

*The United States Foreign Political interests regarding
majority rule in Rhodesia in 1976*

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Introduction

The 1960s and the 1970s were a time of mass decolonization¹ in Africa, as former colonial countries sought independence from the European states. The only officially recognized white-minority regime was that of South Africa but another African state with a white minority government existed at the time. Rhodesia, present day Zimbabwe, unilaterally declared independence (UDI) from Great Britain on November 11th 1965² and was an unrecognized state until the transition to majority rule and creation of Zimbabwe in 1979 and 1980 respectively. This thesis focuses on the year 1976 as a crucial turning point from white supremacy towards majority rule that was carefully planned and led by the US state department through a series of meetings and telegrams. The significance of using diplomatic means in solving matters of troubled states is clearly visible today for example in Libya and Syria as is the complexity of superpower interests and how they choose to pursue them.

The primary research question of this thesis is what were the United States' main interests concerning Rhodesia's transition to majority rule³ and how did it pursue these goals. The main concern and focus of this study is the United States' perspective to the issues and negotiations concerning majority rule in Rhodesia. Sub-questions concerning the matter are: who took part in the diplomatic process to create the negotiations; did the cold war affect the process and what was the relationship of the United States and Great Britain during the process. This study focuses on the year 1976 and the United States' actions concerning Rhodesia and its transition to majority rule. The timeline is narrowed down to the period when the United States conducted a series of meetings to set up a negotiation concerning the transition to majority rule: starting in March 1976 when Secretary of State Kissinger met with the British Foreign Minister regarding Southern Africa and ending when Rhodesia's Prime Minister Ian Smith publically announced that the Rhodesian Government was willing to take part in the negotiations in September 1976. The

¹ A comprehensive definition of decolonization: Raymond F. Betts 2012, "Decolonization – a brief history of the word". *Beyond Empire and Nation – The Decolonization of African and Asian societies, 1930s - 1960s*, 23 – 35, Ed. Els Bogaerts & Remco Raben KITLV Press Leiden.

² Watts 2006, 442.

³ The significance of transitioning to majority rule is discussed in depth in: Frederic Cooper 2012, "Decolonization and citizenship – Africa between empires and a world of nations". *Beyond Empire and Nation – The Decolonization of African and Asian societies, 1930s - 1960s*, 39 – 64, Ed. Els Bogaerts & Remco Raben KITLV Press Leiden.

United States did not play an active role in these negotiations and therefore the negotiations are left out from this study.

Regarding the use of the term “Rhodesia” many historians have chosen to either anachronistically use the name Zimbabwe or use the colonial name on Southern-Rhodesia whereas some scholars have avoided this by simply referring to the country as the Smith regime. For the sake of clarity, in this thesis the country is referred to by its somewhat controversial UDI name Rhodesia since this is the term used in the primary source. The term Southern Rhodesia is used when referring to the region prior to the UDI. The terms used of Tanzania’s President Nyerere, Zambia’s President Kaunda and Mozambique’s President Machel are “the African Presidents” and “the Black African Presidents” as these were the terms used in the primary source. Since the study focuses on the foreign political interests of the United States it is crucial to examine the meaning of foreign political interests of a country. Several factors such as economics, hostilities and other relationships with foreign countries, domestic politics and history are part of foreign political interests. The interests of a country are defined by policymakers and largely depend on the ideology of the people crafting the policies. With change of administration or personnel, the interests of the country can shift and furthermore, the ideals and goals of policymakers can change over time or differ depending on the issues. In this study the lead policymaker of the United States was Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who had been involved⁴ in crafting United States foreign policy in different roles since 1969. Kissinger’s views of statecraft are discussed in chapter 1.1.

This study is part of the field of foreign political and diplomatic history and focuses on the United States’ viewpoints of the events. The primary source used in this thesis is the Foreign Relations of the United States, or FRUS, and specifically FRUS 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa published in 2011. As a source, the FRUS is somewhat one-sided containing only official documents regarding United States foreign policy but it is best suited for answering the research questions of this thesis that specifically focuses on the United States viewpoints. One of the four main chapters of the volume is dedicated to the majority rule in Rhodesia consisting of mainly memorandums of conversation and telegrams. This study approaches the FRUS documents with

⁴ Henry Kissinger became the National Security Advisor for President Richard Nixon 1969. Sargent 2015, 44–45.

criticism towards the source and laying focus on the content instead of the language. Methods such as discourse analysis or examining the use of language could be used on the material but would be better suited to answer different research questions than the ones presented in this study. This study focuses solely on the United States aspect of the events and does not mean to overstate the role of the United States concerning the transition to majority rule in Rhodesia.

The secondary sources used in this study complement the primary source and help answering the research questions. DANIEL J. SARGEANT's *a Superpower Transformed* is used regarding the United States' foreign policy in general the 1970s. Academic writing of the relationship of the United States and Rhodesia is scarce although two books that focus on the United States relationship were published in 2001, ANDREW DEROCHE's *Black, White and Chrome: the United States and Zimbabwe, 1953 to 1998* and GERALD HORNE's *From the Barrel of a gun: the United States and the War against Zimbabwe 1965 -1980*. These books were unattainable for this thesis but neither one of them utilize the FRUS documents used in study since they were just recently declassified. CARL P. WATTS wrote an article focusing on the foreign political interests of the United States towards the UDI of Rhodesia and especially the relationship of the United States and Great Britain during the period leading to the UDI. In regard to the history of Zimbabwe this study uses a book from the University of Harare *Becoming Zimbabwe* as well as the *Oxford History of the British Empire*. An article *Settlers and liberator of the South* by TERENCE O. RANGER, a scholar known for specializing in the history of Zimbabwe, is also referred to which focuses on the armed conflicts of Southern Africa in the 1960s and 1970s.

The colonial history of Zimbabwe, and Southern Africa in general, is tightly linked with South Africa. The British interest towards the Zimbabwe plateau started in late 19th century in the pursuit of gold found in the region which also inspired British businessman Cecil Rhodes to obtain a royal charter to his British South Africa Company (BSAC) in 1889 to secure to British and Cape interest the areas north of the Limpopo and Zambesi rivers. The BSAC started pushing in to the area from the Cape Colony in South Africa as the "pioneer column" which set out in 1890, using armed force to seize land when necessary. The main aim of the BSAC was to obtain mining rights but in addition it attained farming land and taxed the locals of the region.⁵The area

⁵ Saunders, Smith, 610–614; Porter 2009.

officially adopted the name Rhodesia in 1898 under the rule of the BSAC. The governance of the area was first done under the Order-in-Council as of 1898 and as of 1923 Rhodesia achieved Responsible Government and acted as a self-governing colony. ⁶ In 1910 four South African colonies formed the Union of South Africa, which gained self-representation in 1931. The constitution of 1910 heavily favored the white minority of South Africa and segregation between the races slowly grew until the 1948 general election where the National Party rose to power and begun drafting legislation concerning the justification and enforcement of racial segregation, apartheid.⁷

The white minority and its relationship to the black majority is a significant factor when examining the history of Rhodesia both before and after the UDI. For example, land ownership was one of the main issues that strained this relationship dating back to the 1890s and remained an issue, which was evident in the Land Apportionment Bill that sought to legalize land segregation and was passed in 1930 and implemented in 1931. The bill did not only split the land according to race but also defined landownership differently in the European and Native areas so that European land was seen as privately owned where as black Africans could only attain a communal tenure. In addition to the land segregation, similar acts were passed that effectively restricted the African peasant agriculture that competed with the growing settler commercial agriculture.⁸ In addition to restricting the natives in the rural areas, legislation was also drafted to control native Africans in urbanized areas. The Native Accommodation and Registration act of 1946 which denied the unemployed black natives from moving in to urbanized areas.⁹ In 1951 the Native Land Husbandry Act was adopted which further gave the administration control over the black majority and made it possible for the administration to not only accommodate locals to the countryside but also to transform them in to cheap labor needed in the commercialized urban areas.¹⁰

After the transfer to Responsible Government in 1923, Southern Rhodesia had acted as an unofficial autonomous entity with the British Parliament having a veto-right to all legislation

⁶ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 58–59; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

⁷ Omer-Cooper 2006, 158–183.

⁸ Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 66–68; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

⁹ Mlambo 97–98; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

¹⁰ Mlambo 86; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

which was never used.¹¹ However, Southern Rhodesia became also part of the Central African Federation which included Nyasaland, Northern and Southern Rhodesia and lasted from 1953 to its collapse ten years later. The Federation was administered from Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia and it had both federal and territorial government posts. The Federation was an economic success and Southern Rhodesia as the most industrialized of the territories benefitted the most of the Federation. The inequalities of the economic benefits of the Federation in addition to increased racial tensions led to the gradual collapse of the Federation when the territories adapted new constitutions. In 1963 both Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland attained majority rule and became independent, Northern Rhodesia as Zambia and Nyasaland as Malawi.¹² In Southern Rhodesia the Prime Minister saw that independence was impossible without majority rule and introduced a legislature package that improved education, land owning and political rights for the blacks. This alienated the Europeans from his party and led to the rise of a new right-wing party, The Rhodesian Front that won the elections in 1962. In April 1964 former Minister of Finance Ian Smith rose to power as the Prime Minister and after 18 months of negotiations with Great Britain Smith's government declared Rhodesia unilaterally independent on the 11 of November 1965.¹³

In the immediate aftermath of the UDI economic sanctions were imposed towards Rhodesia first by Britain and later by the UN. The first acts by Britain were removing Rhodesia from the Sterling and the Commonwealth preference system, ceasing trade and banning Rhodesia from London's capital markets. The UN Security Council imposed an Oil Embargo and selective sanctions in 1966 and more comprehensive mandatory sanctions in 1968.¹⁴ Despite the mandatory sanctions Rhodesia was able to survive due to countries that did not fully enforce them; South Africa and Portuguese Mozambique were the most vital life-lines for land locked Rhodesia in both export and import.¹⁵ Mozambique attained independence¹⁶ in 1975 and immediately enforced the UN sanctions in addition to confiscating all Rhodesian owned property and assets. These turns of

¹¹ Watts 2006, 441–442.

¹² Mlambo, 89–93; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

¹³ Watts 2006, 442.

¹⁴ Mtisi, Nyakudya, Barnes, 126–127; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

¹⁵ Mtisi, Nyakudya, Barnes, 133–134; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

¹⁶ After ten years of fighting, Mozambique gained independence from Portugal in June 25th 1975. Birmingham, Ranger, 349–355; Birmingham & Martin 1983.

events made Rhodesia more dependent on South-Africa as 80 percent of Rhodesia's foreign trade now passed through South-Africa.¹⁷ The two nationalist African opposition parties, ZAPU and ZANU, both formed their own military wings after the UDI which were ZIPRA and ZANLA respectively.¹⁸ The guerrilla war started slowly and the first major strikes against white settlers occurred in 1972 when ZANLA guerillas attacked white farmers in the countryside. The independence of Mozambique in 1975 opened a new 764 mile long front for the guerillas that started operating from Mozambique.¹⁹ The opposing sides were not strictly defined by race, although the vast majority of the guerillas were blacks and many black Rhodesians also fought as volunteers for the Rhodesian army and acted as police officers.²⁰

The conflicts in Angola and Mozambique in the 1960s and 1970s were tied to the situation in Rhodesia in 1976 and heavily affected it. In Angola a violent uprising of African nationalists against Portuguese colonial rule started in 1961 and raged on into the mid-1970s.²¹ In January 1975 the Portuguese were willing to start the transition of Angola towards independence that was led by the three largest African political parties. However, they were unsuccessful in stabilizing the country and instead emerged in civil war sparked by neighboring Zaire's backing of one of the groups and sending Zairian troops to Angola. Other foreign powers including the Warsaw Pact and the United States backed opposing groups but did not directly take part in the conflict. In October 1975 South Africa launched an invasion of Angola and shortly after tens of thousands of Cuban militants were shipped to fight in Angola. In addition to countries, also American, French and British mercenaries took part in the conflict on various. Supported by Cuban forces, the Angolans were able to drive South Africa back from Angola the same year and in November 1975 Portugal let go of Angola completely giving power to "the people of Angola".²² The communist power taking part in the Angolan Civil War was not unnoticed by the United States policymakers who feared the growth of Soviet and Cuban influence in Southern Africa. United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had backed South Africa in its invasion but due to domestic politics, most notably the Defense Appropriations Act, was not able to financially or

¹⁷ Mtisi, Nkyakudya, Barnes, 144; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

¹⁸ Mtisi, Nkyakudya, Barnes, 119–120; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

¹⁹ Mtisi, Nkyakudya, Barnes, 142–145; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

²⁰ Mtisi, Nkyakudya, Barnes, 120, 125; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

²¹ Birmingham, Ranger, 340–343; Birmingham & Martin 1983.

²² Birmingham, Ranger, 357–359; Birmingham & Martin 1983.

militarily take part in the conflict.²³ The rapid escalation and internationalization of the conflict in Angola and the effects of domestic politics towards military intervention in a similar conflict affected United States policymakers in 1976 regarding the situation in Rhodesia.

²³ Sargent 2015, 220–221.

1. Towards Majority Rule

1.1. Background to US interests in Rhodesia prior to 1976

During the time of the Central African Federation, United States policymakers chose to approach the question of Southern Rhodesia's independency by supporting Great Britain and opposing possible declaration of unilateral independence by the white minority. Great Britain and the US saw that swift decolonization of central Africa was best for them both domestically and internationally since there was no major communist activity in any of the Federation territories and African nationalist sought support from the Americans. These factors resulted in the United States merely observing the developments in the area and letting Great Britain take the lead in the matters.²⁴ The dissolution of the Central African Federation disturbed the stability of the area with increased threat of Communist infiltration in the region. Zambia's copper production and distribution, which the United States was heavily involved and dependent of, was also threatened by these changes. The United States was not used to following other countries' lead and as frustration concerning the situation grew in the United States it also brought friction to the relationship between the US and Great Britain.²⁵ From late 1964 the United States started planning for the possible UDI and its' impact on Zambian copper fearing that if Zambia embargoed the UDI regime of Rhodesia it would retaliate by cutting off electricity and coal in addition to closing transportation through Rhodesia.²⁶ During the course of 1965 the United States followed closely the developments in Rhodesia and the negotiation between Southern Rhodesia's Prime Minister Ian Smith and Great Britain's Prime Minister Harold Wilson. The United States made it clear both officially and unofficially that if the UDI occurred, the Americans would back Great Britain and take part in the economic sanctions against Rhodesia.²⁷

The United States representatives in the United Nations Security Council voted in favor of the sanctions against Rhodesia in 1966 and 1968. Both series of sanctions were imposed in the United States under executive order.²⁸ Prior to the 1966 sanctions, Rhodesia was the largest source of chrome ore imported to the United States and after the UDI sanctions, the Soviet Union

²⁴ Watts 2006, 442–443.

²⁵ Watts 2006, 444.

²⁶ Watts 2006, 450.

²⁷ Watts 2006, 456–457.

²⁸ Randolph 1978, 58.

became the new primary source for chrome and in 1968-1969 60 percent of imported chrome came from the Soviets giving them the ability to control prices. To counter this in November 1971 the so-called Byrd Amendment was passed in Congress which prohibited embargoing any strategic material from a non-communist country as long as the same product was imported from a communist country.²⁹ The passing of the Byrd amendment made it possible for the United States to reopen Chrome trade with Rhodesia despite the sanctions.³⁰ In December 1973 the senate passed the first of many attempts, supported by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Ford, to repeal the amendment. In 1977 the repeal of the amendment was successful and importing Rhodesian chrome was once again forbidden in the US.³¹

In the 1970s human rights and non-governmental organizations became influential in the international community as organizations such as Amnesty international got widespread media attention towards human rights issues around the world. This development also effected the crafting of foreign policy for highly influential countries such as the United States, as the human rights aspect could not be ignored.³² Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's relationship to the combination of foreign politics and human rights was complex and changed during his career. He believed that avoiding major wars while advancing national interest was the core purpose of statecraft. Kissinger mentioned the words "human rights" in 39.6 percent of his public speeches in 1976 compares to 5.5 percent in 1974. Nevertheless in his view human rights and the sovereignty of nations were a complex equation and not necessarily Americas business.³³ In addition to the emergence of human rights in global politics the early 1970s were also marked by the détente face in the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.³⁴ By 1976 détente was slowly falling apart which was evident from controversies in the United Nations and also events in Mozambique and Angola. The Angolan Civil War was seen by United States policymakers as a proxy struggle between the superpowers.³⁵

²⁹ Randolph 1978, 57;60.

³⁰ Mtisi, Nkyakudya, Barnes, 134; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009.

³¹ Randolph, 1978–1979.

³² Sargent 2015, 201–203.

³³ Sargent 2015, 206–209.

³⁴ Sargent 2015, 9.

³⁵ Sargent 2015, 220–222.

1.2. *Laying the foundations for negotiations*

On March 21st 1976 Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sent a telegram³⁶ to British foreign Secretary Callaghan, who was just named the next Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, responding to an earlier message³⁷ sent by Callaghan concerning events in Southern Africa. Callaghan had brought up several threats and issues in the region one of which was the situation in Rhodesia and the threat of Soviet or Cuban interference such as in Angola. Callaghan also brought up the need of addressing the transition to majority rule in Rhodesia sooner rather than later.³⁸ In his response Kissinger agreed to most of Callaghan's points, especially concerning Rhodesia, but did not share Callaghan's optimism of a settlement in Rhodesia.³⁹ It is noteworthy that although Kissinger expressed skepticism towards a settlement in Rhodesia that would result in majority rule, only a month later he was in Tanzania and Zambia discussing the possibility of Rhodesian transition to majority rule through diplomacy.

On the 25th of April 1976 Henry Kissinger met Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere in Dar es Salaam and discussed the situation in Southern Africa. Concerning Rhodesia Kissinger stated: "... I am prepared to put the power of the United States behind the liberation of Rhodesia, in unmistakable terms, so Smith and Vorster cannot possibly misunderstand."⁴⁰ Kissinger continued that he did not wish to "see blocks in Africa"⁴¹ and does not want foreign conflicts to be fought on African soil. Nyerere's view on Southern Africa was that the Rhodesian regime should be pressured and South Africa should also face pressure regarding its military occupation of Namibia. Nyerere also ultimately wanted the apartheid of South Africa to fall. Kissinger explained his views that all of the three concerns were shared by the United States but since the South African question was harder and more complicated the primary focus would be on Rhodesia and

³⁶ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 21.3.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 481-482.

³⁷ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 23.3.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 482-484.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Kingdom, 21.3.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 481-482.

⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, 25.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 485.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Namibia. Kissinger revealed that he had planned to deliver a speech in Lusaka on the 27th of April concerning Rhodesia and in the speech he would lay pressure on South Africa's Prime Minister Vorster concerning Rhodesia.⁴² Kissinger consulted Nyerere on the key-points of the speech and its impact on the African States. In the speech Kissinger would say that the US will not support factions, urge the neighboring countries of Rhodesia to close their borders and promise that repealing the Byrd Amendment is worked on. Nyerere assured Kissinger that big powers are not wanted in Africa such as in the Angolan Civil War.⁴³

Kissinger continued his African tour to Lusaka, Zambia and on the 27th of April he met with Zambia's president Kenneth Kaunda and held a similar meeting of the same topics as with Nyerere two days earlier. Kaunda shared Nyerere's opinion of putting pressure on Rhodesia's Prime Minister Smith and said that it should be done by South Africa.⁴⁴ Kaunda assured Kissinger concerning foreign influence in Southern Africa:

*We do not want to see outside interference at all, and we would not like to see outside support for factions in Rhodesia. They should be left alone; that is the only way to avoid an Angolan situation in Rhodesia.*⁴⁵

Kissinger promised that the US would use its diplomatic and economic powers to lay pressure on Rhodesia and that the United States "are totally behind majority rule"⁴⁶. Kissinger also expressed that if foreign powers keep out of Southern African affairs, the US will support the neighboring states of Rhodesia and take part in resettlement efforts with the British concerning the white minority. Kissinger acknowledged the problematics concerning South Africa's apartheid but

⁴² Memorandum of Conversation, 25.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 485–488.*

⁴³ Memorandum of Conversation, 25.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 489–490.*

⁴⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, 27.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 494–496.*

⁴⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, 27.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 495.*

⁴⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, 27.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 496.*

concluded that the Rhodesian and Namibian issues should be dealt with first and solving them require help from South Africa.⁴⁷

Based on the meetings Kissinger held with the African Presidents and the British representatives, the US's main motive for Majority rule in Rhodesia was to avoid confrontation with the communist superpowers. This motive was not a secret in 1976, which is evident from a briefing held by the director of the CIA H.W. Bush to Kissinger, the subject of which was a conversation between South Africa's Prime Minister Vorster and Rhodesia's Prime Minister Smith on June 13th 1976. The Prime Ministers discussed the on-going conflict in Rhodesia and Kissinger's plans of transition to majority rule. They saw avoiding a communist backed insurgency, as in Angola, as the main motivator for Kissinger's negotiations. Vorster thought that President Ford would lose his re-election and Kissinger would be removed from office. Vorster persuaded Smith towards being more open to the negotiation reminding him that they had the ultimate control of the timetables, not the Western States. Smith concluded that emphasizing the threat of communism was Rhodesia's best bet and was evasive when Vorster mentioned the possibility of majority rule.⁴⁸

Kissinger told the African Presidents that avoiding confrontation with the communist powers was crucial for the United States. For instance scholars such as Daniel Sargent see the threat of Soviet interest to Black Nationalism in the region as the reason why Kissinger pursued a peaceful transition to majority rule in Rhodesia. In addition Sargent noted that Kissinger's new African Policy was unpopular in the United States and possibly resulted in Ford's defeat in the Texas primary just days after Kissinger Lusaka speech. ⁴⁹ Kissinger himself knew that there would be major opposition in the United States as he stated to Kaunda: "While it is true that within the United States there will be resistance to my speech today, we have made our decision."⁵⁰

Based on both primary and secondary sources the answer to the research question of the United States' interests in Rhodesia in 1976, the primary objective for American policymakers was to

⁴⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, 27.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 496–497.*

⁴⁸ Memorandum From Director of Central Intelligence Bush to Secretary of State Kissinger, 19.8.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 523–526.*

⁴⁹ Sargent 2015, 225.

⁵⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, 27.4.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 496.*

achieve majority rule in Rhodesia through diplomatic means and by doing so avoiding another Angola where superpowers fight a proxy war. The specific timing of the diplomatic process had several reasons: the escalation of the war in Rhodesia, the results of the Angolan Civil War and Mozambique's independence and support to African nationalists. The efforts to achieve majority rule were led by United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and included the highest officials of the countries that took part to the process, heads of state and foreign ministers. The Cold War was a factor for the United States to choose to pursue the issue diplomatically and avoid a confrontation with the Soviet bloc.

2. Negotiations as the target

2.1. Finding common ground – the US and UK relations concerning Rhodesia

On the 8th of July 1976 Kissinger and a group of American foreign policy experts met in Washington D.C. with a similar group of British, led by Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Anthony Crossland, regarding more concrete plans of Rhodesia's transition to majority rule. Kissinger felt that both domestically for the US and for the success of the plan the best way would be for Ian Smith to willingly accept a transition government that he would not be a part of. This way the white Rhodesians would not feel it is forced upon them. The British were reluctant of Smith having any role in the transition but Kissinger was successful in presenting his view, that selling the transition to the white minority would be considerably easier with Ian Smith.⁵¹ Kissinger, however, did not think that Ian Smith was mandatory to the success of the plan: "I personally think getting an agreement signed is more important than who sign it."⁵² Both the British and the Americans agreed that there would be a transition government that would hold free-elections and achieve majority rule within two years.⁵³ A month later in a private meeting between Kissinger and Callaghan the two discussed the plan for Rhodesia. A key-point, which was also crucial in the earlier meeting, was the economic guarantees for encouraging the white minority to stay in a majority ruled Rhodesia.⁵⁴

The planning of the negotiations continued on the 16th of August with Kissinger meeting the Ambassador Botha of South Africa. The main focuses of the meeting were Kissinger's next meeting with South Africa and the plan for the negotiations. Kissinger explained the significance of the place where they would meet and how it appeared to the Black African President's. Kissinger said that meeting in Europe, for instance Switzerland, would be the most convenient and non-provocative. Kissinger also showed Botha a preliminary draft for the negotiations and said he was concerned the British would show it to the Black African Presidents prior to the

⁵¹ Memorandum of Conversation, 8.7.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 503–510.*

⁵² Memorandum of Conversation, 8.7.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 507.*

⁵³ Memorandum of Conversation, 8.7.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 507–510.*

⁵⁴ Memorandum from the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Snowcroft) to President Ford, 5.8.1976. . *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 511–512.*

negotiations. Botha made it clear that it is crucial that the British and Americans present the same plan to the Africans.⁵⁵ On August 17th Kissinger met with his fellow US foreign policy experts and discussed the British differing opinions. Kissinger stated: “The British perception is 100% the opposite of ours. They want to tie up the South Africans totally before any move.”⁵⁶ The British disagreed with Kissinger showing Botha only a summary of the plan instead of the full text. In Kissinger’s view the full text was possibly too favorable for the whites and would be hard to sell to the Black African Leaders. Kissinger thought that the British were more concerned in toppling Ian Smith than finding a solution to the problem.⁵⁷

On the 4th of September Kissinger and the American foreign policy experts met with Britain’s Secretary of State and his delegation concerning the Rhodesian issue. The main topics of the meeting were briefing each other on the situation and finally deciding how to approach Vorster and the South Africans. Crossland, who had just returned from Africa, said the African leaders felt passionately about Smith and wanted him removed as fast as possible. Mozambique’s president Machel had joined Nyerere and Kaunda in favoring a peaceful transition to majority rule in Rhodesia.⁵⁸ Rhodesia launched raids on ZANLA camps operating from Mozambique in 1976.⁵⁹ These attacks came as a surprise to Machel who approached both the US and the British after the raids. The Black African Presidents had been willing to support the negotiation process but did not know how to unify the African nationalists. The next step towards the negotiations was who would be the negotiator with the nationalists. Both the British and the Americans came to a conclusion that their suggestion for a negotiator would be a white caretaker government that does not include Ian Smith. Concerning Vorster the two sides decided that Kissinger would

⁵⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, 16.8.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 513–515.

⁵⁶ Memorandum of Conversation, 17.8.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 520.

⁵⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, 17.8.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 520–523.

⁵⁸ Memorandum of Conversation, 4.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 527–528.

⁵⁹ Mtisi, Nkyakudya, Barnes, 149; Mlambo & Raftopoulos 2009

pressure Vorster to influence Smith to resign and if he was successful both the US and the UK would support the guarantee packages for the white minority, an issue for Machel.⁶⁰

2.2 *Selling the plan*

On the 6th of September Kissinger and the American delegation met with South African Prime Minister Vorster and his staff in Zurich, Switzerland concerning the majority rule negotiations of Rhodesia. Vorster started by stating that it was in the interest of both blacks and whites that the transition period would be as long as possible. Kissinger replied that the Rhodesian whites and blacks had to agree on a specific time frame but the goal was that it would not be longer than 18 to 24 months. Kissinger told Vorster that when the British representative visits South Africa Vorster would tell them that the Americans had introduced the papers concerning the negotiations and the South Africans were considering them but had not decided on them yet.⁶¹ Kissinger warned Vorster of telling the British that South Africa agrees to the terms:

*Because if you say you've accepted it, He will immediately run to Dar. And on the political paper too. Say you are sympathetically considering it.*⁶²

Kissinger and Vorster continued going through the plans and specifically the transition period. Kissinger also mentioned he would visit Nyerere in Dar es Salaam next and do his best to sell the plan to him. The emphasis of the meeting with Vorster was going through the plans and modifying certain words and phrases to be less provocative towards the African Nationalists and the Presidents backing them. Vorster was more concerned of how the papers define the rights and status of the whites of Rhodesia and how South Africa would benefit from the negotiations diplomatically. Vorster would present the results of the meeting to Smith and if Smith was willing to go forward with majority rule, Kissinger was set to meet them both in Pretoria after he had visited Tanzania and Zambia.⁶³

⁶⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, 4.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 529–535.*

⁶¹ Memorandum of Conversation, 6.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 541–544.*

⁶² Memorandum of Conversation, 6.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 543.*

⁶³ Memorandum of Conversation, 6.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 544–552.*

Kissinger met Nyerere in Dar es Salaam on the 15th of September and, in addition to Rhodesia, they discussed the imminent negotiations concerning Namibia. The main topic regarding Rhodesia was the guarantee package the western States were putting together. Kissinger explained that they were not only meant to encourage the whites to stay in Rhodesia, although this was important for the US domestically, but rather a larger scale investment to the economy of Rhodesia. Nyerere approved the guarantees and mentioned the British might call a constitutional conference and have at least symbolic role in the transition, which Kissinger did not oppose to. The two formulated a mutual press line and concluded that the rest was up to Rhodesia accepting majority rule.⁶⁴ On the 16th of September Kissinger continued his African tour in Lusaka where he met President Kaunda and conducted a similar meeting as with Nyerere a day earlier. Kissinger briefed Kaunda on what had been discussed with Nyerere and Kaunda agreed to their conclusions. Kissinger informed that he would meet with Smith and Vorster in Pretoria but only if Smith was willing to majority rule. Kissinger said he had pressured Vorster concerning Smith and promised that if he met Smith and Smith did not commit to majority rule the United States would publicly attack Smith's regime. Kaunda was wary of Kissinger meeting Smith and warned of the consequences if Smith was uncooperative. Kissinger also said South Africa could face US sanctions if they were uncooperative and in addition Kissinger assured Kaunda that even if Ford would lose the Presidential elections that fall, his opponent Carter had promised to support the negotiations if the African Presidents support it.⁶⁵

Kissinger met with Smith and Vorster in Pretoria on the 19th of September and discussed Rhodesia's transition to majority rule. Kissinger sent a summary of the meeting to President Ford the next day. Smith and his colleagues agreed to majority rule within two years, the immediate start of negotiations to create interim government, the structure of the interim government and the role of the British in the events. The Rhodesians insisted that once the interim government is formed all guerilla warfare and UN sanctions cease immediately. Kissinger promised that the US and the UK will support this diplomatically. Smith would return to Rhodesia and further negotiate the matter with his party and, if everything went well, he would announce the program

⁶⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, 15.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 558–560.

⁶⁵ Memorandum of Conversation, 16.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 562–565.

on TV and Radio on the 24th of September. The Rhodesian whites accepted the guarantee package formed by the US and UK and it only need approval of Rhodesian blacks. Kissinger told Ford that he had warned both Vorster and Smith of the dire consequences to them if Smith fails to act as he had promised.⁶⁶ Kissinger told the President that he had personal conflict in driving the matter:

This outcome gives me no pleasure. It is extremely painful for me to be the instrument of their fate—which could turn out to be disastrous. That they have accepted with good grace only makes it harder⁶⁷

On the 20th of September Kissinger met with Kaunda in Lusaka and briefed him on the negotiations with Smith and Vorster. Kaunda was shocked of Smith's approval and wanted to know what the guarantees were for Smith being true to his word. Kissinger told him Smith was aware of the consequences if he betrayed the trust of the US or South Africa, the closes ally to Smith. Kaunda promised to inform the other African presidents immediately and he said he understood that if Smith announces the plan on Friday the 24th as promised, the African Presidents will have to offer their support and acceptance. Kaunda and Kissinger saw Nyerere's reaction as the most crucial and Kaunda promised to use his influence on the African Presidents.⁶⁸

On the 23rd of September Kissinger and the American delegation met with British Prime Minister Callaghan and his staff in London. Callaghan asked Kissinger to tell the British what was expected of them in the following weeks if Smith would deliver his speech on the 24th. Kissinger said that the Africans agreed the next step would be to call a conference and that the British should have some role in them. Kissinger explained that due to several reasons the Americans could not take lead but instead could and would support the British in the matter. ⁶⁹ Kissinger mentioned the Cold War affecting the situation: “. . . it would get us in a Cold War competition with the Soviet

⁶⁶ Telegram From Secretary of State Kissinger to President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Snowcroft), 20.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 573–574.

⁶⁷ Telegram From Secretary of State Kissinger to President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Snowcroft), 20.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 574.

⁶⁸ Telegram From Secretary of State Kissinger to President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Snowcroft), 21.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 576–577.

⁶⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, 23.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 577–579.

Union. You have a legal responsibility to create a framework for an interim government.”⁷⁰ Both Callaghan and Kissinger came to the conclusion that if Smith presented his speech, the British would contact the Africans and start setting up a conference. Kissinger thought the main focus of the conference would be the creation of the interim government and not a Constitutional Conference. Kissinger believed Smith had agreed to the transition due to several factors including the pressure from South Africa, the guerilla war and the economic sanctions.⁷¹

2.3. The Final Push

The United States’, especially the Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s, attempts to promote majority rule in Rhodesia had met relative success since it began in March 1976. The cooperation with the British was fundamental to achieve anything since Southern Rhodesia was still officially a part of the Commonwealth despite Rhodesia’s UDI. The British and Americans had shared goals but differed on some of the details and methods of how to achieve the transition to majority rule. The African Presidents and South Africa’s Prime Minister Vorster were needed to approve the plans to build a stable foundation for the possible negotiations. The last piece in the puzzle was getting Rhodesia’s Prime Minister Ian Smith to agree to the transition. Everything the United States and Kissinger had been working hard to achieve hinged on Smith giving his speech on the 24th of September. A failure to do so could lead to a diplomatic crisis and possibly force the United States to act on their threats and enforce sanctions on South Africa.

Smith delivered the speech⁷² as promised on the 24th of September in Salisbury, the capital of Rhodesia. In the speech Smith stated how the “Western nations”, especially Kissinger and the British Government, were pressuring Rhodesia to transition to majority rule. Smith said Kissinger shared his concerns of possible “Communist penetration” and the speech had strong anti-communist rhetoric and referred to the African nationalists fighting the Rhodesian government as terrorists. Smith also mentioned the financial guarantee packages that had been a

⁷⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, 23.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 579.

⁷¹ Memorandum of Conversation, 23.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 580–584.S

⁷² The speech can be found in Telegram From the Embassy in South Africa to Secretary of State Kissinger en Route to Washington, 24.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa*, 588–593.

controversial issue especially for the Frontline Presidents.⁷³ Smith did not mention that the western powers wanted him to step down and instead he stated:

*For myself, I hope to share the privilege of continuing to play a part in helping to guide the destiny of Rhodesia. I remain dedicated to the ideal of doing all I can to ensure that Rhodesia remains a country in which all of us, of whatever race or colour, can live and work and prosper together in peace, harmony and stability.*⁷⁴

The overall tone in the speech was defiant and painted the picture that the Rhodesian government had been driven to a corner concerning the transition to majority rule.

On the 24th of September President Ford sent a message to Prime Minister Callaghan congratulating him and Kissinger in their efforts concerning Rhodesia. Ford emphasized the importance of forming the interim government as fast as possible. He also promised the full support of the United States to Great Britain during the negotiations and in the aftermath, both diplomatic and economic. Ford also praised the collaboration of the two countries in their attempts of finding a solution to the problem in Rhodesia.⁷⁵

On the 25th of September Kissinger sent a telegram to President Kaunda regarding Smith's speech. Kissinger wished to clarify certain details of the speech, for instance that the language Smith used was meant for the shocked audience of Rhodesia and would not have been recommended by the United States. Smith had also mentioned the economic guarantees to the white minority in the speech and Kissinger emphasized that they are a matter of discussion and the African Presidents should not be concerned about them. The focus of the telegram was to stress how much work had been done to achieve Smith's speech and how negative reception of it could possibly give Smith a reason to back away from the process. Kissinger thanked Kaunda and the other Presidents and said that their role would only grow once the negotiations start in

⁷³ Telegram From the Embassy in South Africa to Secretary of State Kissinger en Route to Washington, 24.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 588–592.

⁷⁴ Telegram From the Embassy in South Africa to Secretary of State Kissinger en Route to Washington, 24.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 592.

⁷⁵ Message From President Ford to British Prime Minister Callaghan, 24.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 594.

supporting the African Nationalists of Rhodesia.⁷⁶ Kaunda responded on the 27th thanking Kissinger of his message and clarification of several troubling points in the speech. Kaunda thanked Kissinger for his work on the matter and vowed that he and the other African Presidents want to solve the Rhodesian issue. Kaunda stated that Great Britain, definitely not Ian Smith, should organize the conference to create the transitional government and asked the United States to pressure the British to do it as quickly as possible. Kaunda was worried that Smith would back away but was hopeful that the transition to majority rule could happen successfully.⁷⁷

On the 30th of September Kissinger received a letter from Ian Smith which he had also sent to Prime Ministers Vorster and Callaghan explaining the reactions to his speech in Rhodesia. Smith wrote that he had informed in the speech that the speech had been forced upon him by the Western states as was the whole concept of transition to majority rule. Smith warned of the threat of a communist takeover in the case of transition and named Mugabe and Mozambique's President Machel as possible perpetrators of the coup. Smith said that although shocked, the initial reactions to the speech were mostly positive and understanding. He said the mood had however changed during the week due to statements released by the African Nationalists and Presidents. Smith said he is doing his best to sell the transition to his people and stressed how crucial it is to quickly win back the trust of white Rhodesians.⁷⁸ On the 1st of October Kissinger replied to Smith's letter through the South African embassy of the United States. Kissinger denied forcing the announcement and reminded Smith what they had discussed in Pretoria of how the terms Smith had been presented were likely a lot better than the terms he could get later on. Kissinger shared some of the concern of a communist takeover and emphasized that placing a moderate interim government as quickly as possible would be the best way to avoid it. Kissinger

⁷⁶ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Zambia, 25.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 595–596.

⁷⁷ Telegram From the Embassy in Zambia to the Department of State, 27.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 597–599.

⁷⁸ Telegram From the Embassy in South Africa to the Department of State, 30.9.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 599–602.

thanked Smith of his steadfastness and said he would send two of his assistants to Salisbury to discuss the United States viewpoints of the settlement.⁷⁹

As stated earlier, the main interest of the United States towards Rhodesia in 1976 was to achieve the transition to majority rule. Secretary of State Kissinger led the efforts with a series of meetings and telegrams during the spring, summer and fall of 1976 in cooperation with the British. The goal was to get the Rhodesian government and the African Nationalists to attend a conference where they would negotiate the formation of an interim government for the transition period towards majority rule. The goal of the United States was to start a diplomatic process and end the fighting and although the United States and Kissinger were heavily invested in the process of achieving majority rule in Rhodesia, they would not take part in the actual negotiations due to Cold War realities. The United States urged Great Britain to call up the conference and take lead since Rhodesia was originally Great Britain's problem and despite the unrecognized UDI it was part of Great Britain's Southern Rhodesia. Although the United States and Great Britain shared the goal of transition to majority rule they had different views of some of the details.

⁷⁹ Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in South Africa, 1.10.1976. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) 1969-1976, VOL XXVIII Southern Africa, 602-604.*

Conclusions

This study focused on examining the foreign political interests and actions of the United States regarding Rhodesia in 1976. The first chapter explained how the main interest of the United States was to avoid confrontation with the Soviet Union and Cuba in the form of a proxy war. The United States chose to solve the situation by creating a diplomatic solution for the problem in cooperation with the United Kingdom and Southern African countries, which was the main focus of the second chapter of this study. The concrete objective in solving the issue was to get all the parties involved to attend a conference where a transitional government would be created. Although the United States promoted the transition they would not take part in the actual negotiations and merely help bring all the sides to the table. This study focused on the motives and actions of the United States and used sources that enabled answering the questions. This thesis is not and does not attempt to be a complete narrative of the events but instead a narrowed down study that focuses only on the particular questions.

The main source used in this study gave a good perspective to the events in the eyes of United States policymakers. The findings of this study are in line with earlier studies although Andrew DeRoche's *Black, White and Chrome: the United States and Zimbabwe, 1953 to 1998* and Gerald Horne's *From the Barrel of a gun: the United States and the War against Zimbabwe 1965 -1980* were not available for use in this study. Comparing the findings to the arguments of the two books would have given more perspective concerning the true value of the findings in this study and the sources used. Further research of the subject is needed with the use of additional sources such as memoirs of the key figures involved and possibly British foreign political documents to broaden the view beyond solely the United States. Also the link between the diplomatic efforts of Kissinger in 1976 and the eventual transition to majority rule in 1979 could be a possible subject of research with the next FRUS series being published in the summer of 2016.

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