

REMARKS OF SENATOR TSONGAS

June, 30, 1980

*Dennis
F41
Chris*

BETRAYAL OF HOPE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Mr. President, on the far tip of the African continent, a notorious country is in the throes of change. The world watches anxiously as the most explosive racial crisis in the world simmers and steams. In South Africa, Mr. President, history is on the march -- double time. But who is in command? And to where will it all lead?

Mr. President, in South Africa, it is not easy to sort out the fundamental from the superficial, the policy from the posture, the commitment from the ploy. On the brink of disaster, South Africa and its people send forth contradictory signals and inconsistent impressions. I went there six months ago to see for myself where that tragically divided society was headed.

What I saw was hopeful and encouraging. I spoke with representatives of nearly all segments of South African society. Their judgment was consistent. They said that Prime Minister Botha represented the first real hope for change in 30 years. I was impressed with what I heard. I told the South African press that I was prepared to give the Prime Minister the benefit of the doubt. I promised to suspend my university divestiture campaign for six months. In six months, the Prime Minister would have enough time to demonstrate in what direction his policy was headed. I was hopeful then. Finally, perhaps South Africa would move toward racial reconciliation and the dismantling of apartheid by force of reason, not by force of arms.

I selected three issues to measure the progress of Prime Minister Botha's government over the six month time period. Because so many dissidents in South Africa told me that they could not obtain passports, I decided to monitor the government's policy on passport revocation and denial. A Foreign Ministry spokesman told me that the government does not oppose a U.N. settlement in Namibia. Progress on that issue became my second measure of South Africa's intentions. Finally, there was widespread expectation that the South African Parliament would pass legislation pulling down some of the minor pillars of apartheid, such as the Immorality Act and the Mixed Marriages Act. Legislative action along these lines was my third measure.

Six months later, I am now in a position to report my findings to the Senate. The facts speak for themselves.

Passports - As part of a general clampdown on critics and dissidents, the government has withheld and revoked passports. The most notable case is Bishop Desmond Tutu, whose passport was revoked in March. Bannings and detentions without trial have increased dramatically this year.

Namibia - After stalling for several months, South Africa replied to the latest U.N. proposal in ambiguous terms. Then the South African military launched a series of air strikes and ground assaults into Angola. The severity and duration of these attacks are unprecedented. They have dashed hopes for a peaceful settlement in Namibia.

Legislation - The Parliament has enacted no anti-apartheid legislation whatsoever. New restrictions on the press, however, have become law.

For reasons only Prime Minister Botha can explain, the government retreated from last year's rhetoric and resumed a hard line. To say that the government betrayed its promises is an understatement. The government has set out on a path of polarization and destruction. And South Africans will suffer.

At a time of rising expectations among blacks, coloureds, and Asians, the government has chosen to block change. Accommodations and negotiations are no longer discussed. Magnus Malan, the commander of South Africa's military forces, urges a strategy of "total war" against the "communist onslaught". Military spending is up.

At the same time, the government places an eight-page ad in Time Magazine, urging Americans to invest in South Africa. A government ad in the Economist tells us that South Africa is a reliable source of gold and strategic minerals. We are asked to remember the importance of the Cape Route.

South Africa portrays itself as an island of prosperity and stability in a turbulent world. While the government entrenches discrimination and minority rule, we are asked to play along -- as if that country was a placid democracy.

That sort of public relations flim-flam would be amusing if the stakes weren't so high, if the crisis wasn't so acute. South Africa is convulsed by racial turmoil. In the past few months.

the three engines of discontent -- labor unrest, civil protest, and revolutionary violence -- have reached new plateaus of activity.

I need not inform my colleagues in great detail about events which have made headline news here. On the labor front, a rash of strikes has broken a period of industrial peace. Starting with the Ford plant in Port Elizabeth and spreading to other industrial centers, labor disputes have rocked South Africa's economy since last December.

Civil protest is so extensive, it is difficult to summarize: Non-white student boycotts of classes in which over 30 mixed-race students were killed by police; a march by prominent clerics in protest of government policies; rallies and meetings to commemorate those who died in the Soweto uprising in 1976. All these protests met harsh and at times brutal treatment from the South African police.

Lastly, the ominous stirrings of a viable revolutionary movement are plainly visible. South Africa is not an easy target for rebel tactics, but in the last few months, black guerillas have attacked police stations, occupied a bank in the capital city, and attacked two strategic industrial sites -- the Sasol coal-to-oil conversion plants. At last report, none of the guerillas had been captured.

I have stood here before and lectured my colleagues on the imminence of black unrest in South Africa. I have warned that South Africa is inherently unstable under present government policies. I have beseeched my colleagues to open their eyes to this serious threat to our security interests.

My colleagues may be listening, but the Administration clearly is not -- pallid words of concern were all the State Department could muster in response to the deaths of over 30 students at the hands of the police. A vote of abstention in the U.N. was our brave response to the invasion of Angola by South African troops.

I read this weekend that Secretary of State Ed Muskie is uncomfortable with Foggy Bottom clichés. I applaud his directness on the issue of Thailand's security. I would like to see him apply his considerable talent and candor to southern Africa. It is high time that our Africa policy spoke unambiguously on the subject of apartheid.

But let's face the cruel political facts. South Africa lobbies and propagandizes very effectively in the United States. Chaotic turbulence in the Middle East has left most Americans leery of disturbing existing regimes, no matter how deeply they offend our values and beliefs. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has cast nearly every foreign policy issue in East/West terms. The hostage crisis has put the country into an isolationist mood. So the political deck is stacked. Pretoria is the beneficiary of a political windfall. No one wants to hear that South Africa is edging toward the brink. So when a liberal stands up in the Senate and attacks apartheid, it is a lonely exercise.

But, I am here to tell my discerning colleagues, and I will tell them again and again, that the apartheid crisis is not going to disappear. It is going to get worse. It is going to involve the

U.S. directly because our interests are at stake. For some, the question is purely moral, and I can understand that. But for the U.S. Senate, there can be no flinching from the cold calculation of our security interests.

In the case of South Africa, we have not done that. Instead, we have indulged ourselves with a lot of wishful thinking. We all acknowledge that apartheid is an abhorrent political doctrine, but all too many of us believe that gradual, evolutionary change will alter the system painlessly and quietly. The slick assurances of South African spokesmen tell us not to worry. They urge us to invest in their country. They say that prosperity will break down apartheid. Such platitudes sound good on the surface, but 20 years of unprecedented economic growth in South Africa went hand-in-hand with harsher race laws. The public relations man says one thing, the facts say quite another.

All of this wouldn't matter much if South Africa's people accepted their lot. But they don't. Look at the last few months. Who is responsible for the unrest?

The wretched victims of South Africa's resettlement policies, crowded in the remote bantustans? NO. The impoverished blacks working on white-owned farms? NO. The migrant workers separated from their families and living in barracks? NO. The urban blacks corralled in townships with rife unemployment? NO. None of those groups are responsible for the present unrest in South Africa. They are at the bottom of the heap -- they endure the full weight of apartheid's burden. But they have been silent this year.

Then who is it? Who are these malcontents losing their jobs, their homes, their lives? They are, for one, the Coloureds, those who by virtue of their mixed race heritage are just once removed from white society and who are first in line for what's left. They are in the second case, the elite black labor force who work in the modern auto factories and other industrial plants where working conditions are the best in the country for non-whites. They are, thirdly, black and coloured clerics, established men of the church, who are in the forefront of civil protest. These are not the most heavily oppressed, these are the most-favored-rebels, apartheid's select few who scratch the most from that rigid system.

What does this mean? If the black and coloured elite are risking all they have gained to confront the apartheid regime, what is happening at the bottom of the pyramid? What stage of desperation have the masses of black people reached as government promises turned to dust? If the elites are outraged, what is the common man thinking? How long will police repression keep him in line?

Four years ago, the Soweto uprising gave us an idea of black frustration and anger. Those feelings have since filtered up. Now there are practically no moderates left in the system. There are more and more rebels and fewer conciliators. This is called political polarization, and it means big trouble for South Africa.

Unlike South Africa, America is the land of compromise. We negotiate our differences here. We don't have South Africa's problems or their approach. It is sometimes hard for us to understand why people of color have become so embittered in that country. Why not put ourselves in their situation?

Would we be content with no political rights of any kind?

Would we accept government control over where we travel and where we live?

Would we endure the humiliation of pervasive discrimination?

Would we be willing to work at only the lowest paid jobs in the economy?

Would we sit quietly while a small racial minority reaped the rewards of our country's mineral bonanza?

Would we put up with all of this when our neighbors in Zimbabwe had just triumphed over minority rule?

I think not. I think that most of my colleagues would have abandoned peaceful petitions and letters of protest long ago. They would be somewhere in the Soviet Union, I venture to say, learning how to handle a Kalashnikov.

I am convinced of that. Very few of us would swallow what apartheid dishes out. But, somehow we can't see Africans doing what we, in their shoes, would have done long ago. When we hear of guerillas being trained in East Germany and the Soviet Union, we are outraged by Soviet meddling. We blame the anger and unrest on

communist subversion, as if there was no real problem in South Africa, only outside agitation. That kind of tunnel vision will take us straight to a foreign policy disaster in South Africa.

As we fearfully reject the opponents of apartheid, the Soviets embrace them. As we search for communists, the Soviets court the nationalists. As we cuddle up to Pretoria, the Soviets champion majority rule.

Where will that logic take us, I ask? Where would it take you if you lived in Soweto?

We have a clear choice. We can play along with Pretoria or we can get tough.

I favor the latter. We should adopt a step-by-step program of political, social, and economic sanctions. If the South African government makes a measurable attempt to dismantle apartheid, we should reverse the process and dismantle our sanctions, step-by-step. We must remain flexible and ready to encourage any positive developments.

I will resume my active support of the university divestiture campaign. It is a moderate first step. I deeply hope that it is the last step I will have to take.

The goal is peaceful change. The means is outside pressure to encourage it. The alternative is a gathering storm of violence, political chaos, and economic collapse. Pretoria must move aggressively and creatively to accommodate the liberationist tide. If not, South Africa will be overwhelmed by it.