

**February 21, 1979**  
**Memorandum, Meeting on Rhodesian Situation at  
the Office of the Secretary of Foreign Affairs of  
South Africa**

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**Summary:**

Discussion centered around British support for Smith, Anglo-American involvement in the conflict, Cuban/Soviet involvement, and South Africa's stake in it all.

**Credits:**

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English

**Contents:**

Transcript - English

Brand Fourie: Referred to Mr Smith's (statement in Durban)... that he would retire from politics only when Rhodesia had achieved recognition and sanctions had been lifted by Britain and the United States. This would have an effect on the (forthcoming) elections...

Sir Anthony Duff: Was more concerned about the effect of Smith's continued presence both before and after the elections. If Smith was there progress would be precluded. Assuming that there were to be no lifting of sanctions and no recognition after the -election, deadlock would continue. The United Kingdom thought that it had been useful for Smith to remain, up to a point. That point had now been reached.

Fourie: Agreed...

Richard Moose: Another factor which has a strong bearing on the situation is the question of Cuban/Russian involvement. There is evidence accumulating of Soviet willingness to increase material support for the Patriotic Front and to help the Zambians, in the face of Rhodesian air attacks. There is also the related factor of the probable reaction of the Soviet Union and Cuba to the military situation. Mugabe yesterday in conversation referred to the possibility of outside intervention. He has two kinds of intervention in mind. Firstly, the United Kingdom and the United States mounting a rescue operation for whites and secondly South African intervention. The question arises how they would interpret South African involvement such as the provision of supplies, the transfer of equipment and joint operations. Such involvement might trigger larger involvement on the Soviet/Cuban side. The situation was close to the point that the Patriotic Front would reach a decision that there was no alternative to a military solution. This was a matter of grave concern. He could not believe that South Africa would fail to see the situation in the same light. South Africa would not want that sort of situation developing on the border, although he was not questioning South Africa's ability to handle such a situation. However, South Africa's diplomacy had been directed to avoiding just such a situation on its borders.

Fourie: Was indeed very aware of the many perils of the situation. However, one point should not be lost sight of; it would be very harmful to the image of the Patriotic Front if they had to admit that they could not do the job themselves. What they would like was to have more instructors and material support but it would be a disaster for them politically to have to introduce Soviet and Cuban fighting units. He was however puzzled by the reference to joint operations and would be glad of an explanation.

Moose: Understood that South African forces have operated joint patrols with Rhodesians in Mocambique and Zambia.

Duff: Agreed that there had been rumours of small units cooperating.

Fourie: There were always many rumours.... He would be glad to receive particulars about the alleged joint patrols.

Duff: Was not thinking so much in terms of South African involvement such as had been just discussed but in terms of the thinking of the Africans. He detected a change, particularly in the mind of Nyerere. Previously Nyerere had believed in Africans solving their own problems but now he seemed to be thinking of using Cubans for the defence of Mocambique, Tanzania and Zambia against Rhodesian attack. There was a gradual change in attitude discernable. Eventually the Africans may no longer consider it to be a disaster if the Cubans were to help them. The undesirable scenario he foresaw as a possibility was the creation of a climate receptive to Soviet and Cuban intervention; the departure of the whites; black civil war; the establishment of a Government subservient to the Soviet Union. What was giving rise to concern at present was the increasing evidence over the past two

months of changing attitudes in African politicians in Tanzania and Zambia and the stepped-up pattern of visits of Soviet military and political representatives.

Fourie: Did not dismiss that possibility. However, there was a difference in the procedure which we believe necessary to cope with the situation. The first step would be to get past the elections. Only then would it be realistically possible to counteract the deteriorating situation...

Duff:... He wished to stress... that the penultimate disaster would be South African involvement, even in the case of small units getting experience.

Fourie: There was a time when there had been a danger of South African involvement, i.e. when South African police were in Rhodesia. They had perhaps given the impression of bolstering Smith. They had however now been withdrawn.

Moose: The same impression would be created by the use of South African aircrew in aircraft or helicopters.

Fourie: Was not under the impression that Rhodesians were short of personnel of this nature.