

The Executive Memorandum

The Heritage Foundation

214 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E. Washington, D.C. 20002-4999 (202) 546-4400

RUSH!

9/21/90

Number

282

TIME TO RETHINK U.S. SOUTH AFRICA POLICY

Next week's state visit by South African President F.W. de Klerk will be an historic moment in United States-South African relations. Never before has a South African head of state been received by a U.S. President. But neither has a South African leader done so much to dismantle that country's hated system of racial segregation and discrimination, called apartheid. Because of de Klerk, apartheid's demise is on the horizon.

Nevertheless, numerous barriers lie along South Africa's path to peace and freedom. First, South Africa remains deeply divided along ethnic lines. Today, the Xhosa and Zulu tribes, long bitter rivals, are engaged in a bloody, vindictive conflict as they jockey for political clout. Since August 1, black-on-black violence in South Africa has taken some 800 lives. This may escalate as apartheid continues to disintegrate.

Second, it is unclear whether the African National Congress (ANC), among the largest and most influential political groups in South Africa's black majority, will commit itself to respecting individual liberties in a post-apartheid South Africa. To date, the ANC has sent conflicting signals, sometimes supporting democracy, but other times extolling the virtues of socialism and even communism. Meanwhile, other political groupings in South Africa, such as the 1.5 million-strong Inkatha movement of Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, have made clear their support for individual liberties and their opposition to socialist economic schemes.

New Political Realities. When George Bush meets with de Klerk on Monday, he must recognize that political realities in South Africa have changed so rapidly that American policy toward that nation deserves serious reexamination. The central objective of American policy should no longer be to isolate and punish South Africa's leadership. Since his election last September, de Klerk has legalized all black political organizations, permitted exiled South Africans to return to South Africa, released all individuals serving prison sentences imposed because of political affiliations, eliminated media restrictions, and rescinded South Africa's state of emergency in all but one province. He abolished the country's Separate Amenities Act, one of the last remaining pillars of institutionalized racial separateness, which allowed local government officials to reserve public facilities for whites. Perhaps most important, de Klerk also has launched a series of "talks about talks" with the ANC that are likely to lead to full-scale constitutional negotiations with black political representatives. Finally, de Klerk also has opened his National Party to all races.

The central challenge now for Washington is to assist South Africans in their bid to institutionalize economic and political freedoms. This means that Washington must reevaluate policies that guided America's South Africa policy before apartheid's collapse. Foremost among these is economic sanctions. Four years ago, Washington imposed economic sanctions on South Africa in an effort to force South Africa's leadership to abandon apartheid. While it is true that this policy sent a message to the South African leadership that Washington was committed to ending apartheid, it is also true that these sanctions hurt the very people they were intended to help: South Africa's blacks. In large part

because of these sanctions, black unemployment and underemployment in South Africa stands at a staggering 47 percent. It is not surprising, then, that a Gallup Poll taken last year found 82 percent of South African blacks opposed to sanctions as a means to ending apartheid.

Constructing a Democratic South Africa. Now that de Klerk has committed his nation to ending apartheid, these sanctions should be lifted to help assist South African blacks empower themselves economically. Washington additionally must focus on helping institutionalize political and economic liberty in South Africa. The first step is for Bush to state unequivocally, following his meeting with de Klerk, that Washington expects the dismantling of apartheid to lead to genuine freedom and democracy. Bush should make it clear that Washington is not just committed to the destruction of apartheid, but also is committed to the construction of a democratic South Africa. Bush should stress that any move by white or black extremists to establish another authoritarian political system in South Africa will be opposed by Washington.

Finally, Bush should express his support for efforts to end factional violence in South Africa. Washington has limited leverage in South Africa, but, if requested, Bush should pledge to help broker a diplomatic settlement between rival factions. Bush should make this offer when he meets with de Klerk on Monday.

De Klerk's visit presents Americans with an opportunity to look anew at South Africa, a country in profound political transition. The time has come for new, creative thinking in Washington's policy toward that country. Bush should inform the South African leader that Washington no longer views the South African leadership as an affront to civilized, democratic society. Rather, Bush should tell de Klerk, Washington eagerly awaits the moment that it can welcome a democratic South Africa back into the growing community of democratic nations. Clearly, South Africa has not yet reached the ultimate objective that de Klerk seeks: a democratic, non-racial society. But, Bush should tell de Klerk, Washington is pleased with the tremendous progress South Africa's leadership has made in forging a new future for an embattled nation.

Michael Johns
Policy Analyst

For further information:

Michael Johns, "For Mandela's Visit, Some Words of Caution," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 269, June 14, 1990.

Michael Johns, "Sanctions Didn't End Apartheid," *Boston Herald*, June 27, 1990.