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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

October 18, 1983

See other side

Dear Colleague:

The gravity of the situation in southern Africa is something our foreign policy constantly points to but does little about. The difficult negotiations which led to Zimbabwe's independence as a friendly, democratic, multiracial society were the consequence of skillful diplomacy, in large part, American devised and American-led.

Now we threaten to undo our own good work by seeking to cut that country's economic aid because it dared to exercise its sovereignty in a world body we all belong to. The only nations that could possibly stand to gain by this intemperate action are South Africa and the Soviet Union.

The Soviets could gain because its own actions (it shot the Korean airliner out of the sky not Zimbabwe) have instigated our potential response to Zimbabwe's abstention on that issue in the U.N. A weakened Zimbabwe, already a poor and vulnerable country, could prompt more violence and upheaval in southern Africa and thus create a climate for a rapid expansion of Soviet influence.

South Africa stands to gain because as the main source of instability and tension in the region, it will consider American action against Zimbabwe as a signal to increase its destabilization campaign against that country and its neighbors. It will move to further secure its abhorrent system of apartheid at home and to advance its political, military, and economic sabotage in the region. In time it will consolidate its hegemony and inevitably delay getting out of Namibia. Finally, it will view the U.S. as cooperating with its own ambitions. The rest of Africa will view U.S. actions in the same light.

Many of us in this Congress are reluctant to see this outcome and therefore have introduced bills specifically designed to constrain U.S. relations with South Africa. Some of those measures are pending full House approval now. To understand why we feel passage of these bills is so vitally necessary for an effective U.S. policy toward Africa, the poorest and least developed world continent (and why exposing a vulnerable nation like Zimbabwe to increased South African intervention is so devastatingly wrong-headed), I urge you to read the just published Los Angeles Times Op-Ed article by our esteemed Chairman of the Africa Subcommittee, Howard Wolpe, on the reverse side. If we want a fair and non-hypocritical foreign policy towards the struggling nations of Africa, I urge you also to seriously consider voting favorably for the important legislation, H.R. 3646, including the Gray Amendment, before you.

Sincerely,

William H. Gray III
William H. Gray, III
Member of Congress

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A New U.S. Approach to South Africa

Let's Dissociate Ourselves From Apartheid, Regional Aggression

LOS ANGELES TIMES - 10/13/83

By HOWARD WOLPE

There are now five major bills pending before the U.S. Congress concerning South Africa, and many more resolutions. Once again, following a lull during the first two years of the Reagan Administration, South Africa is the focus of congressional scrutiny. Why should this be so?

South Africa has been much on our minds ever since the National Party took power in 1948. It has spent those years entrenching and perfecting its system of institutionalized racism in open defiance of attempts by most other U.N. member states to have it end apartheid and extend political and social equality to all its citizens. Yet South Africa continues its horrendous policies that deny even a modicum of basic human rights to the vast majority of its people.

This Administration has insisted that South Africa is trying to reform. The State Department's Bureau of African Affairs in early 1981 initiated a series of steps, termed "constructive management," based on the premise that quiet diplomacy and closer U.S. association with the South African regime would encourage internal change and lead South Africa to end its illegal occupation of Namibia.

Thus the Administration has expanded our diplomatic presence in South Africa. It has allowed visits by "homelands" leaders in contravention of our own consular laws, and has increased the numbers of military attaches in our respective embassies. It has "mistakenly" given visas to South African military and intelligence personnel. It has sent nuclear technicians to South Africa, and has amended U.S. policies to allow the sale and export of military and police equipment to South Africa. And it has vetoed a U.N. resolution condemning South African aggression against Angola—all in the name of "constructive engagement."

And what has been South Africa's response to all these "constructive engagement" carrots?

First, the government's internal repression has intensified sharply in the last 2½ years. Pass-law detentions have increased; new restrictions have been imposed on the press; millions of black South Africans have been forcibly returned to "homelands";

citizens who dare to dissent, black and white, continue to be subject to arbitrary banning, and the continued use of torture methods during detention have led to new unexplained deaths in prison.

Second, South Africa continues to block a settlement of the Namibia conflict, successfully using the American insistence on linking Namibia's independence to the removal of Cuban troops from Angola as a way of prolonging a political settlement in that embattled territory.

Third, South Africa has dangerously escalated its destabilizing military and economic aggression against its black-ruled neighbors. South Africa occupies Angolan soil, and gives support to dissident groups in Angola and Mozambique. It has launched murderous raids into Lesotho and Mozambique. It has sought to overthrow the Seychelles government. And it has not hesitated to use economic sabotage against Zimbabwe and Mozambique as an added stick.

In short, "constructive engagement" has been an utter failure. It is clear that the options embraced by the Reagan Administration in hopes of alleviating a worsening situation in South Africa have in fact merely made matters worse. Not only is there more upheaval and violence in the southern African region today, but now—for the first time and as a direct consequence of "constructive engagement"—the United States has become directly implicated in these developments. We must understand the enormous damage that "constructive engagement" has done to American interests. For in African eyes the United States is now viewed as colluding with the South African government in delaying Namibia's independence, in fostering regional instability and in preserving the abhorrent system of apartheid.

It is against this backdrop that I and a number of my colleagues are pressing for the passage of legislation to recast the United States' foreign policy toward South Africa. We need to act now, before it is too late—too late to avoid an Armageddon in South Africa, and too late to dissociate the United States from apartheid and

from South Africa's regional aggression.

Among the measures pending that call for various types of sanctions against the South African government, three are scheduled for a House vote on Tuesday: A bill by Rep. Howard L. Berman (D-Calif.) would reinstitute restrictions on exports to South Africa's police and military, Rep. Stephen J. Solarz's (D-N.Y.) bill would impose new restrictions on commercial activity and mandate fair employment practices for all U.S. companies doing business in South Africa, and a bill by William H. Gray III (D-Pa.) would prohibit new U.S. corporate investment in South Africa until the President determines that there is demonstrable progress toward the elimination of apartheid.

Already passed and awaiting final approval is a bill by Rep. Julian C. Dixon (D-Calif.) that would disallow U.S. votes in the International Monetary Fund on behalf of nations that practice apartheid. Also pending is a bill by Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-N.Y.) that would prohibit nuclear relations with South Africa.

These are the signals that we should be sending to South Africa's government so that it has no doubt concerning where the United States stands on apartheid, on the question of Namibia's independence and on South Africa's regional aggression. That country should know that its continued intransigence on these matters will precipitate changes in its relationship with the United States, and that those changes will prove costly.

U.S. interests on that continent require a redirection of American foreign policy toward South Africa. We cannot continue to struggle to achieve a just society at home and equivocate on our international obligations abroad. The racism and the denial of political rights that we will not tolerate at home must not be condoned by our posture overseas. Our national values, and our national interests, dictate that we act on South Africa before it is too late.

Howard Wolpe, a Democratic congressman from Michigan, is chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa.

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