

# **SOUTH AFRICA AND THE COMMONWEALTH**

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At a press conference in the United States in December, 1970, and as reported by the B.B.C., Prime Minister Heath said: "The Commonwealth has always existed and worked on the basis that members respect each other's interests". Tanzania certainly has no quarrel with that description of one aspect of the Commonwealth. It implies a mutual responsibility between Commonwealth members, as well as the complete national sovereignty of every individual member to pursue his own country's interests. In other words, it is a recognition that, while every Commonwealth member has complete freedom to make its own decisions, each nation has also, by its membership, accepted an obligation to try to the best of its ability to pursue its own interests and needs in such a manner that its actions will not adversely affect the basic interests of other members.

This combination of complete freedom and inter-responsibility is an important and fundamental part of Commonwealth membership. There is one other. By the composition of the Commonwealth, one basic principle is implicitly accepted by every member. If we are not opposed to racialism, we have no business sitting down together in an association which consists of representatives of all the racial groups in the world.

The Commonwealth is based on the equality of all its members, despite our great inequality in wealth, in power, and in experience. Yet it remains true that, for historical reasons, the United Kingdom has, up to this time, a very special position in the Commonwealth. Its Queen is the Head of the Commonwealth. Economically and politically it is the most powerful member—the only one with Permanent Membership of the Security Council. And all other Commonwealth members were at one time governed by the United Kingdom; many of us have yet to celebrate a decade of independent existence. We are all equal members, all bound to consider the interests of others when making our own decisions; but we have reason to expect that the most

~~powerful among us, whose actions are most likely to affect other members, will not make the least effort to harmonise her interests with those of her Commonwealth partners.~~

It is in this context that the British proposal to sell arms to South Africa has to be considered.

### South Africa and African Commonwealth Countries:

The South African Government is a minority government elected by, and supported by, that group of its citizens who are defined, by South Africa, as white. The other four-fifths of its citizens are excluded from political and economic power. They suffer daily degradation, humiliation and discrimination in every sphere of life. They suffer these things not because of what they have done, or even what they believe, but simply for what they are. They suffer for being Africans, Indians or Coloureds, as defined by South Africa.

There is nothing accidental about the sufferings and the degradation of the non-white peoples of South Africa. They suffer because the South African Government, and the white people who elected that Government, are committed to racialism. White supremacy is to them a doctrine of faith—an ideology. The mass removals of non-white peoples from one part of the country to another; job reservation, which excludes non-whites from any skilled or semi-skilled jobs; "Influx Control", which breaks up families of non-whites; the Group Areas Act; the Pass System; the allocation to the 70 per cent of the population who are Africans of 13·7 per cent of the land (with no land at all allocated to the two million Coloureds or the 600,000 Indians); all these things add up to a tyranny unequalled elsewhere in the world. And it is a tyranny based entirely on race, which is maintained by deliberate racial legislation combined with ruthless administration, and enforced by a Secret Service and a Police Force of a viciousness which has not been equalled since the days of Nazi Germany.

All this means that the South African regime is at war with the majority of its own people—with something like 83 per cent of them. And this 83 per cent have no choice in the matter at all. They cannot join the ruling group even

~~if they are themselves racialists; they are forever Africans. Coloureds or Indians, and therefore, according to the South African regime, they are forever inferior and subject to the decisions of their white masters.~~

It is for this reason that the nations of Africa, in particular, are committed to absolute hostility to the South African regime. Even though we are living in free states ourselves, we cannot acquiesce in a system which denies our humanity, because it denies the humanity of our brothers on grounds of characteristics which we share. We are determined that Prime Minister Vorster and his supporters should be put in the dock of world opinion, and that they shall be condemned.

We make no apology for the fact that we want to see the present regime of South Africa overthrown. We want to see South Africa governed on the principles of humanity, with the equality of every citizen recognized regardless of his race or colour. In other words, we want to see the apartheid policy of South Africa replaced by a system which accepts the principle of human equality and which is working for the implementation of that principle. If anyone fails to understand the depths of Africa's feelings on this matter, then they do not understand apartheid, or they do not understand the reaction of people who have suffered from racial discrimination. It is, in fact, impossible for Africa to understand how anyone who really opposes racialism can fail to share Africa's hostility to the South African regime, even if they are not prepared to do anything against that regime.

For in reality South Africa is only a peculiarly African problem in the sense that it exists in the continent of Africa. It is true that the majority of the victims of apartheid are Africans; but there are also 600,000 South Africans of Indian descent, a few hundred South Africans of Chinese descent, and approximately 2 million people of mixed African, Indian and European descent. And on the other side, those imposing apartheid are Europeans who claim that their actions are in defence of a "European Christian civilization" and the whiteness they share with the white people of Europe and America. Thus, all members

of the Commonwealth could be expected to feel equally ~~concerned about the evils of South African apartheid~~, because the humanity of all Commonwealth citizens is being questioned by the policy.

But it is not really enough to say that. For different members of the Commonwealth have different strengths, both in relation to each other and in relation to South Africa. African Commonwealth members—even taken together—are very weak compared with South African economic and military strength, and therefore compared with her international influence. Similarly, the economic, military and political strength of the African Commonwealth countries is minuscule in comparison with that of the old and white members of the Commonwealth, each of which is separately on a par with, or stronger than, South Africa. If, therefore, the problem of racial tyranny and the propagation of racialism by South Africa is of concern to us all, then it is not unreasonable to expect more action from the white Commonwealth members in helping to defeat this evil, than the non-white members are capable of mounting.

Britain, in particular, would seem to have a special responsibility in this matter. For although it would be absurd to blame the present-day British leaders for the actions of British Governments at the beginning of the twentieth century, it would be equally absurd for us not to recognize the lessons and the implications of the history of those years. In the first decade of this century, following wars between Britain and the Boers of South Africa, British Governments put all their energies into establishing good relations between the Boers on the one hand, and Britain together with South Africans of British descent on the other. In their exclusive concentration on that aspect of the problem, the interests of the African peoples were left to the protection of entrenched constitutional clauses, and the anticipated influence of the more "liberal" Cape Province. The result we all know; it is this result we are dealing with now. This is not the fault of anyone at our Conference—it is doubtful whether any of us were even born at that time! But it does mean that we all, and Britain especially, have a responsibility to see that similar mistakes are not made again. This has been the back-

ground, and the lesson, which has caused Africa's continued pleading with Britain not to acquiesce in independence for Rhodesia except on the basis of majority rule. It is a further reason why one would expect Britain to avoid any action which could strengthen still more the South African regime which has developed out of that error. In fact, one would expect Britain to be helping to end the harm which was, perhaps inadvertently, done then—not because of any personal guilt about that past (which would be stupid) but simply in the spirit of putting right things which had gone badly wrong.

We in Tanzania do, of course, understand that Britain and some other members of the Commonwealth may not have the same order of foreign policy priorities as we do. Every government thinks first of the security of its own citizens and its own homeland. But we do expect that they will have South Africa's racialism on their list of priorities even if it is not at the top. For Tanzania, however, which borders a white-dominated state, opposition to racialism is, and must be, the very top priority of our foreign policy—and South Africa is the leading racist state. Therefore, both because Commonwealth membership implies an endeavour to respect other members' interests, and because we believe that all Commonwealth nations are involved in this problem, we do feel that we have a right to ask that other Commonwealth countries should at least not make the African people's position relative to the South African regime worse than it already is. Only if their own very existence is under immediate and obvious threat would it be possible for us to understand how another member could think that an action which strengthens South Africa is compatible with their continued Commonwealth membership.

This attitude applies, of course, to arms supplies. For the selling of arms is something which a country does only when it wants to support and strengthen the regime or the group to whom the sale is made. Whatever restrictions or limits are placed on that sale, the sale of any arms is a declaration of support—an implied alliance of a kind. You can trade with people you dislike; you can have diplomatic relations with governments you disapprove of; you can

sit in conference with those nations whose policies you ~~abhor. But you do not sell arms without saying in effect:~~ "In the light of the receiving country's known policies, friends, and enemies, we anticipate that, in the last resort, we will be on their side in the case of any conflict. We shall want them to defeat their enemies."

#### **Britain's need for the Simonstown Base:**

The British Government has said that it is considering the sale of arms because it needs the Simonstown Base for the defence of the Cape sea route. It says, further, that South Africa has the same interest in the Cape sea route and that, if Britain does not agree to sell arms, the South Africans may renounce the Agreement under which Britain can use the Simonstown Base.

Britain's need for Simonstown is a matter which only Britain can determine, because only Britain knows her own defence secrets. The fact that it is reported that no British ships are stationed in Simonstown now, and that her contribution to the defence of the Cape route at present consists of 3 Naval Officers and 5 Ratings, is perhaps irrelevant to the fact that, under the Agreement, the Simonstown Base would be available to Britain in time of war. It does, however, suggest to the uninitiated that Britain's need at this time is not extreme. It is also difficult for the non-military mind to imagine that, if Britain was involved in a war with the Soviet Union, South Africa would side with the Soviet Union, or even fail to give Britain and her allies any facilities she needed to fight the Soviet Union effectively.

There are, however, other aspects to the Simonstown Agreement. First, they were negotiated in 1955—that is, before any African Commonwealth country was an independent state. Among the African members of the Commonwealth, Ghana obtained independence in 1957, Nigeria in 1960, Tanzania in 1961, and the others still later. In 1955, none of these developments was expected to happen so quickly. The Simonstown Agreement therefore refers to British and South African co-operation in the defence of Africa; it was also thought to have some relationship to Britain's Far Eastern colonies. But Britain is no longer responsible for the defence of Africa. And South Africa is the enemy of the rest of Africa, and of humanity in general.

~~Even leaving aside these considerations, the fact is that, under the Agreement, Britain's obligation to supply, and South Africa's obligation to purchase from Britain, certain naval equipment, expired in 1963. From 1964 up to 1970, South Africa has acquiesced in the continuation of the Simonstown Agreement despite the fact that Britain joined in the arms embargo called for by the United Nations in 1963.~~

#### **Continuity of Policy:**

The British Government has further argued that the supply of arms to South Africa now would not mark a major change in policy, but is merely a logical extension of practices about which African states have made no previous complaint. It is said that, although Britain undertook, in 1964, to ban the sale of arms to South Africa, she has in fact continued to sell spare parts, and has had military manoeuvres with South Africa, in accordance with the Simonstown Agreements, throughout the period since 1955. It is said that if Africa did not, and does not, object to this, it is illogical to object to the sale of more naval weapons, and weapons intended by Britain to be used in defence of the sea routes.

The truth is, of course, that Africa has not liked these practices, and does not like them now. But we are very well aware of the problems of inheritance. African states themselves inherited many Agreements which they have since regretted but not felt able to renounce. Indeed, many African governments have themselves entered into Agreements which change of circumstances, or greater knowledge, has caused them to regret. It would therefore be unrealistic for us to complain, in 1970 or 1971, about Britain fulfilling the minimum of engagements with South Africa which she undertook in 1955. What we do expect, however, is that a government inheriting obligations which are contrary to its interests in changed circumstances, will do the minimum it is obliged to do, and will endeavour always to lift these obligations from its back.

And circumstances have changed. Africa is a different place now from what it was in 1955. South Africa has left the Commonwealth, and twelve free African states have joined it. During the same period the South African

~~Government has intensified its attacks on the interests of the majority of its citizens, and has improved its capability for effective oppression of its non-white citizens.~~

There is also the developing situation as regards Namibia. In 1966 the General Assembly Resolution ended South Africa's right to administer that country, and established instead an eleven-nation council which has the task of transferring the administration to an independent Namibian government. Until now no concrete action has been taken to implement that Resolution, but this is not to say that it never will be taken. The Resolution certainly creates a different situation in this United Nations Trusteeship Territory from that which existed in 1955. Further, in July last year the Security Council (with Britain abstaining) passed a Resolution calling again upon all members to desist from the sale of arms or spare parts to South Africa. Canada has, since this Resolution, stopped the supply of spare parts, having previously stopped the sale of new arms.

On top of all this is the Rhodesian situation. Rhodesia is in rebellion against Britain; its administration is being carried on by an illegal regime. Britain has asked for, and received, United Nations' support for economic sanctions against Rhodesia. But the Rhodesian regime has been able to withstand the effect of those sanctions, and maintain its rebellion, because of the support which it receives from its two white-dominated neighbours—Portugal and South Africa. Further, the South African Government has its armed forces operating in Rhodesia, despite both formal and public protests by the British Government. Is it not ironic that, after this deliberate South African action against Britain and British interests, the British Government should now be considering selling arms to South Africa? One would have expected that the new Rhodesian situation by itself would have been sufficient for the British Government to view South Africa with the kind of suspicion which is incompatible with anything except the most formal of diplomatic relations.

In other words, the point about this current British proposal is that Britain is proposing to make a new commitment in new circumstances. It is ignoring all the changes

which have taken place since 1955. It is ignoring the fact that its supply commitments of 1955 have been fulfilled; it is even ignoring the fact that, against its declared wishes, South African armed forces are now operating in a British colony.

Thus, Britain is saying that it still supports South Africa despite everything which has happened in South Africa and in Rhodesia since 1955. It is supporting it despite the failure of South Africa to make any response whatsoever to any of the representations which have been made by the British Government in opposition to apartheid and inhumanity, and it is still supporting it despite the fact that a large number of its Commonwealth partners have, as their first priority in international affairs, a commitment to the opposition against South Africa's racial doctrine.

The British Government has argued that, because it is only proposing to sell naval weapons, and weapons designed to be used in relation to naval warfare, the interests of the Africans and of Africa will not be affected by this sale. There are three points to be made in this connection. First, it is impossible to ensure that any particular weapon will not be used for a purpose different from that for which it was designed. Even submarines can be used to control the movement of freedom fighters along a coast, or to land spies or saboteurs in territory occupied by those you are fighting against. It is absolutely impossible for Britain to ensure that any weapons she supplies will not be used in South Africa's struggle against the freedom fighters, who are now operating in Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola and Namibia, and who will one day operate in South Africa itself.

Secondly, ships can be used to intercept other ships. South African naval vessels could easily be used to intercept shipping destined for East African ports on the plea that these ships were, or may be, carrying supplies for the freedom fighters of Southern Africa. If this happens, it is still possible to say that Britain's arms supply is irrelevant to the conflict between Africa and the South African regime?

And thirdly, South Africa is the most heavily armed nation in the African continent. As we have seen, it could obtain arms from other countries. It is anxious to obtain

British arms because it wants to commit Britain exclusively to its support. It is for this same reason that African Commonwealth members are so concerned that Britain should not supply arms to South Africa. Even though we have so far failed to prevent South Africa getting supplies from other countries, like France, we do not expect that a country officially committed to non-racialism, as Britain is both by its membership of the Commonwealth and by the declarations of successive Prime Ministers, will give this kind of moral support to racialism incarnate.

### Defence Needs:

Britain has, however, explained that she is considering this proposal because she is worried about her defence interests in the Indian Ocean. She has pointed to the existence of increasing numbers of Soviet naval ships, and clearly feels worried by the effect of this Soviet presence. The worry has been expressed in both military and political terms; that is to say, it has been suggested that the Soviet Union may interfere with British shipping and, alternatively, that the presence of Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean will incline those nations which border the Indian Ocean to be more receptive to political pressure from the Soviet Union just because of the presence of these ships.

The first question which African states are forced to ask is how worried is Britain by this threat? Is it worried enough to make any defence efforts of its own? Or just worried enough to disregard the interests of her African Commonwealth partners? The second—and more important—question is what alternatives has Britain considered as a way of dealing with this anticipated threat? Has she considered alternative dispositions of her own naval forces? Has she discussed this problem with her allies outside the context of South African sales? Has she asked the Commonwealth to discuss the problem which she sees, in any other way than in the context of the sale of arms to South Africa?

Tanzania, for example, is a non-aligned state. But we recognize that Britain and many other Commonwealth partners are members of different alliances. We accept

as a fact that many of our Commonwealth partners feel threatened by the Soviet Union, or even by China. Our failure to share these feelings in relation to ourselves does not mean that we are incapable of understanding them or the policies which other Commonwealth members have adopted. All that we are asking is that, in planning to counter moves by nations they fear, Commonwealth members should avoid strengthening a nation which is hostile to free Africa. For we in Tanzania are the enemies of the present regime in South Africa; and we fear South Africa because of our opposition to the regime in power there.

The threat we feel cannot be removed by assurances to us, whether given directly by South Africa, or by Britain about arms she is supplying to South Africa. For the basic quarrel which South Africa is involved in is a quarrel with her own people and with humanity; free African states are involved because of the African-ness we share with South African citizens. A non-aggression pact between South Africa and the free African states is therefore nonsense, or it is a betrayal. We independent states could be sure that South Africa would not attack us without a non-aggression pact. All that we have to do is acquiesce in her racialism and in the subordinate position that Government has allocated to black and brown people. For us to sign a non-aggression pact would, in fact, be tantamount to doing just these things.

### Let us Combine our Interests:

Britain's reason for considering a proposal which would strengthen South Africa is said to be because of her desire to prevent the Soviet Union from extending its influence in the Indian Ocean area. But two African states border the Indian Ocean, and four border the Eastern Atlantic—another part of the Cape route. Some at least of these determine their foreign policy more by their opposition to South Africa than by any other single factor; to all this is a very important element. If, then, those we have regarded as friends move from a position of comparative neutrality on this issue to a positive act in support of South Africa, we shall be forced to look again at all our international rela-

tions. For compromise on the South African issue we ~~cannot do. Nor can we do nothing in response to actions~~ which further strengthen South Africa in its opposition to us.

Surely the British Government would be best serving its own interests if it tries to combine British interests with those of free Africa, and of those members of the Commonwealth who share our bitter hostility to racialism and colonialism? We do not believe it would be so difficult as all that. Commonwealth members normally start from a position of basic sympathy with each other and a desire to understand each other's problems, even if we cannot come to the same conclusion about the action which is necessary. Because of our past history, and because of our present circumstances, the African states want a secure and confident Britain, and a Britain which realises, as we do, the role which she can play in the modern world. All that we ask is that she should not pursue her legitimate interests at the expense of ours.

In brief, the problem amounts to this. Britain believes that she has defence problems in the Indian Ocean. Africa lives in bitter opposition and hostility to South Africa. Britain and Africa are both members of the Commonwealth of Nations, which is based, as Mr. Heath said, on the principles of respect for each other's interests. The problem before us, therefore, is that of reconciling two interests which overlap. We in Africa believe that they can be reconciled, that Africa can accept Britain's defence needs if Britain accepts Africa's unalterable hostility to South Africa:

But if Britain is not willing to reconcile these two interests, and if supplying arms to South Africa means more to her than the interests of her Commonwealth partners, then responsibility for damage to the Commonwealth and for African hostility towards Britain will be clear. It will belong to the British Government. We all of us live in the world. We react to the actions of others as they react to ours. As Mr. Heath said in a different context, one action by one country can "easily trigger off a chain reaction".

~~And in this case there can be no question of acting in ignorance of the importance with which other members of the Commonwealth regard this proposal.~~

But I do not believe that there has to be any allocation of responsibility for a chain of events which would damage many, if not all, of us. We can reconcile our interests if both sides wish to do so. And we in Tanzania do wish to do so. I am pleading for friendship with Britain because we in Tanzania value it. I am pleading for the Commonwealth because we believe in it and we need it. But we cannot, and we will not, abate our opposition to racialism for any purpose in the world. We have learned this from Britain too—that, even if you are alone, you do not give up your opposition to tyranny or our fight against it. And I do not want to believe that Britain is saying that *tyranny* is not tyranny when the victims are black or brown.

Africa and other active non-racialists have achieved some success in getting the world to understand the evil of apartheid and the need for international pressure against the South African regime. The United Nations support for an arms embargo is part of that success, and the incompleteness of that embargo in practice is a measure of the work which still has to be done. A reversal of British policy on the arms embargo would, however, mean more than a setback, for Britain is a major power whose action have international repercussions: Other developed nations would undoubtedly find that they, too, had a national interest in breaking the embargo. Then, instead of Africa and non-racialists elsewhere just having France to deal with, we should find that the arms embargo is completely non-existent. We should have to start all over again. But the time scale will not allow that; the cold war divisions of the world would get an irreversible hold on the African continent long before such an international agreement could be obtained for the second time. The British Government may not intend that what it calls its "limited arms supply" should have the effect of smashing the embargo, and of introducing a new front to the cold war she is engaged in, but that will be the inevitable result of their action.



But, let me repeat something which has been said many times. There is no question about Britain's right to decide to sell arms to South Africa. No-one questions her right. The decision is hers. No-one does, or ever has, doubted that. The purpose of this paper, and of all Tanzania's previous communications on this subject, is to ask her to look for other means of solving the problem she feels faced with. We are not asking the British Government to ignore Britain's interests. We are asking that she should try to solve her problems in the context of her opposition to racialism. And we are saying that we believe this can be done; that we are anxious to do what we can to help within the context of our own basic principles.

Let the Commonwealth members sit together and work out our different problems without considering the needs or desires of this non-member—South Africa—whose basic doctrine of faith, and every action, is a denial of everything the Commonwealth stands for. We can do it if we want.

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