julie 1977, p 2; “No US arms for SA”, *Evening Post*, 15 July 1977, p 2; “G’n wapens deur ons, sê VSA”, *Beeld*, 16 Julie 1977, p 4; “Secret arms deal denied”, *Daily Dispatch*, 16 July 1977, p 1; “US denies aiding SA arms build-up”, *The Citizen*, 16 July 1977, p 11.

25. L. Kok, “Questions for Armscor”, *South African Financial Gazette*, 15 July 1977, p 8; “SA wapens ‘goed’”, *SA Oorsig*, 22 Julie 1977, p 7.

computers, radar and communications equipment, all of which could be used by the South African military forces for military purposes, or by the internal security forces for crime control, were placed on a commodity control list and were denied for export to these forces. However, items that did not have any direct and clear application to combat or internal security operations, were generally licensed for sale either to military or civilian buyers in South Africa. Items that were predominantly used by military forces, but did not have a clear and direct application to combat or internal operations, were generally licensed for civilian use, but could also be licensed to military buyers. At the time of the hearing, this policy was under review. Items with a clear and direct application to combat or internal security operations, were not licensed to military or police buyers, but could be licensed for civilian use. Under these guidelines, the US had rejected applications for aircraft suitable for troop transport, but limited numbers of unarmed civilian executive-type aircraft had been approved for sale to the South African defence forces.²⁶

It was emphasised that all licence applications were given an extensive review to ensure that it would not be used by the South African military or security forces in a manner that was inconsistent with the arms embargo. When any doubt existed about the end use of the item, or the end user, the help of the US Embassy in South Africa was elicited to conduct on-the-spot inquiries into the likely use. All sales to the South African military or internal security forces were also carefully reviewed in consultation with the Department of State and in certain cases with the Department of Defense. The same procedures applied to the export of US parts, components, materials or other commodities to be used abroad to manufacture or produce a foreign-made product. For example, the use of US components in the production of aircraft manufactured in third countries and intended for sale to South Africa, was subject to the same kind of controls as described. Compliance with the policy was monitored and enforced in cooperation with US Customs, to ensure that items requiring a licence did in fact have a proper licence to be exported, before it left the US. As in the above case, on-site checks were done in cooperation with the US Embassy in South Africa.²⁷

Guidelines on the determination of strategic materials was first promulgated in 1964, amended in 1968, updated in 1970, and were at the time of the hearing under review again. Pursuant to these guidelines,

26. United States Congress: *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, pp 45-46.

27. United States Congress, *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, p 46.

items on the Export Control List were continuously reviewed to determine whether it should be on the list, and, if so, whether there was sufficient certainty that it would not be diverted to or used in an impermissible manner by the South African military or internal security forces. In this regard, new initiatives regarding the South African situation, coupled with congressional concern, had led the Department of Commerce to review and strengthen certain aspects of the embargo programme. For example, a small value exemption that existed for shotguns, shells and parts was eliminated. Furthermore, new regulations were instituted to require validated export licences for foreign shipments to South Africa and South West Africa (Namibia) that came through the US. And just the day before the hearing, new regulations were announced which significantly increased the level of control over equipment that could be used in crime control and detection, like psychological stress analysis equipment, non-military gas masks, bullet-proof vests, helmets and shields, photographic equipment especially designed for crime control and detection, document authentication equipment and various other grey area items, including shotguns and Boeing 747 aircraft that could be used for troop transport.²⁸

Lastly, it was emphasised that the earlier allegations were utterly false. All checks by the Department of State had failed to bring to light transfers of US equipment through third parties to South Africa. This was followed by a brief explanation on how the arms embargo policy fitted into the Carter administration's South African policy. It served two purposes. Firstly, the Carter administration believed it was essential to deny the sale to South Africa of any item that could be used to enhance or maintain the SAG's military capabilities, or, in the case of the police, in the enforcement of apartheid. Secondly, the Carter administration wanted to avoid the possibility that any of its policies could be interpreted wrongly as indicating US acquiescence in South African racial policies. This had been embodied in the comprehensive review of the US' policy towards South Africa during the first few months of 1977, and the Carter administration at the time of the hearing was studying particular aspects of US relations with South Africa. Close attention was being paid particularly to the importance of maintaining an arms embargo policy that was consistent with the Carter administration's overall approach to South Africa. In this context, an in-depth look was being taken at the question of grey area sales. Even when an item had no clear and direct application to combat or internal security operations, the sale of such

28. United States Congress, *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, p 47.

items could strengthen the enforcement of apartheid. However, to devise guidelines on this issue was a difficult matter, and therefore some requests had to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.²⁹

The testimonies by the Carter administration officials elicited a flurry of newspaper reports in South Africa. Headlines spelled out that the US had moved to tighten the arms embargo, and that it obviously was part of a programme to enforce political change in South Africa. According to the reports, the Carter administration officials had wholeheartedly supported the sentiments of Diggs regarding the necessity of finding ways to strengthen the arms embargo. The reports further alleged that it was clear that whenever the Department of Commerce could identify additional areas to strengthen the embargo, the changes would be initiated promptly. The new controls outlined during the hearing were listed, as well as the fact that the US had launched a major investigation to determine whether heavy military equipment of US origin had reached South Africa through loopholes in the arms embargo measures. Lastly, it was understood that the SAG would protest against the move, as it would have a direct effect on the export of riot-control equipment to South Africa.³⁰

From the discussion above, one can conclude that the Carter administration had indeed moved to strengthen the arms embargo. The SAG finally reacted in early August 1977, through the Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha. The latter reiterated that South Africa would endeavour to manufacture all the arms it could not obtain elsewhere and that he thought that the arms embargo was a dream that could never be fully realised. In his own words: “As long as we have the money, there will always be suppliers”.³¹ He emphasised that South Africa never disclosed where it obtained its weapons or which countries supplied it. In another speech a few days later, he admitted that South Africa’s

29. W.H. Lewis, “US arms embargo against South Africa”, *Department of State Bulletin*, 5 September 1977, pp 320-322; “Secret arms deal with SA denied”, *The Argus*, 21 July 1977, p 15; Gervasi, *The United States and the arms embargo against South Africa*, pp 25-28; United States Congress, *United States-South African relations: Arms embargo implementation*, pp 50-53.

30. “US moves to tighten clamps on South African arms”, *The Star*, 21 July 1977, p 3; “Boeings on new list of arms curbs”, *The Argus*, 21 July 1977, p 1; “US will tighten SA arms embargo”, *The World*, 21 July 1977, p 1; “Amerika omseil nie wapenverbod”, *Die Volksblad*, 21 Julie 1977, p 13; “US tightens up police equipment exports to SA”, *The Citizen*, 22 July 1977, p 15; “VSA verskerp wapenverbod teen SA”, *Oggendblad*, 22 Julie 1977, p 3.

31. As quoted in “SA will make all arms – Minister”, *Eastern Province Herald*, 10 August 1977, p 1.

expenditure on arms had increased fifteenfold during the previous ten years as a result of a major growth in the indigenous armaments industry necessitated by the arms embargo. The result was that by 1977, the local manufacture of ammunition, weapons, aircraft, electronic optics and pyrotechnics had progressed so far that South Africa was starting to consider the export of armaments to “responsible powers”. In what can be viewed as a defiant comment against the new US regulations, he said that once South Africa had acquired licences for manufacture, no matter in what way, the initiative lay with the SAG to put them to practice or not.³²

From August 1977, relations between South Africa and the US deteriorated rapidly. On 6 August 1977, the Soviet Union informed the US that it had spotted installations for detonating a nuclear device in the Kalahari Desert in South Africa. In a subsequent special statement, the Soviet Union alleged that South Africa was on the verge of manufacturing a nuclear bomb and called for urgent international efforts to block such development. The US immediately reacted by redirecting its own satellite cameras to the site, which verified the Soviet information. A strong joint warning not to proceed was issued to the SAG, but was met with a series of categorical denials that any explosion was contemplated, along with a public display of indignation about the way the US was treating South Africa. Vorster accused the US of backing a concerted international pressure campaign against South Africa, which could only result in chaos and anarchy in Southern Africa. He vigorously reminded the US that South Africa did not intend to bow the knee to American pressure for changes in South Africa. Rather, Carter’s pressure on the Southern African white minority governments was viewed as a way of repaying black voters in the US who had supported him prior to his election victory in November 1976. Vorster also emphasised that while US interest in Southern Africa was welcome, the SAG would not tolerate the right that the US had ascribed itself to prescribe what should be done in the region.³³

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32. “SA will make all arms – Minister”, *Eastern Province Herald*, 10 August 1977, p 1; “Arms spending jumps 15-fold”, *Pretoria News*, 18 August 1977, p 8; “Botha on arms policy”, *Evening Post*, 18 August 1977, p 7; “Botha scorns weapon deal ban”, *The Natal Mercury*, 18 August 1977, p 13; “Botha warns of need for discipline”, *The Argus*, 18 August 1977, p 17; “S.A. kan wapens al uitvoer, sê P.W. Botha”, *Die Volksblad*, 9 Augustus 1977, p 3; H. Hoffeldt, “SA nie verleë oor Weste”, *Beeld*, 18 Augustus 1977, p 1; “Wapens: S.A. besluit self, sê Botha”, *Die Burger*, 18 Augustus 1977, p 1.
33. Study Commission, *South Africa: Time Running Out*, p 358; “Moscow says A-bomb near in South Africa”, *The New York Times*, 7 August 1977, p 13;

An interesting fact is that the Kalahari test-site incident happened almost on the eve of a meeting in London between the US, British and South African foreign ministers, in order to discuss efforts to move both Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia) to internationally recognised independence. As the Soviet Union played a major role in aiding the guerrilla resistance movements in these areas in an effort to gain a foothold in Southern Africa, one cannot help but wonder whether the report on the presumed nuclear installation in the Kalahari Desert had been done on purpose to shoulder South Africa out of the negotiations. Whether this was the case or not, the fact is that South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha was not received too warmly at the talks in London. Indeed, he commented afterwards that the more South Africa did to help achieve acceptable settlements in Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia), the more the Western governments attacked it. Therefore, South Africa had a growing conviction that accepting US and British demands for change in South Africa could lead to the latter's destruction.³⁴

Looking closely at the outcry that followed the Soviet report, it seems that it was not so much caused by the possible effects of the physical explosion of a nuclear bomb by South Africa, as the fact that it might have caused a political explosion. As Andrew Young stated during a visit to South Africa in May 1977, it would have done no good to drop a bomb on Soweto, where unrest had continued for more than a year. Rather, it would probably have damaged negotiations on the independence of Rhodesia and South West Africa (Namibia), turning the spotlight away from them to South Africa. Furthermore, it could have sped up a trade and mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. Of course, the fallout from such an explosion would also have affected countless whites. On the other hand, exploding a nuclear bomb could have reiterated South Africa's new policy of "total strategy", as noted earlier, acting as a vigorous display of toughness when challenged.³⁵

By 27 August 1977, the theory of South Africa exploding a nuclear bomb as part of a political ploy was enhanced when US intelligence

Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, p 414; "South Africa lashes out at U.S.", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 8 August 1977, p 2; "Candid talk on Southern Africa" (Editorial), *The Christian Science Monitor*, 8 August 1977, p 6.

34. G. Godsell, "S. African chess: The toughest moves", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 10 August 1977, p 1; "U.S.-British push vexes South Africa", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 16 August 1977, p 9.

35. J. Goodwin, "South African atom bomb – a political explosion?", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 August 1977, pp 1, 22.

analysts declared that they doubted seriously whether South Africa ever intended to physically detonate a nuclear bomb. Despite hard photographic evidence from US spy satellites that an underground test site was being prepared in the Kalahari Desert, analysts suddenly started to believe that South Africa manipulated the whole episode for its own political benefit by giving US government officials the impression that a test was imminent. Some even suspected that the site was a mock test facility built to trigger publicity that would indirectly label South Africa as being a potential nuclear power.³⁶ Whatever the case, one tends to think that this sudden change in US theory is indicative of hurt pride, because of the fact that the US, with all its sophisticated spy satellites, did not even notice the site until after being directed to it by the Soviet Union.

The SAG's Defiance

In early September 1977, South Africa once again made headlines all over the world with the death of Steve Biko, a black consciousness leader, in police custody. Biko, a former medical student, was actively involved in self-help programmes in black communities. In 1973, he was banned and restricted to King William's Town. Afterwards, he was arrested and released several times as a result of his promotion of black consciousness. The SAG was of the opinion that black consciousness would eventually lead to the mobilisation of black opinion against the white establishment. Biko was outspoken against US involvement in South Africa, believing that it had steadily increased and that the Carter administration should take a harder line against South Africa. His final arrest was on 18 August 1977 near Grahamstown, far outside the limits of his banning restriction. He was kept in isolation until 6 September 1977,

36. O. Johnson, "A-test story seen as S. African ploy", *Los Angeles Times*, 27 August 1977, p 6. During the course of the Kalahari event, the SAG only denied that it was contemplating a nuclear explosion. It was not categorically denied that South Africa was building installations that could be used to test-explode a nuclear device. Therefore, US suspicions about the intended use of the installations in the Kalahari Desert remained unconfirmed until 1993, when South African State President F.W. de Klerk admitted that South Africa had sunk shafts of 200 meter deep by one meter wide in the Kalahari Desert for underground nuclear testing, but had stopped the project after protests from the US and Soviet Union. In 1987, one of the two shafts was reopened and inspected. A hangar was erected over it for easy maintenance in case a decision was made to conduct an underground test. However, soil samples taken by officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that such a test never took place (M.S. van Wyk, "The 1977 United States arms embargo against South Africa: institution and implementation to 1997." DPhil thesis, University of Pretoria, 2004, pp 70, 357).

when he was taken to an interrogation room. There he was confronted with pamphlets obtained from informants. According to his interrogators, he gave an unsatisfactory response, thereby eliciting a storm of physical and mental abuse that left him unconscious. He had suffered injury to the brain, but was refused proper medical attention for several days. He was finally transported to a police hospital outside Pretoria, more than a thousand kilometres north of Port Elizabeth where he had been held in custody. The doctor who examined him on his arrival in Pretoria was given no information about his prior history, and proceeded only to give him a shot of vitamins. Biko died a few hours later on 12 September 1977.³⁷

A terse announcement of Biko's death was made the following day, leading to a wave of reports in English South African newspapers and international wire services. However, the South African state-controlled radio and television stations did not even mention Biko's death. At first, the Minister of Police, Jimmy Kruger, gave the cause of death as a hunger strike. But within a few days, an avalanche of questions and criticisms led to a retraction of the first explanation. Now, the official statement was that Biko had not died because of a hunger strike, but simply after one. Biko was also accused of plotting and advocating violence. When questioned on Biko's death at the Transvaal Congress of the Nationalist Party, Kruger said that it left him cold. This statement caused the SAG immeasurable damage, according to Foreign Minister Pik Botha. It alienated friends, because they saw a hardened point of view that was branded as a trademark of Afrikaners and made them suspicious of further relations. Botha predicted that Carter would support a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa as a result of Biko's death.³⁸

In the days and weeks after Biko's death, the SAG was confronted by an upsurge of black student demonstrators and protests, supported by white liberal factions. To make matters even worse, Vorster on 17 September 1977 made his first public comment about Biko's death, saying that although it was very unfortunate and that an inquest would be opened, he wished to note that Biko's role as black nationalist leader had

37. Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, pp 414-423.

38. Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, p 423; J.E.H. Grobler, *Transcript of a telephonic interview with R.F. (Pik) Botha*, 11 February 1997. In the South African Parliament, John Wiley predicted that the US would eventually support the UN in sending a task force to occupy South Africa (See: Republiek van Suid-Afrika, *Debatte van die Volksraad [Hansard]*, Eerste Sessie, Sesde Parlement, 27 Januarie 1978-16 Junie 1978, kolom 3810; See also: Columns 111-112 & 3757, for comments by Helen Suzman).

been exaggerated. Indeed, he did not even think that one out of a hundred people knew who Biko was before he died. Vorster went on to forecast some severe tests for South Africa, but nonetheless reiterated his belief that the policy of apartheid was not discrimination, but a sincere effort to provide black people living in South Africa with an opportunity to rule themselves independently in mini states within the South African borders. He again lashed out at the US, saying that relations between the US and South Africa was fast reaching the stage where the SAG felt that the US wanted to prescribe to them how the country should be run internally. He admitted that only a fool would not listen to advice, but then said that outsiders could not be allowed to meddle in the internal affairs of another country. Therefore, the SAG was definitely not going to allow anybody to tell them what to do and what not, especially not the US. This comment was specifically aimed at Mondale, who remarked at his meeting with Vorster in May 1977 that he did not see any difference between the concepts of full participation and one-man, one-vote. Every citizen should have the right to vote, and every vote should be equally weighed. The remark was taken by Vorster as confirmation that the US favoured one-man, one-vote elections in South Africa, which would lead to black majority rule.³⁹

Several international sympathisers attended Biko's funeral, and a memorial meeting was held at the UN, where the Sierra Leone Foreign Minister, Abdullai Conteh, urged the international community to take collective action to bring "an end to the carnage" in South Africa, in the form of a mandatory arms embargo. His plea was echoed by David Sibeko, the foreign affairs spokesman of the PAC-in-exile, who asked the Security Council to impose economic sanctions and a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. Sibeko quoted from a speech by Biko the previous year, in which Biko had asked Carter to reverse the traditional policy whereby the US had always looked at South Africa as a partner in diplomatic initiatives in Africa. Several other appeals on the same note were also heard, and it started to look as if a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa was imminent. In fact, on 26 September 1977, a memorandum from David Aaron, the US President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs, was sent to Mondale and the Departments of State and Defense. In this

39. Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, p 423; S. Topping, "Vorster warns U.S. against 'meddling', says he will resist sanctions", *The New York Times*, 17 September 1977, pp 1, 5; "Excerpts from interview with Prime Minister Vorster on South African policy", *The New York Times*, 17 September 1977, p 4; J. Foisie, "S. African leaders take a defiant stand against possible U.N. economic sanctions", *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September 1977, p 5.

memorandum, initial measures of force against South Africa, if necessary, were recommended. The measures included support for a mandatory UN embargo on arms sales to South Africa. In addition, it was stated that grey area sales of military related equipment would continue to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, but with some tightening as a signal to South Africa. The tightening pressures would be given special consideration in the South West Africa (Namibia) context, where the issue of South African military withdrawal could prove to be a major obstacle.⁴⁰

The SAG had in September 1977 provided new ammunition to its foreign critics with the death of Biko. In October 1977 it provided even more such ammunition. Vorster felt that he might be able to turn the panicky mood that gripped South Africa to his advantage and proceeded to announce that parliamentary elections would be held in November 1977, a year earlier than the originally planned date. He wanted a strong mandate to deal for once and for all with outside intervention in South African affairs. To demonstrate his resolve to suppress dissent, he ordered a crackdown on dissident black leaders, newspapers and organisations, which was introduced on 19 October 1977. Two leading black newspapers, *The World* and the *Daily Dispatch*, as well as eighteen black and interracial organisations, including the South African Student Organisation (SASO), the Black People's Convention, the Black Women's Federation and other organisations were banned. Fifty prominent individuals were arrested.⁴¹

The bannings led to an immediate international outcry. The Carter administration issued a statement saying that it was deeply disturbed by the crackdown, which it viewed as designated to stifle the freedom of expression for black people in South Africa. Furthermore, the US Ambassador to South Africa was called back for consultation on what steps the US should take in response to the crackdown. This decision was given unusual publicity by the Carter administration, presumably so that it could be regarded as a slap directed at the SAG. Carter also called a

40. D. Shannon, "Arms ban for S. Africa urged at U.N.", *Los Angeles Times*, 24 September 1977, p 2; CPLA, Atlanta: Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, 1972-1981, NLC-1132-C, PRC 41, 01/1977-01/1981, Box 24, Memorandum, David Aaron – The Vice-President, Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, 26 September 1977.

41. DeRoché, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, pp 89-90; Massie, *Loosing the bonds*, pp 424; B. Gwertzman, "U.S. recalls envoy from South Africa for consultations", *The New York Times*, 22 October 1977, p 1; The price of repression (Editorial), *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1977, p 6.

policy review session with Mondale, Young, Vance, his national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and representatives of the Treasury, Commerce and Defense Departments to discuss which concrete steps to take beyond the oral condemnation of South Africa. In the US Congress, white liberals and members of the Congressional Black Caucus, as well as the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, issued strong statements urging the Carter administration to go beyond mere rhetoric and to take specific actions like economic sanctions and other punitive measures against South Africa. In the UN, the African nations began a renewed campaign to invoke tough punitive measures against South Africa, including an arms embargo, a ban on future investment and a curb on trade with South Africa. Andrew Young himself responded by saying that he favoured some form of sanctions against South Africa, although he took care to say that he was expressing a personal view.⁴² The American public and private organisations also reacted to the crackdown through numerous petitions and letters, and demanded military, economic and political sanctions against South Africa.⁴³

At this point, it can be asserted that at the end of October 1977, it was clear that the gulf between the US (that is both the US Government and the US people) on the one hand and the SAG and its supporters on the other hand, was widening rapidly. The status quo that existed when Carter became US President nine months before, was no longer tenable.

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42. G. Hovey, "U.S. considers steps against South Africa", *The New York Times*, 25 October 1977, p 5; B. Gwertzman, "U.S. recalls envoy from South Africa for consultations", *The New York Times*, 22 October 1977, p 1; K. Teltsch, "Young in favor of stiffer steps on South Africa", *The New York Times*, 25 October 1977, p 1; C. Murphy, "Young favors sanctions against South Africa", *The Washington Post*, 25 October 1977, p A1; "Young favors U.N. sanctions on South Africa", *Los Angeles Times*, 25 October 1977, p 1; DeRoché, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, p 90.
43. CPLA, Atlanta: White House Central File, Subject File, CO 141, 1/20/1977-1/20/1981, Box CO-54, Letter: David W. Preus, President of the American Lutheran Church – President Carter, 31 October 1977; Letter: Frederick H. Borsch of The Church Divinity School of the Pacific – President Carter, 31 October 1977; Letter: Joe Hale, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council – President Carter, 31 October 1977; Letter: Peter Wensberg, Senior Vice-President of the Polaroid Corporation – Vice-President Walter Mondale, 28 October 1977; Letter, Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy – President Carter, 28 October 1977; White House Central File, Public Relations, Executive, PR 13-1/ST, Letter: C.B. Robinson, Chairman of the Tennessee Black Caucus – President Carter, 4 November 1977.

The Institution of a Mandatory Arms Embargo against South Africa

The crackdown on internal opposition by the SAG was widely regarded as a very drastic backward step on the advancement of human rights and therefore placed Carter in a position where he could no longer resist some form of practical action against South Africa. If he did not do anything practical, his commitment to human rights would be viewed as false by the American electorate who voted for him for just that reason, as well as by the world community who had been expecting a more hard-line policy from his administration towards South Africa. Thus, on 25 October 1977, a new day dawned for US-South African relations. For the first time ever, a US government branded the South African racial policies a threat to international peace and security. The Carter administration announced that it had decided in principle to support the UN Security Council in imposing a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, with an initial time limit of six months as an incentive to South Africa to stop the continuing crackdown on opposition movements. In addition to the arms embargo, the Carter administration also indicated that if satisfactory language for a resolution could be agreed upon with African states and other delegations, it would be inclined to support a Security Council warning of economic action against South Africa if the latter did not modify its policy of apartheid. However, it was quickly added that the US at that stage did not consider drastic economic sanctions against South Africa. The Carter administration still felt that to press for such drastic action would risk alienating conservative forces in the US Congress and among the public opinion, whose support was crucial for other foreign policy objectives. Thus, a door was left open for diplomacy. It was still hoped that the SAG would cooperate in bringing about a peaceful solution to the South West African (Namibian) question and the issue of apartheid.⁴⁴

On 27 October 1977, Carter officially announced US support for mandatory UN sanctions against all arms sales to South Africa, thereby

44. J.C. Harsh, "Mr. Carter versus South Africa", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 27 October 1977, p 23; O. Johnston, "U.S. prepares South Africa sanctions plan", *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 1977, pp 1, 23; "U.S. to support mandatory S. Africa arms embargo", *Chicago Tribune*, 26 October 1977, p 2; "Carter to back arms embargo on Republic", *The Cape Times*, 27 October 1977, p 1; G. Hovey, "U.S. is said to agree to arms sanctions against South Africa", *The New York Times*, 26 October 1977, pp A1, A7; NSA: South Africa: The making of United States policy, 1962-1989, microfiche collection 00794: Telegram, Secretary of State – All African diplomatic posts, 28 October 1977.

establishing a formal precedent for action by the UN. He also expanded the US arms embargo against South Africa to include items such as spare parts for C-130 transport aircraft and other equipment like small executive aircraft that could be used for either military or civilian purposes. In his announcement, Carter said that South Africa had rejected the efforts of the US to work harmoniously together towards a peaceful solution for the problems of Southern Africa and the elimination of apartheid, by taking away the rights of free press and eliminating many of the organisations that had been working towards improved equality for all the people of South Africa. He therefore felt that it was important that the US expressed its deep and legitimate concern about these actions in no uncertain terms. He denied that a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa amounted to intervention in the internal affairs of the latter country, claiming that the US was not trying to impose a blueprint or timetable for racial change in South Africa. Instead, the US wanted to continue working with the SAG in the hope that it would not sever itself from the rest of the world, but rather move in a rapid and evolutionary way towards granting all people of South Africa equal human rights.⁴⁵

In the days following Carter's announcement, the Western members of the Security Council reached general agreement to accept a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, subject to renewal every six months. Key points of the draft resolution were: it was in line with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, in other words the call for an arms embargo was based on the finding that further shipments of arms to South Africa would represent a threat to peace; it represented abandonment of a position of seventeen years' duration by Western powers and a decision to take specific, mandatory measures with respect to South Africa; and, if adopted, it would represent the first time that the UN had imposed Chapter VII sanctions on a member state. However, a lot of haggling with the African states over the draft resolution followed. Many of the African states reacted favourably to the Western resolution, but some of the more radical African states rejected it and insisted on

45. "U.S. in van of new pressure", *Evening Post*, 28 October 1977, p 1; G. Hovey, "President says U.S. backs U.N. arms ban against South Africa", *The New York Times*, 28 October 1977, pp 1, 8; "Transcript of President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Affairs", *The New York Times*, 28 October 1977, p 14; E. Randolph, "Carter backs UN ban on arms to South Africa", *Chicago Tribune*, 28 October 1977, p 1; "Arms ban yes – economic sanctions no", *The Natal Witness*, 27 October 1977, p 1; "President Carter's News Conference on October 27", *Department of State Bulletin*, 21 November 1977, pp 718-719; "National Newspaper Association interviews President Carter", *Department of State Bulletin*, 5 December 1977, pp 798-799.

more radical resolutions, including a ban on government or private investments, loans or credit to the SAG. Furthermore, the African states pointed out that the draft Western resolution did not even mention a halt to all nuclear cooperation with South Africa.⁴⁶

None of the Western nations were however willing to accept full economic sanctions against South Africa, and as far as an embargo on nuclear cooperation with South Africa was concerned, Andrew Young responded by saying that matters had gone too far for such an embargo to be a realistic possibility, since South Africa had at that stage already developed a capable nuclear potential. For that reason, the US could not risk ending its twenty-year policy of cooperation in nuclear technology with South Africa, as it would only encourage that country to turn to the separate development of its capacity to produce nuclear weapons. Young did however warn South Africa that if it detonated a nuclear bomb, its neighbours would be able to obtain much more sophisticated nuclear weapons, although not from the US. With this statement he hinted that it might be obtained from the Soviet Union. In a separate interview, National Security Advisor Brzezinski confirmed this fear, namely that the Soviet Union might be tempted to take action that would exacerbate and fuel the conflict in Southern Africa. He added that tightened US sanctions on military exports to South Africa were therefore aimed in part at avoiding a Soviet intrusion in the region, and that the prime concern of the Carter administration was that the growing racial conflict in South Africa would not become an ideological conflict, which would involve the intrusion of foreign powers.⁴⁷ This was an important

46. DeRoché, *Andrew Young: Civil Rights Ambassador*, p 90; H. Robertson, "SA 'threat' to world peace", *The Star*, 28 October 1977, p 1; "Carter sê ja vir wapenverbod", *Die Burger*, 28 Oktober 1977, p 1; E. Randolph, "Carter backs UN ban on arms to South Africa", *Chicago Tribune*, 28 October 1977, p 1; NSA: South Africa: The making of United States policy, 1962-1989, microfiche collection, 00796: Telegram, Secretary of State – American embassies, 29 October 1977; M.R. Benjamin, "Africa hits 'loopholes' in U.S. arms embargo effort at U.N.", *The Washington Post*, 29 October 1977, p A1; "Africans in U.N. press South Africa curbs", *The New York Times*, 29 October 1977, p 3.

47. NSA: South Africa: The making of United States policy, 1962-1989, microfiche collection 00797: Telegram, Secretary of State – All African diplomatic posts, 29 October 1977; B. Gwertzman, "Young rejects ban on atom fuel sale to South Africa", *The New York Times*, 31 October 1977, p 1; "Young keer vir kernverbod", *Beeld*, 31 Oktober 1977, p 1; "Young hints at N-bomb build-up", *The Citizen*, 31 October 1977, p 1; CBS, "Presidential Assistant Brzezinski interviewed on 'Face the Nation'", *Department of State Bulletin*, 5 December 1977, p 801; "U.S. fears Soviet move in S. Africa", *Chicago Tribune*, 31 October 1977, p 5.

statement, since it signalled a departure from initial Carter administration remarks that the SAG's anti-communist stance would play no role in the formulation of its policy with regard to South Africa. Thus, the Carter administration found itself in basically the same position as that of Kennedy in 1963. On the one hand, the arms embargo was an effort to counter the pressure from the African states somewhat in order to maintain the economic, strategic and anti-communistic privileges of South Africa, while simultaneously trying to polish the image of the US in the eyes of the African states.

In the meantime, on the home front, Carter was also confronted with an approved resolution in the US House of Representatives, in which the SAG's repressive measures against black and white opponents to apartheid was strongly denounced. The resolution called on Carter to take effective measures against South Africa in order to register the deep concern of the US people about the continued violation of human rights in South Africa. An identical copy of the resolution was also introduced in the Senate, where it was unanimously approved. The acceptance of the resolution was important in the sense that it was the first time that the US Congress had formally spoken out against South Africa. Both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party supported the resolution and were therefore united in denouncing the actions of the SAG. As the Carter administration had indicated that it would take action against South Africa in one way or another, it also meant that it was united with the US Congress. This was very important indeed, as it demonstrated to other countries that the US Congress fully supported Carter's proposal for a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa.⁴⁸ In the face of such a rare unity in US power circles, Carter had no choice but to go ahead with the action he had promised.

On 2 November 1977, Vance presented a review of unilateral US sanctions that the Carter administration had considered since the South African crackdown on 19 October 1977. As discussed previously, Carter had already announced the extension of the US arms embargo against South Africa to include items such as spare parts and other equipment, but now Vance indicated that the US would also henceforth prohibit the export of all police equipment to South Africa, including grey area equipment. In addition, the US naval and commercial attachés to South Africa were recalled to the US as a punitive unilateral action.

48. S. McBee, "House censures 'repressive' South African tactics", *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1977, p A13; A. Parker, "US envoy aided anti-SA hate campaign", *The Citizen*, 2 November 1977, p 1; "U.S. 'not telling SA what to do'", *The Natal Witness*, 2 November 1977, p 1.

Vance reiterated that the US wanted to begin the progress towards the end of apartheid and full participation for all South Africans in the country's political processes. In the light of that, he offered the possibility of a new round of top-level meetings between the South African and US governments. This call was heeded that very same day by the US and South African ambassadors, who met amid the sharp recriminations between the two countries and agreed to do everything possible to repair the damage in the relations between them.⁴⁹

Also on 2 November 1977, the fifteen members of the Security Council agreed on a revised resolution for a mandatory embargo on arms sales to South Africa. The Western demand of limiting the ban to six months was dropped, and it was agreed that acquisition of arms and military material by South Africa represented a threat to peace. The new resolution called on all countries, including those not part of the UN, to immediately cease any provision to South Africa of arms, ammunition of all types, military vehicles, equipment and spare parts. It also called for a review of all existing contracts and licences under which South Africa had been able to manufacture weapons. All countries were furthermore forbidden to assist South Africa in the development of nuclear weapons. The resolution was accepted unanimously as Resolution 418 by the UN Security Council on 4 November 1977, under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Thus, a permanent and binding arms embargo against South Africa was instituted. It was mandatory, meaning that all the members of the UN were obliged to abide by it, in comparison with the 1963 arms embargo which only called for voluntary adherence.⁵⁰

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49. O. Johnston, "U.S. recalls 2 S. Africa aides, halts arms sales", *Los Angeles Times*, 3 November 1977, p 1; "Amerika slaan weer: Attaché herroep", *Beeld*, 3 November 1977, p 1; "U.S. recalls two envoys from Republic", *The Natal Witness*, 3 November 1977, p 1; "V.S.A. roep twee hoë amptenare terug", *Die Volksblad*, 3 November 1977, p 2; "U.S.-S.A. envoys pledge to repair battered links", *The Argus*, 3 November 1977, p 25; "Bid to end SA-US Cold War", *The Star*, 3 November 1977, p 27.
50. K. Teltsch, "U.N. Council agrees on arms-ban terms against South Africa", *The New York Times*, 3 November 1977, p 1; "U.N. in accord on S. African ban", *The Washington Post*, 3 November 1977, p A21; "Weste, Afrika nog haaks oor verbod", *Beeld*, 3 November 1977, p 11; "U.S. backs S. Africa arms ban", *Chicago Tribune*, 3 November 1977, p 1; United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 418 (1977)*, 4 November 1977; "U.N. imposes mandatory arms ban on South Africa", *Los Angeles Times*, 4 November 1977, p 2; "Sanksies: dis final", *Die Vaderland*, 4 November 1977, p 1; "Security Council cited threats to peace", *The New York Times*, 5 November 1977, p 7; "U.N. votes to embargo arms sales to S. Africa", *Chicago Tribune*, 5 November 1977, p 2; Congressional Quarterly Incorporated, *Historic Documents of 1977*, p 823.

US and South African Reaction to the Mandatory Arms Embargo

Speaking immediately after the Security Council vote, Andrew Young remarked that a very clear message had been sent to South Africa through the institution of the embargo, namely that continuation on the course on which it had embarked, in other words apartheid, would only lead to further strains on ties between South Africa and the rest of the international community. He called the institution of the mandatory arms embargo a stigma that would hopefully lead South Africa to end its policy of apartheid. He however added that if the SAG showed a willingness to end apartheid and made progress in that direction, there might be reconciliation between the two countries.⁵¹

US Vice-President Mondale in turn emphasised that the Carter administration stood firmly by its conviction that steps had to be taken against the SAG to let it know that its disregard for human rights and dignity would not be tolerated by the rest of the world. Therefore, the imposition of the mandatory arms embargo was more than just a gesture; it represented a significant change in US policy. In the short term, the effect of the embargo and the US' own additions to it might have been largely psychological, but in the long run it would deprive South Africa of certain materials. Furthermore, whatever materials South Africa might be able to obtain abroad, would be obtained with difficulty and at greater cost. He warned that the US was prepared to take further steps against South Africa, should the latter still refuse to move away from its discriminative policy of apartheid. However, for the moment, the Carter administration had decided against taking measures that would end trade with and investment in South Africa. He denied that the US had vetoed economic sanctions against South Africa on the basis of Western economic interests, saying that the US could have gone further, but that there was no international consensus for economic sanctions against South Africa. Moreover, it could result in South Africa's virtual isolation, possibly drive the SAG to even greater defiance, and end whatever influence the US government might have had in bringing about peaceful change in South Africa. The arms embargo was therefore

51. A. Young, "U.N. Security Council condemns South Africa's Apartheid policy and imposes a mandatory arms embargo", *Department of State Bulletin*, 12 December 1977, pp 864-865; "U.N. votes permanent ban on sale of arms to S. Africa", *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 1977, p 1; "Veiligheidsraad eenparig", *Beeld*, 5 November 1977, pp 1-2.

designed in part to give the US diplomatic flexibility to react as necessary to the situation in Southern Africa.⁵²

Mondale's reaction was echoed by Vance, who told a group of black leaders in Washington that the Carter administration planned to increase its economic and diplomatic pressure on the SAG. He said that the Carter administration considered recalling all US commercial attachés from South Africa. However, the Carter administration was not willing to decrease US diplomatic representation in South Africa by recalling the ambassador permanently. It was crucial to have an ambassador in South Africa to keep the Carter administration up to date on developments in the country and to make policy recommendations. Furthermore, Vance again rejected a proposal to cease all cooperation on nuclear technology and research with South Africa, as he felt it would hamper efforts by the US to get South Africa to agree to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.⁵³

Concerning the response from the SAG's side, unfortunately no archival material reflecting the reaction of the SAG could be traced in the National Archives Repository in Pretoria. Neither was any official statement ever issued or made in parliament, which was in recess at that time. One is therefore dependent on media reports for information about the SAG's response to the arms embargo.

There is no doubt that senior members of the SAG were extremely agitated about the US' announcement of a mandatory arms embargo and reacted defiantly. On 26 October 1977, even before the embargo had been endorsed by the Security Council, South African Defence Minister, P.W. Botha, in a telephonic interview with the *New York Times* stated that South Africa had a strong enough arms industry to surmount an international embargo in a way that would astonish those seeking an end to white rule in South Africa. He nonetheless added that a decision to impose a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa would deprive its forces of some needed conventional arms, although it would not seriously weaken the country's overall fighting capacity. Concerning Carter, Botha apparently thought that he (Carter) was incapable of being president of the US, since the latter must surely have known that one country cannot prescribe to another how to go about its way.

52. CPLA, Atlanta, White House Central File, Subject File, CO 141, 1/20/1977-1/20/1981, Box CO-53, 7/1/77-5/30/78, Memorandum: P. Tarnoff – Vice-President Mondale, 9 November 1977; “Mondale warns of further action”, *The Argus*, 7 November 1977, p 13; “Nog stappe kom as SA nie oppas, sê Mondale”, *Die Volksblad*, 7 November 1977, p 3.

53. “V.S.A. wil erger druk, sê Vance”, *Die Oosterlig*, 8 November 1977, p 1.

Interestingly, the following day Botha denied the interview. However, he did not deny making the comments, saying that he had spoken to a reporter by telephone under the impression that the latter only wanted some background information, and that he had made it clear that he was not willing to conduct a formal interview by telephone. He therefore could not accept any responsibility for the report.⁵⁴

A few days later, P.W. Botha reacted again, stating that Carter's action of imposing a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa was not unexpected. He assured South Africans that they need not be concerned about the practical impact of a mandatory arms embargo. He claimed that the local arms industry was able to produce all the weapons needed for the protection of the country's borders. This included small arms as well as heavy artillery. In addition, the development and establishment of a local missile industry had been completed, and significant progress had been made in making the country's shipbuilding industry operative. Progress had also been made with the production of other strategic weapons, although he declined to say what these entailed. Thus, Botha reiterated, the South African armed forces would be able to cope with any attacks mounted by black forces, even if they were supplied and trained by the Soviet Union. Commandant P.G. Marais, the chairman of Armscor at the time, however did not fully agree with Botha. He said that while South Africa was able to fulfil its own need for armaments for unconventional warfare completely, and almost completely for armaments for conventional means, the country was still not able to produce heavy bombers, ships and submarines. He doubted whether the country would in future be able to manufacture such heavy equipment.⁵⁵

Angry comments also came from Foreign Minister Pik Botha, who called Carter's policy with regard to South Africa "dangerous" and accused Carter of applying double standards. Botha reiterated that there was no indication that the pressure on South Africa would decrease after

54. "South Africa defies U.S. on arms, says it can surmount an Embargo", *The New York Times*, 27 October 1977, pp A1, A9; "Wapensanksies teen S.A. nie onverwags", *Die Volksblad*, 28 Oktober 1977, p 3; "Verbod op wapens sal S.A. nie ondersit", *Die Burger*, 28 Oktober 1977, p 3; "Sanksies sal S.A. nie knak – Botha", *Die Oosterlig*, 28 Oktober 1977, p 1; "PW Botha ontken VSA-onderhoud", *Die Volksblad*, 28 Oktober 1977, p 1.

55. "South Africa views arms cutoff proposal calmly", *Los Angeles Times*, 29 October 1977, p 6; "SA kan nog nie bomwerpers en bote bou", *Die Vaderland*, 29 Oktober 1977, p 1; "SA sells arms – Botha", *Eastern Province Herald*, 31 October 1977, p 2; "Defence Minister reacts to arms embargo: Local industry gives SA missile lead", *The Citizen*, 3 November 1977, p 2.

the institution of the mandatory arms embargo. Rather, all the signs pointed to an increase in pressure. After the UN vote on 4 November 1977 that imposed the mandatory arms embargo, Botha said that it was perhaps a good thing that South Africa now knew where it stood, in other words that it was on its own and that it would have to struggle alone in order to survive. He said that the Carter administration's decision to support the embargo would make it even more difficult to find possible solutions for the Southern African issues, as it would make South Africans more determined to defend their country. The embargo was therefore nothing else than an incitement to violence. He added that it was not so much the practical effect of the arms embargo that concerned South Africa. Rather, it was the principle involved. South Africa did not accept the embargo because it was not a case of morality. If it had been, then the US should have asked for sanctions against more than half of the nations of the world where there was neither press freedom nor human rights.⁵⁶

Prime Minister Vorster reacted by saying that many of the threats against South Africa were pure bluff and that it was his job to decide when the bluff would end. He vowed to continue making it clear to the world that South Africa would not go any further in meeting the demands that were being made. Some changes would certainly be made internally in South Africa, not because the world demanded it, but because it was right and just. He also said that South Africa was the prize in the struggle for Africa between the West (led by the US) and the Soviet Union. These two parties wanted to take away what the people of South Africa rightfully owned. Therefore, South Africa would not be compromised or dictated to about how to run its own affairs.⁵⁷

Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that the Carter administration's policy towards South Africa was based on political interests, of which a concern for human rights and human dignity was a

56. "S. Africa vows to fight on, calls U.S. two-faced on rights", *Chicago Tribune*, 29 October 1977, p 1; "Pik Botha oor veto's: Druk op S.A. sal toeneem", *Die Burger*, 2 November 1977, p 1; "West vetoes sanctions against SA", *South African Digest*, 4 November 1977, pp 1-3; "Hypocrisy! Pik on UN arms ban", *The Citizen*, 5 November 1977, p 1; "Aanhitsing tot geweld", *Beeld*, 5 November 1977, p 1; "Verbod hits aan tot geweld", *Die Volksblad*, 5 November 1977, p 5; "South African Minister asserts arms ban may incite violence", *The New York Times*, 5 November 1977, p 7.

57. "West vetoes sanctions against SA", *South African Digest*, 4 November 1977, pp 2-3.

significant ingredient. It can be asserted that the defiance of the SAG collided with the strong human rights stance of the Carter administration, and finally led to the institution of a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. Several factors fuelled the fire caused by the collision, such as international and US domestic pressure for action against the SAG.

In retrospect, however, the strong utterances about human rights by the Carter administration versus its reluctance to impose stronger measures than the arms embargo simply do not add up. If the Carter administration was so serious about human rights, why the reluctance to impose stronger measures? The truth is that the mandatory arms embargo actually did not constitute anything new as far as US policy towards South Africa was concerned. On the contrary, the 1963 arms embargo was rather strictly enforced by Carter's predecessors, despite some weakening by the Nixon and Ford administrations. In fact, Carter's institution of some restrictions regarding grey area items was merely a reinstatement of measures relaxed by the Nixon and Ford administrations. One can therefore assert that only the description of the arms embargo changed, namely from voluntary in 1963 to mandatory in 1977, and that Carter's actions were merely a case of anti-apartheid rhetoric, disguised under a shadow of nothing more than very limited action. This leads to another conclusion, namely that the mandatory arms embargo was indeed only a limited effort to appease the Afro-Asian nations and US anti-apartheid activists. Furthermore, although the Carter administration had declared early in 1977 that South Africa's fierce anti-communism stance would have no influence on its policy towards South Africa, the limited action indicates that it was perhaps still a matter that was taken into consideration behind the scenes.

With all having been said, however, one should not disregard the fact that the mandatory arms embargo was imposed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which made it a very important symbolic act of significant importance at that point in history. It marked the first time in the 32-year history of the UN that mandatory sanctions were applied to a member state. It also marked a major shift in US policy towards South Africa, when taken into consideration that as recently as 1975 and 1976, the US had vetoed mandatory arms embargo resolutions against South Africa on the grounds that the SAG did not constitute a threat to peace. Lastly, the mandatory arms embargo acted as a predecessor of far-reaching economic and other sanctions instituted against South Africa in the mid-1980s.

Abstract

When Jimmy Carter took office as President of the United States in January 1977, he faced a difficult task: human rights activists worldwide expected him to take serious action against the South African Government because of its policy of apartheid (which they viewed as a gross violation of human rights), as well as the military build-up of the South African government and the question of independence for South West Africa (Namibia), where South Africa's administration and military presence was regarded as illegal. During the presidential campaign of 1976, Carter had declared himself a fierce supporter of human rights and vowed that he would do anything in his power to act against violators of human rights. Now that he had been elected, he had to act on his promises. The question is, did he seriously mean to take action against the South African government, or was it again merely the same verbal rhetoric that previous US governments had made themselves guilty of? This article investigates statements and actions by the Carter administration vis-à-vis South Africa during its first ten months in office, as well as the factors that played a role in determining the decision to impose a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. In conclusion, it has been found that although Carter and his administration continuously verbally castigated the South African government, in the end it was merely a case of anti-apartheid rhetoric. The fact is that the mandatory embargo did not really constitute anything new as far as US policy towards South Africa was concerned.

Opsomming

Die Carter-Administrasie en die Instelling van die 1977-Verpligte Wapenverbod teen Suid-Afrika: Retoriek of Aktiewe Optrede?

Met Jimmy Carter se aanvaarding van die presidentskap van die Verenigde State van Amerika in Januarie 1977, het hy voor 'n moeilike taak te staan gekom. Menseregte-aktiviste vanoor die wêreld het van hom verwag om strenger teen die Suid-Afrikaanse regering op te tree weens laasgenoemde se apartheidsbeleid (wat as 'n verregaande skending van menseregte beskou is), asook weens die Suid-Afrikaanse regering se opgaring van militêre voorrade en Suidwes-Afrika (Namibië) se onafhanklikheids-vraagstuk. Suid-Afrika se administratiewe en militêre teenwoordigheid in laasgenoemde is naamlik as onwettig beskou. Gedurende die presidensiële verkiesingsveldtog van 1976, het Carter verklaar dat hy 'n vurige voorstander van menseregte is en onderneem dat

hy alles in sy vermoë sou doen om teen diegene op te tree wat hulle aan die skending van menseregte skuldig maak. Na sy verkiesing, was dit nou tyd om hierdie beloftes na te kom. Die vraag is of hy werklik ernstig was daarvoor om teen die Suid-Afrikaanse regering op te tree, en of hierdie uitsprake van hom nie maar net weer dieselfde verbale retoriek was wat ook deur vorige Amerikaanse regerings gebruik is nie. Hierdie artikel ondersoek die verklarings en optrede van die Carter-administrasie teenoor Suid-Afrika gedurende Carter se eerste tien maande aan bewind, asook die faktore wat 'n rol gespeel het in die neem van die besluit om 'n verpligte wapenverbod teen Suid-Afrika in te stel. Ten slotte word bevind dat, hoewel Carter en sy administrasie die Suid-Afrikaanse regering voortdurend mondelings terreggewys het, dit maar net weer 'n voorbeeld van anti-apartheid retoriek was. Die feit is dat die verpligte wapenverbod nie werklik as 'n nuwe verwikkeling in die Amerikaanse beleid teenoor Suid-Afrika beskou kan word nie.

Key words

Arms embargo implementation; arms embargo; arms industry; arms shipments; Carter administration; nuclear weapons; sanctions; South African Apartheid Government; United States foreign policy; US anti-apartheid movement.

Sleutelwoorde

Amerikaanse anti-apartheidsbeweging; Amerikaanse buitelandse beleid; Carter-administrasie; kernwapens; sanksies; Suid-Afrikaanse apartheidsregering; wapenbesendings; wapenindustrie; wapenverbod toepassing; wapenverbod.