

CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT: RONALD REAGAN'S PROBLEMATIC POLICY
OF APPEASEMENT WITH SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

During the 1980's, South Africa was one of the most isolated states on earth due to its system of apartheid. Despite a growing international movement to topple apartheid during this tumultuous period, President Ronald Reagan maintained a close alliance with the South African government that was showing no signs of undertaking serious reform. Reagan and his administration adopted the policy of "constructive engagement" with South Africa. The architect of the policy, Chester Crocker, articulated that the South African government would gradually end the system of apartheid and that any threat of economic sanctions would only embolden the government to continue with apartheid. As the anti-apartheid movement began to reverberate louder in the United States, the US Congress and business corporations were under increasing pressure to limit US interaction - economically and diplomatically - with the government of South Africa.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the debate surrounding the policy of constructive engagement and the dilemma the Reagan Administration had in justifying continued

acknowledgement of the apartheid government of South Africa during the mid 1980's. At issue is whether Reagan's engagement with South Africa was practical and ultimately helped end apartheid; or, was it counterproductive and was merely tacit approval of the South African government that extended the life of apartheid.

This thesis was a synthesis of secondary materials (books and articles) as well as selected government documents that have been written on U.S.-South Africa relations, especially on constructive engagement. The US-South Africa relationship is a story fraught with complexity, misgivings and suspicion. It is my hypothesis that Reagan's policy of constructive engagement damaged America's creditability with the citizens of South Africa, particularly the black majority. More importantly, the policy of constructive engagement extended the life of apartheid that only ended in 1990, that ultimately gave way to the multiracial Presidential election won by the African National Congress under Nelson Mandela in 1994.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

After twenty years of generally increasing official US government coolness toward South Africa and concomitant South African intransigence, the possibility may exist for a more positive and reciprocal relationship between the two countries based upon shared strategic concerns in Southern Africa, our recognition that the government of P W Botha represents a unique opportunity for domestic change, and willingness of the Reagan administration to deal realistically with South Africa.¹

-Chester Crocker

The diplomatic relationship between the United States and South Africa is a story fraught with complexity, mistrust and suspicion. At its core, the relationship between the two countries was a marriage of common interests and ideologies that grew deeper during the Cold War until the end of apartheid - the legal system of racial separation in South Africa. The United States viewed the debate over South Africa and its government's repressive apartheid regime through the scope of the Cold War and the containment of communism.² South Africa's racial policies were not so much

¹ Alan Pifer, *South Africa in the American Mind* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1981), 1.

² Ryan Irwin, "A Wind of Change? White Redoubt and the Postcolonial Moment 1960-1963," *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 5 (November, 2009): 901, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-7709.2009.00817> (accessed December 4, 2011).

deemed to be morally reprehensible as they were viewed as a nuisance in America's quest to stop the growing influence of communism in African countries.³ However, the driving force for change across the world to end the dreadful system of apartheid was the societal insistence everywhere that racism in South Africa should be met with a tougher US response.

By the end of the 1980s, South Africa was one of the most isolated states on earth due to its legal system of apartheid. Apartheid is remembered as one of the worst crimes against humanity of the 20th century. Televised evidence of the apartheid regime's brutality was streaming into American and European living rooms on a daily basis. The Prime Minister of South Africa at that time, P.W. Botha, imposed a state of emergency in July 1985, granting his government sweeping powers that effectively placed South Africa under martial law.⁴ Implemented in 1948 by The National Party government of South Africa (1948-1994), apartheid was the foremost reason why countries around the world began to impose sanctions on the government of South Africa. Although the United States joined the international community in 1986 in imposing economic and

³ Irwin, "A Wind of Change? White Redoubt and the Postcolonial Moment 1960-1963," 911.

⁴ Sasha Polakow-Suransky, *The Unspoken Alliance: Israel's Secret Relationship with Apartheid South Africa* (New York: Random House Books, 2010), 180.

diplomatic sanctions against South Africa, earlier United States interests, as previously mentioned, had been driven largely by the aim of reducing Soviet influence in southern Africa. Apartheid presented the United States government with something of a conundrum. To illustrate, the government in Pretoria presented itself as a bulwark against the spread of communism; it was located on the important Cape Sea route, it possessed reserves of rare minerals, and it played host to numerous US transnational corporations that found the South African market profitable.⁵

An assessment of U.S. administrations' reaction to apartheid beginning in 1948 to its demise revealed that while they all tepidly criticized the institution of apartheid, US Presidents stopped short of condemning the racist regime of Pretoria by enacting full-blown economic and diplomatic sanctions on the government of South Africa. Democratic and Republican officials alike repeatedly miscalculated the stability of white rule, the strength of black resistance and the significance of the former Soviet Union and Cuban involvement in the region, with equally damaging

⁵ Alex Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

consequences.⁶ The typical response from the different administrations to their critics for not supporting economic and diplomatic sanctions usually centered on the argument that such sanctions would hurt the very people that are deprived under the system of apartheid. Thomas Borstelmann postulated that, while U.S. officials recognized the dangers of apartheid and its disregard for basic human rights, Harry S. Truman's Administration (1945-1953) was unwilling to challenge South Africa because natural resources, such as uranium ore, were at the time vital to America's nuclear industry. Borstelmann also noted that South Africa's commitment to containment, participation in the Korean War, and the encouragement of U.S. trade solidified the Truman Administration's willingness to overlook apartheid.⁷

Hence, the United States maintained formal diplomatic relations with Pretoria throughout the apartheid era. In fact, by 1985, the United States was South Africa's second largest trading partner, its second largest foreign investor, and the

⁶ Michael Clough, "Southern Africa: Challenges and Choices," *Foreign Affairs* 66, no. 5 (Summer, 1988): 1068, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/43397/michael-clough/southern-africa-challenges-and-choices> (accessed September 14, 2011).

⁷ Thomas Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1993), 95.

source of one-third of its international credit.⁸ Furthermore, South Africa steadfastly supported the U.S. and other countries opposition to communism and sought to suppress the rising influence of communism in the neighboring countries of Angola, Mozambique and Namibia, as each nation emerged from colonial rule to independence.

Under the administration of Richard Nixon (1969-1974), a comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward Southern Africa called *National Security Study Memorandum 39* was produced, which will be discussed in the succeeding chapter. Under Jimmy Carter's Administration (1977-1981), the United States adopted a tougher line toward Pretoria, viewing African nationalism as a driving force in the region that was compatible with United States interest.⁹ Yet in spite of Carter's more aggressive approach toward South Africa, arguably more than any other President, it would be Ronald Reagan's Administration (1981-1989) that would change the course of the relationship between United States with South Africa.

To illustrate, in the 1980s, the anti-apartheid movements in the United States and Europe were gaining support for

⁸ John Parsons, "On Constructive Engagement in South Africa," *Tech*, November 5, 1985. <http://tech.mit.edu/V105/N47/parson.47o.html> (accessed September 8, 2011).

⁹ Rita Byrnes, *South Africa: A Country Study* (Washington, D.C.: GPO for the U.S. Library of Congress), <http://www.countrystudies.us/south-africa> (accessed September 9, 2011).

boycotts against South Africa and for the withdrawal of U.S. firms from South Africa. However, despite the growing homegrown and international movement to topple apartheid during this tumultuous period, President Ronald Reagan maintained a close alliance with the South African government that was showing no signs of serious reforms. In fact, throughout his Presidency, Reagan staunchly supported the apartheid government of South Africa. For example, in 1981, Reagan explained to the late Walter Cronkite, a CBS reporter, that he was loyal to the South African regime because it was "a country that has stood by us [United States] in every war we've ever fought, a country that, strategically, is essential to the free world in its production of minerals."¹⁰ The next day, President Botha responded: "It is good to know that the leader of the free world acknowledges and appreciates the strategic importance of South Africa. We welcome this greater understanding of and greater realism toward South Africa." Reagan gave public support to the South African government, portraying Prime Minister Botha as a moderate who was willing to start political

¹⁰ Y.G-M Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 247.

reforms and would stay on the side of the United States to help block the Soviet Union influence in Southern Africa.¹¹

However, it was that same country - South Africa - that kept a majority of its population voteless, imprisoned those who fought to end the racist institution of apartheid and denied the vast majority of its citizenry basic civil rights. Startlingly, it took six years into his presidency for Reagan to join others in the United States and the international community to formally repudiate South Africa. Specifically, up to 1986, when the United States government imposed economic sanctions on South Africa, the Reagan Administration steadfastly stood by its judgment that constructive change in South Africa was both Pretoria's declared aim that it was actually taking place.¹²

As the anti-apartheid movement began to reverberate louder in the United States, the U.S. Congress and business corporations were under increasing pressure to limit US interaction - economically and diplomatically - with the government of South Africa. The Reagan Administration came up with an alternative to economic and diplomatic sanctions and

¹¹ Justin Elliott, "Reagan's Embrace of Apartheid South Africa," *salon.com*, http://www.salon.com/news/politics/war_room/2011/02/05 (accessed September 8, 2011).

¹² John de St. Jorre, "South Africa: Is Change Coming?," *Foreign Affairs* (Fall, 1981): 112, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/35514/joh-de-st-jorre/south-africa-is-change-coming> (accessed September 14, 2011).

divestment from South Africa that had been demanded by the United Nations and the anti-apartheid movement. It adopted the policy of "constructive engagement" with the established government in Pretoria and denounced those within the African National Congress (ANC), the oldest and most popular South African opposition group against apartheid, as "terrorists", "thugs" and a group most active in guerrilla/sabotage operations.¹³ The key premise of the constructive engagement policy was that a "window of opportunity" had emerged in South Africa; and, a less volatile approach to South Africa would make them change their policy. The Reagan Administration put considerable faith in South Africa's National Party government, despite Pretoria itself being skeptical of constructive engagement.¹⁴

The architect of the policy, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, articulated that the South African government would gradually end the system of apartheid and that any threat of economic sanctions would only push the government to continue with apartheid. He further elaborated that the United States had an inherent and proper

¹³ Chester A. Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," *Foreign Affairs* (Winter, 1980/81): 335, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/34584/chester-a-crocker/south-africa-strategy-for-change> (accessed September 14, 2011).

¹⁴ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 122.

interest in purposeful change in South Africa toward a nonracial system; and the possible failure of such change was a threat to the United States values and interests.¹⁵ "Clearly, the fundamental goal," Crocker postulated in the 1980 *Foreign Affairs* article, was the emergence of a South African society "with which the United States can pursue its varied interests in a full and friendly relationship, without constant embarrassment or political damage."¹⁶

It should be noted that any study of the relationship between the United States and the Republic of South Africa during and post apartheid years must endeavor to assess the extent to which Ronald Reagan's policy of constructive engagement contributed to ending apartheid. This question is fundamental to understanding the relationship between the two countries in the present and perhaps, the future. Again one of the main arguments against sweeping sanctions against apartheid was that United States officials hoped to maintain the small degree of influence they may have had in pressing for political reforms in South Africa.

¹⁵ Chester Crocker, "Southern Africa: Eight Years Later," *Foreign Affairs* (Fall, 1989): 145, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/44900/chester-a-crocker/southern-africa-eight-years-later> (accessed September 14, 2011).

¹⁶ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 112.

Supporters of the engagement strategy and the realization that engagement, in the so-called 'constructive' verbiage, was a practical form of ending apartheid often manipulated the notion that Reagan's continued engagement with South Africa was realistic. This Reaganite worldview placed major emphasis on peaceful and orderly change since it perceived revolutionary social transformations as portent of the former Soviet gains.¹⁷ Reagan's policy of constructive engagement did evince much outrage against the underlying issues of apartheid; but rather encouraged the government of South Africa to continue with the morally reprehensible institution for other policy objectives. Although constructively engaging to change other government's policies is in general an accepted concept of political theory by the United States, there is a definite need to question the extent to which Reagan's policy of constructive engagement with South Africa during his administration only prolonged the institution of apartheid. The views of U.S. civil society (in general) and those of the Reagan Administration were diametrically opposed on what U.S foreign policy should have been toward apartheid South Africa. This disagreement was highlighted by the passage

¹⁷ Robert Fatton, "The Reagan Foreign Policy toward South Africa: The Ideology of the New Cold War," *African Studies Review* 27, no. 1 (March, 1984): 58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/523950> (accessed September 14, 2011).

of the Comprehensive *Anti-Apartheid Act* of 1986 by the U.S. Congress over the strenuous objections of the Reagan Administration - including the exercise of the presidential veto by Reagan, which could not be sustained.¹⁸

Against this historical background, this thesis will explore the debate surrounding the policy of constructive engagement and the dilemma the Reagan Administration had in justifying continued acknowledgement of the apartheid government of South Africa during the mid 1980's. Specifically, the administration chose to work quietly with the South African government, stressing common strategic interests, empathizing with white fears, and utilizing a unilateral rather than a multilateral approach to diplomatic negotiations.¹⁹ The research question is whether Reagan's engagement with South Africa was practical and ultimately helped end apartheid, or, alternatively was counterproductive, a mere tacit approval of the South African government that extended the life of apartheid. The United States and South Africa still face a complex relationship in the post-apartheid era but this relationship may well be a legacy of a history steeped in

¹⁸ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, xiv.

¹⁹ Pauline H. Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1989), 3.

misgivings and distrust based on Reagan's policy of constructive engagement. There is ample evidence to suggest that Reagan's policy of constructive engagement did the following: 1) damaged America's creditability with the citizens of South Africa; 2) extended the life of apartheid, which only ended in 1990 that ultimately gave way to the multiracial Presidential election won by the ANC under Nelson Mandela (1994-1999). Mandela was inaugurated on May 10, 1994 as South Africa first Black President.

An effort has been made to capture in this work a review of Reagan's policy of constructive engagement. Primarily, this work will concentrate on policy formulation and implementation, reflecting on the ebb and flow of relations between the Reagan Administration and the leaders of South Africa. My research will show in chapter that follow that for all its good intentions, the Reagan Administration's policy of constructive engagement with South Africa had little, if any, affect on the government in Pretoria. Although genuine in its attempt to promote change, the policy failed to produce tangible results. Consequently, the policy was virtually defenseless against concerted attacks from critics domestically and internationally. It is hoped that this paper contributes to a better understanding of the impact of the policy that would help the United States and South Africa emerge from the

unfortunate legacy steeped in distrust and misgiving to forge a more solid relationship in the future.

CHAPTER 2

FROM TRUMAN TO CARTER

There is in Africa today an increasing awareness that government must represent the true will of its citizens. Across the continent the majority of people prefer self-government with peril to subservience with serenity...This makes all the more repugnant the narrow-minded, outmoded policy which in some parts of Africa permits the few to rule at the expense of the many.¹

-President Lyndon B. Johnson

The United States well-documented relationship with South Africa needs hardly be recounted in great detail here. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the subject. This chapter will succinctly describe the United States diplomatic relationship with South Africa beginning in 1948 until the start of Reagan's administration. Since 1963, the arms embargo placed on South Africa had been at the heart of the U.S. response to apartheid. Yet, as would occur repeatedly with U.S. administrations, as a result of the Cold War that influenced perception of events in Africa generally, and South Africa specifically, the anti-apartheid rhetoric would fail to be translated into consistent and concrete anti-apartheid action in both

¹ Remarks by President Lyndon B. Johnson on U.S. Africa Policy at a Reception Marking the Third Anniversary of the Organization of African Unity The White House, May 26th, 1966, <http://rfksafilm.org/html/speeches/johnson.php> (accessed February 1, 2012).

Democrat and Republican administrations.² U.S. policymakers - including those of the Reagan Administration - deplored official South African racism, affirmed the American belief in government by the consent of the governed, predicted fundamental change, and prayed that change would come peacefully to South Africa.³

The Reagan Administration was not the first presidential administration to deal with the apartheid regime of South Africa. The country's precious minerals, its prime strategic location, its government's role as a staunch supporter of American and the West's policy of deterring the growth of communism were the many reasons given by the United States presidential administrations for supporting the National Party and its policies in South Africa. This support continued until apartheid's ultimate demise two years after Reagan left office. One can argue that the U.S. interest in supporting South Africa was in the best interest of America. Notwithstanding concerns for the sufferings and indignity that apartheid caused the vast majority of South Africa's citizens, policymakers in the

² Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 153.

³ Thomas Karis, "Revolution in the Making: Black Politics in South Africa," *Foreign Affairs* 62, no. 2 (Winter, 1983/84): 378, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/38233/thomas-g-karis/revolution-in-the-making-black-politics-in-south-africa#> (accessed September 14, 2011).

U.S. continued placating the international community that apartheid would reach its end in due time.

Whereas the memoirs of former presidents and former senior policy makers in the U.S. government often speak abundantly and candidly on areas of U.S. foreign policy with other countries during the second half of the twentieth century, their views on issues that concern countries in Africa are not readily available. Relations between the United States and Africa tended to be managed lower down the foreign policy-making hierarchy.⁴ However, South Africa was the benefactor of U.S. attention during the Cold War. To many in the U.S. government, South Africa was an advocate for U.S. interests on the continent. From 1945 to mid 1980's, South Africa proved to be a useful ally during the Cold War. During this time, Africa as a whole was passing from a Western sphere of influence to a nonaligned status, via the process of decolonization.⁵ South Africa portrayed itself as a defender of democratic ideals that could and would help prevent Marxist-Leninism gaining a foothold within region of Southern Africa.⁶ Furthermore,

⁴ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*

the profits that U.S. businesses could extract from the South African economy and the number of top U.S. firms that enjoyed operating in South Africa from the 1940's until the divestment era became a major consideration for administrations formulating foreign policy toward South Africa.⁷

It was during Harry S. Truman's administration (1945-1953) that apartheid came into existence. The Truman administration came to the conclusion that South Africa was too important an ally - economically and strategically - to forsake simply because of its racial policies.⁸ After all, the United States was involved in its own racial bigotry at the time. Blacks in the United States were still considered and treated as second-class citizens. According to author Thomas Borstelmann, while U.S. officials recognized the dangers of apartheid and its disregard for basic human rights, the Truman administration was unwilling to challenge South Africa because natural resources, such as uranium ore, were at the time vital to America's nuclear industry. Borstelmann also noted that South Africa's commitment to containment, participation in the Korean War,

⁷ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 12.

⁸ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 143.

and the encouragement of U.S. trade solidified the Truman administration's willingness to overlook apartheid.⁹

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953-1961) came into office in 1953, he basically continued the Truman policies toward South Africa. The Eisenhower administration prided itself in being staunchly anti-communist. South Africa would intervene, so thought the administration, in stopping the growing influence of communist and socialist leaning advances in the region. Until 1958, the U.S. continued to abstain from voting on UN resolution concerning South Africa's racial policies. During that year, the United States supported - for the first time in its history - a mildly worded United Nations resolution "expressing regret and concern over South Africa's racial policies."¹⁰

President John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) and those in his administration did not consider the ANC a genuine political party. Thus, the Kennedy administration was unwilling to get involved - with its full force - to end apartheid. They often suggested the ANC took much of their ideas of freedom

⁹ Borstelmann, *Apartheid's Reluctant Uncle: The United States and Southern Africa in the Early Cold War*, 95.

¹⁰ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 152.

and justice from communist leaning groups.¹¹ However, the U.S. first imposed sanctions against South Africa in 1962 when President Kennedy decided not to permit any further arms sales to apartheid regime that might be used to further apartheid.¹² The US imposed an unilateral arms embargo against South Africa, effective January 1, 1964, but trade, investment, and intelligence cooperation remained intact.¹³

President Lyndon Johnson (1963-1969) took an ambivalent posture against the South African government during his administration due his more sympathetic stance toward remedying the racial, political, and economic injustice against Black Americans in the US. As a result of his basic reluctance to support apartheid, American policies dealing with South and southern Africa under the Johnson administration tended to be ad hoc.¹⁴ In 1966, during a White House reception celebrating the third

¹¹ Christian De Vos, "Balancing Acts: John Kennedy, The Cold War and The African National Congress," *South African Journal of Political Studies* 32, no. 1 (May, 2005): 103, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02589340500101782#preview> (accessed September 14, 2011).

¹² Lynda Clarizio, "United States Policy Toward South Africa," in *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy* no. 1 (Baltimore: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1989), 2.

¹³ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, xi.

¹⁴ Terry Lyons, *Keeping Africa off the Agenda. Lyndon Johnson Confronts the World: American Foreign Policy, 1963-1968* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 247.

anniversary of the Organization of African Unity, Johnson commented that the United States had learned from lamentable personable experience that domination of one race by another leads to waste and to injustice. Furthermore, he concluded that just as the U.S. was determined to remove the remnant of inequality from our midst, the U.S. was also with Africa - heart and soul - as they try to do the same.¹⁵ Without expressly stating South Africa, it is the widely held belief that Johnson's comment was directed toward the citizens of South Africa. Although the Johnson Administration pressed the UN Security Council for "effective measures" to obtain Namibia's independence, the Administration balked at taking stronger actions against South Africa, such as sanctions.¹⁶

Under the administration of Richard Nixon (1969-1974), "constructive engagement" with South Africa would have its infancy. A comprehensive review of U.S. policy toward Southern Africa - particularly South Africa - called *National Security Study Memorandum 39* (NSSM 39) was produced in Nixon's Administration. The NSSM 39, authored

¹⁵ President Lyndon B. Johnson gave the remarks on US/Africa Policy at a Reception Marking the Third Anniversary of the Organization of African Unity at The White House, May 26th, 1966, <http://rfksafilm.org/html/speeches/johnson.php> (accessed February 1, 2011).

¹⁶ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, xi.

by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, outlined the principles of the Nixon administration policy toward South Africa. They included (in no particular order):

- To improve the U.S. standing in black Africa and internationally on the racial issue.
- To minimize the likelihood of escalation of violence in the area that may risk U.S. involvement.
- To minimize the opportunities for the USSR and Communist China to exploit the racial issue in the region for propaganda advantage and to gain political influence with black governments and liberation movements.
- To encourage moderation of the current rigid racial and colonial policies of the white regimes.
- To protect economic, scientific and strategic interests and opportunities for the U.S. in the region, including the orderly marketing of South Africa's gold production.

Of the five options outlined in the once-confidential document, the administration opted for the fifth, which concentrated on building a close association with South Africa to support U.S. economic interests and as a consequence, strengthen U.S. anti-apartheid diplomacy. As part of this policy, the Nixon administration relaxed the arms embargo that was in place against South Africa and, while ostensibly criticizing apartheid in the media, abstained from key United Nations votes on anti-apartheid

measure and extended trade between the U.S. and South Africa.¹⁷ Gerald Ford (1974-1977) would keep Henry Kissinger as his Secretary of State; therefore, continuing the policies of Nixon.

Under Jimmy Carter's Administration (1977-1981), the United States adopted a tougher line toward Pretoria, viewing African nationalism as a driving force in the region that was compatible with United States interests.¹⁸ However, Carter believed that the United States should expand business activities in South Africa on the grounds that business would be a force for "change."¹⁹ In 1977 President Carter had cut the representation of military American Defense Attaché Officers in South Africa in protest against the South African crack down in the wake of the infamous uprisings in Soweto in 1976.²⁰ Also, the Carter Administration banned the export of all items to the

¹⁷ Richard Goldstone, "Ambiguity and America: South Africa and US Foreign Policy," *Social Research* 72, no. 4 (December, 2005): 811, <http://www.socres.org/vol72/issue724.htm> (accessed December 3, 2012).

¹⁸ Byrnes, *South Africa: A Country Study*.

¹⁹ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 248.

²⁰ J.E. Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2007), 23.

South African military and police and prohibited the export of computers that would be used to enforce apartheid.²¹

Furthermore, during Carter's term in office, the United Nations adopted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 418. Adopted on November 4, 1977, the resolution imposed a mandatory arms embargo against the South African government. Carter forcefully and adamantly opposed the institution of apartheid in South Africa and called for its immediate end. Yet in spite of Carter's more aggressive approach toward South Africa, arguably more than any other President, it would be Ronald Reagan's administration (1981-1989) that would change the course of the relationship between United States with South Africa.

²¹ Clarizio, "United States Policy Toward South Africa," 2.

CHAPTER 3

POLICY OF CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

In less than six months, the new government of the United States reversed even the halting African policies of the Carter Administration and has embarked on a course of arrogant intervention into African affairs in the most hostile way, from Cape Town (sic) to Cairo, the American eagle has begun to bare his talons.¹

-Julian Bond

The presidential victory of Ronald Reagan in the election of November 1980 would mark a new beginning U.S. policy toward South Africa. The 'new right,' aiming to roll back the liberal policies of the previous presidential administrations in foreign policy, moved into power. Furthermore, Reagan's election to the U.S. presidency would herald the beginning of a fundamentally new political order. According to historian Y.G-M Lulat, Reagan's victory therefore, constituted no less than a "revolution." President Reagan played a major role in shaping the administration's policy toward South Africa. Unlike President Carter, who thought that the U.S. should to stand for racial equality and human rights in South Africa, President Reagan, an ideological conservative, believed that the U.S. had to oppose communism and protect its strategic

¹ Charles Cobb, Gail Hovey, and William Minter, *No Easy Victories: African Liberation and American Activists over a Half Century, 1950-2000*, 1st ed. (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2007), 173.

interest in the region.² In the Reagan administration, South Africa had finally found a government prepared to take seriously arguments about its strategic and political importance as an anti-Communist ally.³

The incoming administration was unequivocally sympathetic to the white minority in power in southern Africa, particularly South Africa. After Reagan's now infamous television interview where he publically stated that South Africa was a 'friend' and that the U.S. would not abandon the apartheid government, P.W. Botha, South Africa's Foreign Affairs Minister at the time and other members of the South African government, would visit the U.S. early in Reagan's first term as president to meet with high-ranking cabinet officials. During this time, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Chester Crocker, a veteran from the Nixon Administration, would craft Reagan's policy toward South Africa, constructive engagement⁴, and a complex and nuanced policy.

² Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, 8.

³ Linda Freeman, "'Constructively' Supporting Aggression and Repression - Reagan's South Africa Policy," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 18, no. 3 (November, 1984): 627, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/484775> (accessed January 25, 2012).

⁴ In an essay written in the fall of 1989 for Foreign Affairs, Crocker stated that the phrase 'constructive engagement' was self-evidently consistent with mainstream U.S. internationalism and essential to the very mean meaning of activist diplomacy.

The following terms would describe the overall policy of constructive engagement, a notion of gradual reform in South Africa:

The political relationship between the United States and South Africa has now arrived at a crossroads of perhaps historic significance. After twenty years of generally increasing official U.S. government coolness toward South Africa and concomitant South African intransigence, the possibility may exist for a more positive and reciprocal relationship between the two countries based upon shared strategic concerns in Southern Africa, our recognition that the government P.W. Botha represents a unique opportunity for domestic change, and willingness of the Reagan Administration to deal realistically with South Africa.⁵

Dr. Chester Crocker was appointed Reagan's Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs soon after Reagan's victory in 1981. By the end of his tenure in 1988, Crocker had become the longest serving Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs since the department's creation in 1958.⁶ Before Crocker assumed his position in the U.S. Department of State, he was the Director of African Studies at the Center for Strategic and International Studies at Georgetown University and Associate Professor of International Relations

⁵ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 247.

⁶ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 23.

at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service. During this time, he authored a document titled "South Africa: Strategy for Change" that outlined his favored policy of 'constructive engagement' towards the governments in southern Africa - particularly Pretoria.⁷ In the article, Crocker questioned, after 20 years of Democratic and Republican presidential administrations, if the U.S. even had a sustainable policy toward South Africa.

"South Africa: Strategy for Change" would serve as the blueprint for Reagan's policy of constructive engagement with South Africa and southern Africa in general. Crocker argued that South Africans are so enmeshed in their own internal ferment and so disenchanted with the recent American performance (notably the Carter administration) that they view the United States increasingly as an object for manipulation an ineffectual and reactive power.⁸ The case for mounting an activist strategy of regional engagement, stated Crocker, rested less on the prospects for success than on the evident costs of not trying at all.⁹ "Clearly, the fundamental goal," claimed Crocker, was the emergence of a South African society

⁷ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 1.

⁸ Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 323.

⁹ Crocker, "Southern Africa: Eight Years Later," 145

"with which the United States can pursue its varied interests in a full and friendly relationship, without constant embarrassment or political damage."¹⁰ However, some observers viewed his ideas as a conceptual throwback to the previous decade, when Henry Kissinger, during the Nixon administration, pursued a policy of "communication" with the South African government stressing mutual strategic and commercial interests.¹¹

Crocker warned against focusing only on the goal of a "full blown national convention" and pointed out that since South Africa is a sovereign state, only the government itself can call and supervise such an exercise and that the West has everything to gain if it succeeds in pressing white-led change in the direction of real power-sharing.¹² At the core of this belief was that only the whites of South Africa could bring about peaceful change, and, that the blacks demanding the end of apartheid must do so in a civil and non-violent manner.¹³ Constructive engagement would focus on the process of change,

¹⁰ Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 324.

¹¹ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, 8.

¹² Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 26.

¹³ The Administrations of each President leading up to and including Ronald Reagan deemed the African National Congress, the main black political group opposing apartheid, as a communist leaning group.

and would avoid focusing on the end result of dismantling apartheid, as this would keep the West (particularly the U.S.) immobilized by a distant objective.¹⁴ According to him, Washington would need a sustained and nimble diplomacy, responsive to the pragmatic instincts of regional leaders.¹⁵

Furthermore, he strongly argued that due to Carter's verbal flagellation and constant reprimands toward South Africa, US policy only helped the National Party of South Africa to gain even more popularity within the country to those who advocated minority rule. Even before Crocker joined the Reagan administration, he was an outspoken critic of the Carter's policy toward South Africa. "The Administration (Carter) has wrapped itself in a straight-jacket of principles which limits maneuver and invites invidious comparisons of its promises and performance," stated Crocker.¹⁶ Crocker took exception to the previous administration's abrasive rhetoric, its radical and allegedly unrealistic demands for a speedy transfer of power, and its many attempts, often halfhearted,

¹⁴ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 26.

¹⁵ Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 345.

¹⁶ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 112.

to disassociate itself from the regime in Pretoria.¹⁷

Overcompensating for what he considered excessive rhetorical hostility toward Pretoria by the Carter administration, Crocker tried to identify with South Africa's strategic interests, particularly its anticommunism stance, and to empathize with white fears. Stressing persuasion over pressure, he signaled in advance that there would be no significant penalties for lack of cooperation.¹⁸ "In South Africa, it is not our task to choose between black and white. In this rich land of talented and diverse peoples, important Western economic, strategic, moral and political interests are at stake," Crocker would explain in a major policy statement delivered in August 1981.¹⁹

In order that South Africa would heed the international demands for ending apartheid, Crocker stipulated that the international community, particularly the U.S., must engage with the government of South Africa. His premise was that there was an opportunity to help shape a regional climate conducive to political accommodation in both southern Africa

¹⁷ Christopher Cocker, *The United States and South Africa, 1968-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1986), 154.

¹⁸ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, 72.

¹⁹ Freeman, "'Constructively' Supporting Aggression and Repression - Reagan's South Africa Policy," 627.

and South Africa if Western governments were prepared to engage in "sustained and nimble diplomacy" involving leadership in regional problem-solving.²⁰

Crocker asked the question: how can the U.S. strongly encourage the South Africans to get on with deciding their future void of apartheid that takes in account the U.S. interest(s)? He offered a valid response to those who believe that exerting strong U.S. influence would be a detriment to the overall goal that was being sought. He quickly pointed out that the then recent experience in Iran should silence those who felt the U.S. should exert strong force in weakening - politically, socially, economically, and other ways - the apartheid government of South Africa. To Crocker, the dismantling of apartheid and the creation of a new nonracial regime was not going to take place through a sudden dramatic act such as curtailing trade or investment with South Africa or even comprehensive sanctions backed by military power. The South African government had proved they could withstand all those challenges from previous administrations. A major reason cited by the Reagan administration for the loss of U.S.

²⁰ Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 345.

influence was that past sanctions led to loss of credibility with the South African government.²¹

Constructive engagement, as outlined in an executive order by President Reagan, rested on four assumptions underlying the ideal outcomes. First, South Africa's overwhelming economic and military predominance in southern Africa and its powerful internal security apparatus would, at least in the short term, enable Pretoria to "manage" internal and external pressures for change. Second, the Botha government could be induced to agree to an internationally accepted settlement in Namibia if South African withdrawal were linked to a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and the prospect of an improvement in U.S.-South African relations. Specifically, constructive engagement was meant to deliver a peaceful resolution to the conflict over independence in Namibia and thus to provide the Reagan Presidency with a foreign policy success. Third, an early Namibian settlement would set in motion a self-reinforcing spiral of positive developments in South Africa and the region, thus validating the constructive engagement approach. Finally, progress could be made more quickly on apartheid

²¹ Clarizio, "United States Policy Toward South Africa," 39.

issues if the U.S. government used official rather than public channels for its criticism and pressure.²²

"We can cooperate with a society undergoing constructive change," Crocker would write in a Scope Paper intended for Secretary of State Alexander Haig (the Scope Paper was subsequently leaked to the American press).²³ It was to this point that Crocker argued that a new American mindset must evolve. No longer could the U.S. and the international communities seek to change the politics in South Africa by coercion. Rather, he postulated, South Africa would need to come to the realization that its racial politics were damaging to its own credibility. Moreover, there was evidence in the South African government that change was developing with the National Party under the leadership of Prime Minister P.W. Botha. He agreed with other U.S. officials, namely the Republican members of Congress that the timetable and blueprint for change in South Africa were not for outsiders to impose. Yet, without Western engagement in South Africa, and the region as a whole, it would be impossible to provide

²² U.S. U.S. Department of State, Secretary of State's Advisory Committee on South Africa, *A U.S. Policy Toward South Africa*, Report (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987).

²³ Chester A. Crocker's Scope Paper directed to Secretary of State Alexander M. Haig on the subject of Haig's then forthcoming meeting with South African Foreign Minister Roelof F. Botha on May 14, 1981. The paper was leaked to the African-American lobby, Trans-Africa, which made it available to the press.

assurances that Pretoria would be permitted to build a future without apartheid. Furthermore, he summarized the American stance should be firmly supportive of a regional climate conducive to compromise and accommodation in the face of concerted attempts to discredit evolutionary change and to exploit the inevitable ambiguity and periodic "incidents" that will produce political liberalization.²⁴

During this time in South Africa, the blacks were given some, albeit mundane, rights and privileges. They were able to acquire jobs that previously had been denied to them. The government lifted all the legal restrictions against multiracial sports that allowed Blacks to play on some South African international teams. The most profound change occurred in the labor realm. Blacks had finally been given trade union rights and were steadily moving up into more skilled jobs.²⁵

Perhaps more importantly, the economy of South Africa was not faltering when Reagan entered into office. South Africa was thriving. According to John de St. Jorre, a correspondent with *The London Observer*, South Africa's economy was flush

²⁴ Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 345.

²⁵ de St. Jorre, "South Africa: Is Change Coming?," 108.

from the high prices of gold and other mineral exports.²⁶ The pervasive thought amongst those in the Reagan Administration, especially Crocker, was that the previous administration's tactics of rough engagement with South Africa were yielding little change within the National Party. Early in his Administration, Reagan relaxed some of the embargoes that had been placed on South Africa.

Given U.S. interests in South Africa, the perceived lack of coherent effective policies from previous administrations, and the ambiguity of change coming from within the apartheid government, what approach should the Reagan Administration take on the governing National Party? This was the question the administration had to answer. The United States could best promote change in South Africa, according to Crocker, by working with the white power structure and taking into account white fears.²⁷ "Our objective," he said, "is to increase the South African government's confidence."

As mentioned above, the core of constructive engagement rested on four premises, as outlined in a U.S Department of State official cable. First, South Africa's overwhelming

²⁶ de St. Jorre, "South Africa: Is Change Coming?," 108.

²⁷ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, 9.

economic and military predominance in southern Africa and its powerful internal security apparatus would, at least in the short term, enable Pretoria to "manage" internal and external pressures for change. Second, the Botha government could be induced to agree to an internationally accepted settlement in Namibia if South African withdrawal were linked to a withdrawal in Cuban troops from Angola and the prospect of an improvement in U.S.-South African relations. As previously mentioned, an early Namibian settlement would set in motion a self-reinforcing spiral of positive developments in South Africa and the region, thus validating the constructive engagement approach; thus, progress could be made more quickly on apartheid issues if the U.S. government used official rather than public channels for its criticism and pressure.²⁸

As the architect of constructive engagement, Crocker sought to build a centrist consensus, some kind of synthesis of Carter's activism and human rights concerns, with NSSM39's realist approach.²⁹ Crocker would seek to make his approach of constructive engagement toward South Africa an acknowledgement of the country's importance to the United States and the West.

²⁸ U.S., *A U.S. Policy Toward South Africa*.

²⁹ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 113.

Even before Crocker appointment as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, he made it very clear that he did not view that the policy of exerting undue pressure on Pretoria or isolating it was particularly meaningful. Crocker would state "we {U.S.} do not want to destabilize South Africa or jeopardize our own strategic and economic interests. The power to coerce South Africa is not in our hands."³⁰ To further reinforce these declarations, Crocker would state them out in public, further placating South Africa.

Crocker would take his actions of soothing South Africa further. Crocker once described South Africa as a part of the Western experience, and an integral part of the Western economic system and publically stated the ANC was engaged in active and guerrilla/sabotage operations.³¹ Of course, this was a welcomed view for South Africa. During the Carter Administration, they have viewed Carter's "hard line" approach to their government as hindrance to furthering the relationship with the U.S.

One of the first acts of constructive engagement was to reverse President Carter's 1978 total proscription of U.S.

³⁰ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 115.

³¹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 74.

sales to the South African military and police.³² Beginning in mid 1981, the policy of constructive engagement permitted companies in the U.S. to sell their items to South Africa. This included food, clothing, personal hygiene items, nonstrategic chemicals, calculators, personal computers, copying machines and word processors.³³ The administration explained that while other aspects of the arms embargo remained in place, providing "a strong symbolic and political disassociation of the United States from the enforcement of apartheid," Carter's total ban was merely "counterproductive" and had "no effect."³⁴ However, adherence to the U.N. arms embargo and the U.S. refusal to use South African defense facilities were symbolically important to the policy and, according to Crocker, should be continued in the absence of major political change, barring a dramatic deterioration in the geopolitical situation facing the West in adjacent areas.³⁵

According to Crocker, the innovative feature of constructive engagement was its insistence on serious thinking about the sequencing and interrelatedness of change. He

³² Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 115.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 346.

postulated that priority should have been given to those arenas of change that logically lead to, and make possible, future steps. The U.S. should avoid, he further elaborated, the trap of an indiscriminate attack on all aspects of the system {apartheid} - as though each were equally odious and none should be addressed first. If there were a "tilt" in such a policy, it would be in favor of sustained and orderly change. The United States would inevitably, in this sense, align itself with particular processes, change agents, and political forces in concrete cases.³⁶

Crocker would also imply that constructive engagement was a new beginning to the relationship between the U.S. and South Africa. It was "neither the clandestine embrace" of the Nixon administration nor "polecat treatment" of the Carter years.³⁷ He believed that the election of President Reagan had given the United States new credibility with South Africa because "our mandate and our desire to turn a new leaf in bilateral relations."

Even though the policy of constructive engagement sought to avoid confrontation with the government in Pretoria, the

³⁶ Crocker, "South Africa: Strategy for Change," 347.

³⁷ Ibid., 346.

Reagan administration did not shy away from expressing its opposition to apartheid.³⁸ Contrary to popular antiapartheid belief, the policy was a genuine approach to promote change in South Africa. Terming apartheid as "morally unacceptable," Crocker would often state that the administration was adamantly opposed to apartheid. Once, during a Congressional hearing concerning the U.S. policy in South Africa, Crocker stated "our strong moral and political convictions about a system based on legally entrenched racism (any system that ascribes or denies political rights on this racial basis) - including the right of citizenship itself - is bound to be repugnant."³⁹ Another official in the administration described South Africa as pursuing the only system in the world "of denying its citizens natural rights which is openly and legally based on racism," a fact which bestowed upon apartheid "special distinction as the world's most condemned system."⁴⁰

Notwithstanding their dislike for apartheid, the fact remains the strategy of constructive engagement was aimed at appeasing Pretoria. Washington, D.C. wanted the government of

³⁸ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 118.

³⁹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 28.

⁴⁰ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*," 245.

South Africa to know that the U.S. could "cooperate with a society undergoing constructive change."⁴¹ The administration believed that it was in America's interest to foster and support reform and to recognize that in its absence the threat to American interests would inevitably gather momentum.⁴²

However, as admitted by Crocker and others in the Reagan administration, constructive engagement with South Africa had limits in terms of achieving results.⁴³ Crocker explained in 1987 "at the core of our {U.S.} sobering experience in South Africa is the realization that there is a severe limit to what the United States - or any other outside power - can do to bring change in South Africa."⁴⁴ "The focus of decisions and diplomatic action would be regional, but our choice of whether to compete or not - when the Soviets and the Cubans were busily exploiting and militarizing regional conflicts - would have global implications," explained Crocker.⁴⁵ Constructive engagement aimed to give the government of South Africa space

⁴¹ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 118.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ In a 1983 address before the American Chamber of Commerce in South Africa, Herman Nickel, the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, stated "we cannot dictate policy to any state in the region, nor would we want to."

⁴⁴ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

and time to reform its own society.⁴⁶ The Reagan administration would not demand an instant solution to apartheid based on the international community's demand of one person, one vote. Instead, an evolutionary transition from apartheid would be acceptable to the United States, as long as the ruling National Party strategy represented genuine reform.⁴⁷ Crocker's views were summed up in a 1981 State Department memo: "Although we may continue to differ on apartheid and cannot condone a system of institutionalized racial differentiation, we can cooperate with a society undergoing change."⁴⁸

Moreover, while sensitive to white South African attitudes, Crocker was less responsive to blacks and was perceived as such by blacks in South Africa, many of whom believed that the United States had become a close ally of the South African government. In addition to endorsing a constitution that excluded Africans⁴⁹, which was opposed by

⁴⁶ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 114.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ In a 1983 whites-only referendum, Pretoria approved a new constitution granting limited parliamentary participation to Coloureds (a racial group South Africa) and Indians but excluding the majority African {Black} population.

black and white anti-apartheid forces in South Africa, Crocker did not meet with many black leaders in South Africa, nor did he address their political concerns in his public speeches. The administration did not address the needs of the anti-apartheid forces in the US, which will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Historians have often stated that Reagan's administration formulated the most wide-ranging U.S. foreign policy toward South Africa. Prime Minister Botha had begun to enact reforms albeit small in South Africa. Reagan saw this as the perfect opportunity to engage South Africa after decades of inconsistent policies toward Pretoria from the U.S. Set against the backdrop of thwarting communism, Crocker established the policy of constructive engagement that would appease white South Africa while preserving the U.S. interests in the region. Peaceful change, it was proposed, would predominantly come through white institutions in South Africa. After all, Crocker argued, "there is little reason to question the near-term survivability of white power in South Africa."⁵⁰

It has been noted that constructive engagement provided Pretoria with material benefits from early in Reagan's first

⁵⁰ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 114.

term as President. As well as the tangible benefits of increased trade and technology flow from the U.S. to South Africa, South Africa gained an ally in the United States. Reagan and Crocker hoped not to repeat previous administration's engagement with Pretoria that lacked a coherent policy. As demonstrated in the next chapter, South Africa would view the policy of constructive engagement with optimism. Here at last was an administration that would not naively disregard the importance of South Africa as a vital regional player in the struggle against communism and would recognize her as a state with Western values that belonged within the Western embrace.⁵¹ Reagan's anti-communist message would resonate fondly with the leaders of the National Party. The policies of constructive engagement embolden Pretoria to maintain the status quo, thus encouraging Pretoria to continue its policy of racial segregation. Notwithstanding the stated goal of constructive engagement, the policy took away any strong incentive for South Africa to improve its international image by improving the conditions of its majority black African population.⁵²

⁵¹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 72.

⁵² Freeman, "'Constructively' Supporting Aggression and Repression - Reagan's South Africa Policy," 629.

CHAPTER 4

PRETORIA'S REACTION TO CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT

We have never given into to outside demands and we are not going to do so now. South Africa's problems will be solved by South Africans and not by foreigners. We are not going to be deterred from doing what we think best, nor will we be forced into doing what we don't want to do.¹

- South Africa Prime Minister P.W. Botha

The Reagan administration put considerable faith in South Africa's National Party government in ensuring that the policy of constructive engagement would not fail. From Reagan's first day in office, Washington presumed that South Africa's President P.W. Botha was genuinely committed to dismantling racial domination, negotiating security agreements with South Africa's neighbors, and helping the US hold the line against communism.² However, based on past experiences with previous US administrations, South Africa was cautious, albeit happy with a friendlier administration, of this "new" engagement strategy put forth by the Reagan administration.

¹ P.W. Botha, "The Rubicon Speech" (speech, National Party National Congress, Durban, South Africa, August 15, 1985).

² Pauline Baker, "Facing up to Apartheid," *Foreign Policy* no. 64 (Autumn, 1986): 38, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1148689> (accessed January 25, 2012).

The South African government's fear of isolation and desire for acceptance was addressed by constructive engagement's vision of a new United States-South African relationship.³ South Africa cherished the notion that they were strategic importance in the West's attempts to thwart the spread of communism. Constructive engagement gave the National Party legitimacy with the US. Pretoria was encouraged that the Reagan administration viewed the problems of southern Africa through the prism of East-West relations, a perspective that South Africa felt had been naively missing from Carter's policy.⁴

Furthermore, constructive engagement also provided South Africa protection by the US. Pretoria was pleased with the fact that Crocker and the Reagan administration attempted to rule out over very direct way to attempt to influence policy - the use of sanctions.⁵ Crocker, looking back to this early stage, noted how Botha and his colleagues preferred to view Ronald Reagan's 1980 electoral

³ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 74.

⁴ Sanford Ungar and Peter Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," *Foreign Affairs* no. 2 (Winter 1985): 234, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20042571> (accessed January 25, 2012).

⁵ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 84.

victory as the beginning of an embrace.⁶ Soon after the inception of the policy, the Reagan administration realized that it had to offer Pretoria diplomatic protection. The policy provided the protection needed, staving off punitive sanctions demanded by a majority of international community.⁷ For example, the US cast four consecutive vetoes in the United Nations Security Council during April 1981.⁸

Constructive engagement failed to convey to South Africa the true intentions of the policy. The policy, although never expressed to the proponents of the policy, was meant to serve as a blueprint for what the administration thought would be the eventual demise of apartheid. The policy tacitly encouraged Pretoria to continue the policy of apartheid by not providing consequences for ending the dreadful policies sooner. Pretoria seemed happy to receive any of the carrots presented to them by Washington in the name of constructive engagement, without actually feeling compelled to

⁶ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 122.

⁷ The veto by the US on August 31 of a UN Security Council resolution condemning Pretoria for its incursion into Angola during the same month provoked expressions of disappointment in a variety of sections in the US.

⁸ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa: 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 118.

reciprocate with any moves of their own.⁹ Most important, it seemed to have had no impact on the Botha's government's position on political rights for black South Africans.¹⁰

South Africa was so confident of its newfound importance to the US and the West that an arrogant outlook further encroached into their domestic policy. Prime Minister Botha's bureaucratic policies that he enacted in Reagan's first term were aimed at consolidating personal power, and his social economic reforms, while more cosmetic, were based on traditional racial and ethnic criteria that entrenched rather than dismantled apartheid.¹¹ The victory for the new constitution in the November 1983 referendum¹² reflected strong white support for his reform strategy, which Crocker and the Reagan administration cautiously endorsed.¹³

As the policy of constructive engagement was coming into existence under the Reagan administration, Professor

⁹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 80.

¹⁰ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, 26.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹² In September 1984, P.W Botha becomes the first state president with the implementation of the new 1983 constitution that institutes a divide-and-rule strategy of a tricameral parliament (with a chamber each for whites, Coloreds and Asians), from which the majority Black South Africans is excluded.

¹³ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, 27.

Robert Schrire of the University of Cape Town outlined four conditions that would permit the apartheid government to remain intact even with the policy of constructive engagement in place. They were: 1) the South African economy continued to be dynamic and growth oriented; 2) black South Africans acquiesced in white rule; 3) the international community was prepared to trade and invest in South Africa and 4) white South Africans remained broadly united in their support for the ruling regime.¹⁴

It is important to point out that at no time during the policy of constructive engagement did the ruling party of South Africa interpret that as abandonment of white rule. Rather, reforms and "compliance" to the policy meant *preserving* white rule.¹⁵ Many believe it was the failure of Crocker to realize this important matter that led to the ultimate demise of constructive engagement. The important and misunderstood fact was that, to the ruling party in South Africa, constructive engagement never intended to include the dismantling of white rule. To the National Party of South Africa, it meant that America and the West

¹⁴ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 79.

¹⁵ Ibid.

would come to terms with white rule with a few reforms initiated by their government.

In regards to conditions one and three, US businesses in South Africa were willing to cooperate with the policy of constructive engagement. In Reagan's first term, the South African economy was stable, when compared to the South African economy in 1960s and early 1970s.¹⁶ In fact, 1982, the Reagan administration helped South Africa secure more than one billion dollars in credit from the International Monetary Fund, despite strong opposition from US civil society and members of Congress - Democrats and Republican.¹⁷ Although some 68 countries would vote to deny the request, the US and its Western European allies would outvote them. The loan, approved on November 3 1982, would be the largest that South Africa had ever received in its history.¹⁸

Responding to criticism that the decision to grant a loan would be viewed as support for the prevailing political order, the State Department went to the

¹⁶ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 121.

¹⁷ Fattouh, "The Reagan Foreign Policy toward South Africa: The Ideology of the New Cold War," 66.

¹⁸ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 250.

extraordinary length of issuing a statement that "the United States position on the South African withdrawing indicates no change in our position on apartheid nor in our opposition to the use of force to resolve political differences in the region."¹⁹ Likewise, most US corporate executives still considered South Africa commercially viable; therefore, most US firms decided to remain active in the South African market and buy into the corporate responsibility agenda.²⁰

Although the government favored Reagan's policies toward them, from the outset, South Africa remained detached from the realities Reagan's advances. The laws that were enacted in South Africa against blacks early in Reagan's first term went against the administration's stated purpose of constructive engagement. The 1984 South African constitution, for example, excluded the black African majority, triggering waves of protests throughout the country and defying condition two as outlined by Prof. Schrire. The 1984 dispensation made no provision for the

¹⁹ Cocker, *The United States and South Africa, 1968-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics*, 210.

²⁰ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 121.

majority African population, who were still to be represented through their allocated homelands.²¹

Many historians argue that this is the foremost reason for the policy of constructive engagement's failure. Prime Minister Botha declared, "One man, one vote is out; that is to say, never."²² The government in South Africa had its own reform agenda that did not include the principle of the "consent of the governed." Despite the need for a forward-looking debate in South Africa, the attitude of the government continued to be forged in the context of white supremacy. Prime Minister Botha's mind was not open to new possibilities, only tactical compromises. If public discussion of South Africa's future had intensified, the clarity of the debate had not improved.²³

From the very beginning of Reagan's first term, high-level cabinet members began to meet with South African officials on the concept of constructive engagement. This was a complete turnaround from the Carter administration. A shared ideological opposition to communism, and a common commitment to containment, made strategic contacts between

²¹ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 113.

²² *Ibid.*, 123.

²³ Cocker, *The United States and South Africa, 1968-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics*, 166.

the US and South Africa an ideal focus for constructive engagement.²⁴ As a result, Chester Crocker would later state that high ranking South African officials were always more interested in squeezing what they could from the Reagan administration, rather than working with them.²⁵ During this time, a leaked report from a National Security Council (NSC) meeting had the members asking themselves "whether we should continue to commit our diplomatic prestige where the key player - South Africa - appears to be immune to any US influence or suggestions which rub against its policy aims."²⁶

In 1980, President Reagan, through Crocker, specified conditions that needed to be abided if the United States was to back South Africa reforms. He stated, "Piecemeal power-sharing steps deserves support if they are (a) consistent with the goal of expanded black political advancements, (b) demonstrably agreed to by the participants in them, and (c) non inconsistent with an open

²⁴ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 115.

²⁵ Crocker, "Southern Africa: Eight Years Later," 145.

²⁶ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 80.

process of change."²⁷ There is little concrete evidence to show that these conditions were ever met. Since the US believed that the government had it within its power to avert a revolution of change within South Africa, there seemed every reason to hope that constructive engagement might bring Pretoria to its senses much sooner.²⁸

Surprisingly, the Botha government began to instigate reforms shortly after the implementation of constructive engagement. When it came to the issue of internal reform, Botha found it relatively easy to satisfy the Reagan Administration with his own limited agenda.²⁹ Some of the reforms included: relaxation of vertical and horizontal mobility controls in respect of black labor; legitimating of the right to form trade unions by black labor, but within specific limits; movement toward privatization of state-owned enterprises; measures to entice the emergent black middle class into a fuller commitment to the white-middle class order, consolidation and rationalization of

²⁷ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 123.

²⁸ Cocker, *The United States and South Africa, 1968-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics*, 270.

²⁹ Ungar and Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," 242.

the instruments of state itself toward greater decision-making role of the security and armed forces.³⁰

However, the reasoning behind the reforms was in conflict with the policy of constructive engagement. The reforms were cosmetic at best. Crocker was convinced that Botha was sincere in cooperating with the US government's policy of constructive engagement. Botha's call for white South Africans to "adapt or die," often interpreted by those in the US and West as heralding the dismantling of apartheid, belied the fact that Botha was just as committed to the preservation of white South African power as the most hard-line of his predecessors.³¹ The South African government was successful in crushing internal dissent and silencing local and foreign media.

What's more, South Africa lulled Washington into a false sense of confidence that their reforms were for the greater good. Piecemeal reforms and an apparent willingness to negotiate with some neighboring states added to the aura of Pretoria's commitment to change.³² That

³⁰ Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 252.

³¹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 77.

³² Baker, "Facing up to Apartheid," 38.

image, however, was badly tarnished during Reagan's second term, when Pretoria began to attack its neighbors.

South Africa benefited from constructive engagement in many ways: reversal of previously prohibited US sales to the South African military and police, granting of export licenses, increased contact between security agencies of the United States and South Africa, closer working relationships between the intelligence services of the United States and South Africa. For example, the Reagan administration relaxed the United Nations arms embargo against South Africa through the 1981 sales of 2,500 electronic shock batons to private buyers for crowd control in South Africa, the 1982 sale of six turbo jets to the South African Air Force, and the sales of \$500,000 worth of non-military arms and ammunition and \$28.3 million worth of "dual-use" military equipment and technology to the government.³³ These "sweeteners" provided South Africa with greater access to senior US government officials.

Economically, Pretoria benefited greatly from constructive engagement. During Reagan's first term as President, the US was South Africa's largest trading partner, its second largest foreign investor, and the

³³ Prexy Nesbitt, *Apartheid In Our Living Rooms: U.S. Foreign Policy and South Africa*, (Chicago: Midwest Research, 1986), 21.

source of one-third of its international credit. US investments in South Africa, including investments made through subsidiaries, were estimated at \$4.4 billion. In addition, US investors held approximately \$8 billion in shares in South African mining companies. US companies engaged in \$4.8 billion in trade with South Africa, and US bank loans to South Africa stood at \$4.5 billion.³⁴

Similarly, South Africa benefited commercially. First, the Commerce Department issued 1,864 licenses in 1984, valued at \$672.9 million - more than the Carter administration issued in three years.³⁵ Second, South Africa gained nuclear weapon technology. Gaining nuclear technology was strictly prohibited due to South Africa refusal to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty.

Before and during the policy of constructive engagement, the apartheid government of South Africa clearly pointed out that any pressure on Pretoria to move faster towards reform would be counterproductive, because the only alternative (given a white electorate) to the

³⁴ Parsons, "On 'Constructive Engagement' in South Africa," 2.

³⁵ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 212.

National Party's policy was a right-wing government.³⁶

South Africa was adamant that any change would happen when the time was "right" and, any outside interference could be detrimental to the process. Botha conveyed this message to anyone in the Reagan administration that he had direct contact with.

In addition, Botha and his government were nervous about the policy of constructive engagement. One major issue was the trust factor. In early meetings with the Reagan administration, Botha expressed concern that South Africa had been let down by America before, and was therefore not inclined to trust them again.³⁷ His main concern was that the US involvement with South Africa and Angola in 1975, when South Africa invaded Angola with the understanding they would have support from the US; however, America and the rest of the West rescinded their support for South Africa. The experience in Angola proved to Botha that South Africa should only depend on itself in matters of their security.

In return of lenient policies towards South Africa under constructive engagement, the US had hoped for some

³⁶ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 75.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

progress on a settlement in Namibia, and, in particular the implementation of a UN resolution in place since 1978 which offered a step by step end to the conflict in Namibia through elections under UN supervision. Once Namibian independence from South Africa was concluded, the US was prepared to include South Africa in a formal bilateral security agreement that had been previously worked out. However, although Crocker had attempted a version of shuttle diplomacy and a number of conferences seemed to bring settlement close, the issue remained deadlocked.³⁸ South Africa refused to budge on the issue, further causing the policy to lose authenticity.

Another impediment to Pretoria fully supporting constructive engagement was their insistence that they would set the agenda and policy. The policy was dependent on both the US and South Africa prepared to work together in search of common ground. Because of so much discontent with the US congress, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapters, Pretoria would simply bypass regular diplomatic channels to find a definition of policy that suited them. Pretoria continued to attempt to persuade the more conservative of the US agencies and departments

³⁸ Freeman, "'Constructively' Supporting Aggression and Repression - Reagan's South Africa Policy," 628.

(Central Intelligence Agency, Department of Defense, the National Security Council, etc.) to enter into strategic cooperation with South Africa regarding the region, in return for a reduced emphasis on apartheid. All these elements in its approach impacted upon Pretoria's understanding of constructive engagement and, in turn, affected the policy of constructive engagement itself.³⁹

Sanford Ungar and Peter Vale correctly argued that the Botha government had different expectations of constructive engagement. Indeed, for Pretoria, Reagan's victory in 1980 stirred ambitious hopes. It seemed to signal a return to days when the South African white regime could get away with portraying itself as a protector of the Western way of life, a bastion of freedom, decency and economic development at the tip of a continent afflicted by tyranny, chaos, and abject poverty - above all, a bulwark against communism.⁴⁰

Constructive engagement took little notice of the violent protests against apartheid in South Africa. The violence against people participating in civil disobedience

³⁹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 77.

⁴⁰ Ungar and Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," 239.

more visibly erupted with the establishment, in 1983, of a tricameral legislature. The black majority, as previously noted, was totally excluded from the political process. Not only did Botha repress demonstrations through brutal means, he also spoke publicly against US anti-apartheid efforts to reduce racial oppression. Even after Botha imprisoned up to what some analysts accounted for more than 10,000 opposition figures, suspended civil rights, put the security forces above the law and gagged the press, the Reagan administration restated its insistence that punitive economic sanctions were too "blunt" an instrument to use.⁴¹ These actions made a mockery of one of the central tenets of constructive engagement, since support for South Africa and a lack of sanctions did not induce apartheid leaders to take steps to share power with the black majority.

This leads to another important reason why constructive engagement failed to meet its desired goals. Although a regular visitor to South Africa during the Reagan administration, Crocker, nor anyone else in the administration, chose to directly engage with the black opposition in South Africa. The Reagan administration's neglect of its relationship with South Africa's black community was most obvious in its dealings with the African

⁴¹ Baker, "Facing up to Apartheid," 38.

National Congress (ANC). Contacts between the US government and the ANC were not regular, and certainly did not involve higher-ranking members of the Reagan administration.⁴² Crocker would later state that the lack of contact with the ANC as being a matter of priorities.⁴³

Regrettably, the Reagan administration backed the measures put in place by the 1983 constitution enacted by Botha and his regime. The Reagan administration considered this reform worth supporting. A foreign policy engaging this reform process, it was argued, had more chance of assisting genuine progress than the alternative path of opposing it via debilitating punitive sanctions.⁴⁴ As Crocker observed, "For the first time in a generation, the obscure politics of Afrikanerdom are showing clear signs of a noteworthy flexibility. The Botha government has committed itself to a moderate reformist process whose ultimate end remains utterly unclear...The current fluidity does not make meaningful change certain, but it does make it possible."⁴⁵ Further exacerbating the situation was a

⁴² Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 125.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 114.

November 1983 speech by U.S. Under Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. At a conference in San Francisco, he stated that "I do not see it as our {US} business to enter into this debate {South African constitution} or to endorse the constitutional proposals now under consideration. Now do we offer tactical advice to any of the interested parties? Yet, the indisputable fact which we must recognize is that the South African government has taken the first step toward extending political rights beyond the white minority."⁴⁶

According to some historians, what Pretoria knew all along, and the Reagan administration should have realized, was that Botha was simply unable and unwilling to deliver the level of reform that constructive engagement needed to live up to the policy objectives. A confidential observation of the NSC shows that, rather than simply being stubborn, perhaps Pretoria just had too good an understanding of the implicit agenda of the constructive engagement strategy: "There is no sign of South African gratitude or even acknowledgement of the Reagan Administration's friendlier attitude towards the Pretoria regime. They assume that our policies are driven by

⁴⁶ Ungar and Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," 246.

pursuit of our interests, not theirs."⁴⁷ In fact, the South Africans seemed to take many of the American policy makers by surprise by the sheer degree of their intransigence. Commentators remarked that Reagan's conciliatoriness to the South African regime assumed it shared Western's values of good faith bargaining.⁴⁸

Additionally, the Reagan administration claimed credit for limiting Cuban influence in neighboring Angola and brokering peace between South Africa, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.⁴⁹ Constructive engagement, however, took little notice of the violent protests against apartheid in South Africa. This was another reason for its failure.

The violence against people participating in civil disobedience more visibly erupted with the establishment, in 1983, of a tricameral legislature. As previously mentioned, the black majority was totally excluded from the political process. Not only did Botha repress demonstrations through brutal means, he also spoke publicly against US anti-apartheid efforts, discussed in the next

⁴⁷ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 80.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79

⁴⁹ Goldstone "Ambiguity and America: South Africa and US Foreign Policy," 812.

chapter, to reduce racial oppression. These actions made a mockery of one of the central tenets of constructive engagement, since support for South Africa and a lack of sanctions did not induce apartheid leaders to take steps to share power with the black majority.⁵⁰

By the end of Reagan's first term, the South African government, having expected so much, was disappointed with constructive engagement. Specifically, black South Africans were very disillusioned with the Reagan administrations benevolent attitude toward the ruling regime. With President Reagan appearing at times to justify the excesses committed by the South African government under the terms of the state of emergency and at other times seeming to exaggerate the degree of reform that had already taken place, the US was viewed increasingly by black South Africans as part of the problem rather than part of the solution.⁵¹

Meanwhile, Botha and his government reverted back to old-style denunciations of American pressure as counterproductive, and were furious over even the limited

⁵⁰ Goldstone "Ambiguity and America: South Africa and US Foreign Policy," 812.

⁵¹ Ungar and Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," 250.

sanctions.⁵² South Africa had never asked for the policy nor felt compelled to adhere to its goals. While they were pleased that Reagan did not use sanctions to influence policy, Pretoria was not prepared to play the reciprocal role demanded by constructive engagement; their actions had no apparent impact on the constructive engagement policy.⁵³

Through constructive engagement, the US had hoped to convert South Africa from an international outcast into an important regional actor, a potential ally in America's never-ending attempt to contain Soviet expansionism in the region.⁵⁴ The *explicit* agenda of constructive engagement was that Pretoria could be influenced away from the apartheid system through establishing a positive and open relationship. This was undermined, however, by the fact that the South African government had stated that it resented the idea that it should make any moves towards reform, just because America criticized and threatened it

⁵² Ungar and Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," 252.

⁵³ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 81.

⁵⁴ Cocker, *The United States and South Africa, 1968-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics*, 161.

less.⁵⁵ Racism was steeped in the policies that Pretoria enacted. Botha and his allies were unwilling to give up minority rule in order to appease the international community. Truthfully, South Africa was not about to change its apartheid policies for the US and the West. Constructive engagement had done nothing to influence Pretoria to change policy. By the beginning of Reagan's second term, the force of opposition - domestically and internationally - was mounting against constructive engagement.

⁵⁵ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 81.

CHAPTER 5

US POLITICAL AND DOMESTIC BACKLASH

Although South Africa is frequently described as 'a bastion of free enterprise in Africa', the overwhelming majority of South Africans have never known free enterprise or the benefits in terms of human liberty it can provide. Such a system holds little enchantment for a party dedicated to free enterprise.¹

-Senator Nancy Kassebaum, (R)Kansas

In Reagan's first term, a growing backlash arose against the policy of constructive engagement. The left objected to the tilt towards South Africa, the linkage of the Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola to the Namibian negotiations and to the de-emphasis of human rights and development issues in favor of increased focus on military and security issues.² The right objected to economic assistance packages for African socialist and self-styled states and to the Administration efforts to improve relations with Angola and Mozambique.³

In April 1985, Reagan came under attack from within his own Republican Party on the policy. In an analysis of

¹ Pifer, *South Africa in the American Mind*, 6.

² Deborah Toler, "Constructive Engagement: Reactionary Pragmatism at Its Best," *A Journal of Opinion* 12, no. 3/4 (Autumn-Winter 1982): 11, www.jstor.org/stable/1166712 (accessed February 2, 2012).

³ *Ibid.*

Republican Party reactions to apartheid during this period, it was noted that apartheid had divided the right more deeply than any other recent issue.⁴ The Republican majority in the Senate voted 89-4 on a resolution condemning apartheid.⁵ By the end 1985, there was more who opposed the policy than those who favored it. The policy of constructive engagement was becoming less and less popular the longer it continued without any concrete results.⁶

According to Michael Clough, one of the complaints most frequently made by South Africans about constructive engagement was that the Americans were constantly moving the goal posts as it related to measurable reforms by Pretoria. In their view, the reforms instituted by the Botha government went a considerable way toward satisfying earlier US demands, but instead of approval South Africa received new demands.⁷ The "shifting goal posts" debate was

⁴ Baker, *The United States and South Africa: The Reagan Years*, 36.

⁵ Coker, *The United States and South Africa, 1968-1985: Constructive Engagement and Its Critics*, 266.

⁶ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 47.

⁷ Clough, "Southern Africa: Challenges and Choices," 1068.

direct result of the constructive engagement policy's focus on near and medium-term reforms rather than ultimate goals.⁸

It was noted that South Africa touched two of the deepest and most sensitive nerve centers in the very core of the American psyche during the Reagan administration: the commitment to racial equality and the commitment to human rights, which, some successfully argued during that time, were themselves intimately related.⁹ When Reagan first entered office, he and his administration incorrectly presumed that South African President P.W. Botha was genuinely committed to taking apart apartheid, negotiating security agreements with his neighbors, and helping the US and West prevent communist Russia from encroaching on new independent African states. During Reagan's first term, these assumptions were not put to the test.

The reality of constructive engagement's failure to produce the real reform as Washington had anticipated was made evident in Botha's 1985 'Rubicon' speech in Vienna. This meeting was held on the pretext that Pretoria had something to offer by way of substantial reforms. In the speech, Botha failed to live up to American expectations,

⁸ Clough, "Southern Africa: Challenges and Choices," 1077.

⁹ Pifer, *South Africa in the American Mind*, 6.

since the South African President chose the occasion to "warn off" foreign governments from interfering into the internal affairs of South Africa.¹⁰

South Africa misled the US in the Namibia talks, lulling Washington into a false sense of confidence. Piecemeal reforms and an apparent willingness to negotiate with some neighboring states added to the aura of Pretoria's commitment to change.¹¹ However, Pretoria's harsh tactics against apartheid opponents, incursion into neighboring states and the failure to end apartheid further emboldened critics of the Reagan's policy of constructive engagement - internationally and domestically - to take action into forcing Reagan to step up the pressure on South Africa. South Africa gave made little progress in ending apartheid based upon the ideals of constructive engagement. The events in South Africa and continued protests in the US and worldwide, forced Reagan to reassess the policy of constructive engagement and forced him to come to terms with the fact that the policy failed to yield positive results.

¹⁰ Alex Thomson, "Incomplete Engagement: Reagan's South Africa Policy Revisited," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 33, no. 1 (March, 1995): 87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/161547> (accessed February 2, 2012).

¹¹ Baker, "Facing up to Apartheid," 55.

As a result, the administration had to "rebrand" the policy of constructive engagement. By the mid 1980s, it was widely known that the US failed to deliver a strong enough message against apartheid. There was little to cheer about the problem that Reagan administration experienced because of its chosen style of communicating its position.¹²

This time, the administration placed an emphasis on public explanation of the policy. At end of Reagan's first term and the beginning of his second, the policy of constructive engagement was well known throughout the world. When first introduced, many in the international community were willing, albeit reluctantly, to give Reagan's policy of constructive engagement a chance. For decades, South Africa had rebuked the international community for its demands to end the system of apartheid. Reagan's policy was seen as the last chance to end the system of apartheid. However, the refusal of South Africa to enact reforms that would ultimately end the institution of apartheid only made the international movement to end apartheid stronger.

When reports began to surface nightly on US television of the unrest in South Africa - unarmed demonstrators being

¹² Thomson, "Incomplete Engagement: Reagan's South Africa Policy Revisited," 88.

attacked by the South African police and mass public funerals for those who died trying to end apartheid, etc. - the US politico and public began to ask if constructive engagement was contributing to the grave situation in South Africa. The escalating conflict in South Africa created a dilemma for the Reagan administration as those members of his inner circle and Republican Party began to verbally denounce the policies of apartheid and constructive engagement. By the mid-1980s a consensus had developed from those outside the Reagan administration that considered constructive engagement a failure. More importantly, the policy of constructive engagement at this time was beginning to alienate black South Africans who saw no change in their daily lives under the limited reforms enacted by Botha.

Constructive engagement promised that if the US could, as Crocker put it, "steer between the twin dangers of abetting violence in the Republic and aligning ourselves {US} with the cause of white rule," then it could contribute to the achievement of change in South Africa.¹³ By Reagan's second term, this was not happening. Scores of anti-apartheid opponents has been killed at the hands of

¹³ Ungar and Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," 238.

the Botha regime. The view of many was that the administration had given tacit approval for apartheid.

A central part of the problem with constructive engagement had been the way in which Washington had focused on the region as one more case of confrontation between West and East rather than as a genuine African struggle for liberation from white minority rule.¹⁴ The insistence that any independence settlement in Namibia must be linked to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola had served to paralyze the whole process.¹⁵ Together, this encouraged the South African government to embark on a destabilization campaign against their neighbors.

There was little to indicate that the US was gaining any new ground on diplomatic or strategic powers five years after the inception of constructive engagement. Noticeably, apartheid was still the rule of law in South Africa and the region was still very much in turmoil. In fact, there was no evidence that South Africa was about to change its course on apartheid. Black South Africans showed antipathy towards the policy since the five years the policy was in place. The introduction of the new

¹⁴ Freeman, "'Constructively' Supporting Aggression and Repression - Reagan's South Africa Policy," 628.

¹⁵ Ibid.

tricameral parliamentary system had coincided with the most devastating internal violence South Africa had experienced since the formation of the unified South African state in 1910.¹⁶

Consequently, the policy was now being viewed by a growing number of critics - international and domestic - to have been failing to secure any positive concessions from South Africa and by early 1985 there were growing demands for a sanctions package to be imposed.¹⁷ The South African apartheid issue succeeded for a time in gripping the American popular imagination and led to strong Congressional calls for sanctions by the summer of 1985 that the Reagan administration found hard to resist.¹⁸ What was more, because the policy failed to change the lives of black South Africans, their opposition to the policy began to surface. The strategy always seemed to be directed at dealing with structures of white authority within South

¹⁶ Ungar and Vale, "South Africa: Why Constructive Engagement Failed," 249.

¹⁷ Paul Rich, "United States Containment Policy, South Africa and the Apartheid Dilemma," *Review of International Studies* 14, no. 3 (July, 1988): 189, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20097143> (accessed February 2, 2012)

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

Africa, with the Administration never seriously trying to tap into the power of South Africa's black community.¹⁹

Through a series of township uprisings that commenced in August 1984, black South Africans mounted a massive challenge to white minority rule in their country. During the unrest, which continued into 1987, almost three thousand South Africans were to lose their lives, while the South Africa's security forces detained thirty thousand others.²⁰ Many black anti-apartheid groups developed out of a sense of exasperation. Crocker stated in 1981 that "the black communities of South Africa do not possess the means for a direct assault on white power, and there is little likelihood that this will change soon. The attitudinal ingredients of a potential revolution may be present, but the physical ones are not."²¹

Four years later, black opposition groups would prove Crocker wrong. The daily uprisings that were occurring in the majority black townships would put out any hope about the value and effectiveness of constructive engagement.

¹⁹ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 92.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

²¹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 87.

People were beginning to take to the airwaves and streets to denounce the policy of appeasement. The groups that were once all black, became more diverse. In a total rejection of apartheid, black South Africans mobilized to make the townships ungovernable, black local officials resigned in droves, and the government declared a State of Emergency in 1985 and used thousands of troops to quell "unrest."²²

Anti-apartheid groups now consisted of trade unions, sport clubs, university organizations, and religious groups, among others. Black opposition groups created a stalemate for Pretoria that plunged South Africa into a crisis that caused an international outcry.²³ Likewise, the awarding of the Nobel Prize for Peace to Bishop Desmond Tutu in 1984 raised the international profile of black opposition groups in South Africa.²⁴

At the beginning of Reagan's second term, South Africa was embroiled in what many described as a civil war. This was in part due to the South African constitution of 1983

²² Richard Knight, "Sanctions, Disinvestment, and U.S. Corporations in South Africa," in *Sanctioning South Africa*, ed. R.E. Edgar (New Jersey: African World Press, 1990), <http://richardknight.homestead.com/files/uscorporations.htm> (accessed February 11, 2012).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

that established a tricameral legislature that totally excluded the black majority of South Africa. In September 1984, when the constitution came into effect, many of the black townships exploded in violent protests. The unrest would soon escalate into the major cities of South Africa.

Pretoria declared a State of Emergency on July 20, 1985, seven months into Reagan's second term. The legislation was designed to suppress and hinder the activities of black opposition groups. The groups were becoming more and more vocal in their opposition to apartheid. The emergency declaration stipulated the police had the power to arrest, detain and interrogate without a warrant and "meetings" were banned. Television and radio coverage of the unrest was not allowed and newspapers coverage was severely curtailed.²⁵ South Africa's Minister of Law and Order banned "all gatherings held where any policy principle, or any actions of the government, or any statement, or the applications or implementation of any act is approved, defended, attacked, criticized or discusses,

²⁵ Knight, "Sanctions, Disinvestment and U.S. Corporations in South Africa."

or which is in protest against or support or in memory of anything.”²⁶

The strength of the black opposition was eventually having a real impact on the Reagan administration’s policy of constructive engagement.²⁷ Low-level contacts between the US government and the ANC began to take place, followed in September 1986 by a meeting between Crocker and the ANC leader-in-exile Oliver Tambo in London.²⁸ In July of that year, the State Department declared that the ANC had a “legitimate” voice in South Africa. In January 1987, Secretary of State George Shultz met with Tambo in Washington. Never before had meetings taken place with members in the Reagan administration and leaders ANC.

The force of black opposition had a direct effect on the strategy of constructive engagement. It was a vital factor in garnering the public support that led to the eventual enactment of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act.²⁹ The policy of constructive engagement had limited interaction with US government officials to only white

²⁶ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan’s Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 87.

²⁷ Ibid., 88.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 89.

leaders in Pretoria. However, the force of black opposition put pressure on Crocker to engage with the black opposition as well.

Constructive engagement's failures were the high point of the anti-apartheid movement in the US and internationally after Reagan won his second term in office. Through intense media coverage, events in South Africa quickly had an impact both in North America and Europe. Decisions of the US Congress and by US businesses had an immediate effect on business confidence in South Africa as well as among investors in Europe and South Africa. The impact of anti-apartheid movement on public opinion reached a critical mass and forced both the US government and the business community to take material action against apartheid.³⁰

In September 1985, President Reagan signed an executive order imposing limited economic sanctions against South Africa. To many, the imposition of limited sanctions was not enough to make South Africa change its course. By signing the executive order, Reagan in effect made South

³⁰ William Minter and Sylvia Hill, "Anti-Apartheid Solidarity in United States-South Africa Relations: From the Margins to the Mainstream," in *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* 3, no. 2. The South African Democracy Education Trust (Capet Town: Struik, 2005), 755.

Africa an issue the US Congress had to deal with. The outcome was the US Congress taking matters into its own hands, overriding a presidential veto, and voting the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act (CAAA) into law during in October 1986.³¹ For the first time in the US diplomatic history with South Africa, economic sanctions were imposed against South Africa.

The CAAA was a major rebuke of constructive engagement. The purpose of the Act, in its words, was to "set forth a comprehensive and complete framework to guide the efforts of the United States in helping to bring and end to apartheid in South Africa and lead to the establishment of a nonracial, democratic form of government."³² It became public law 99-440 on October 2, 1986. The Act was divided into four sections: ending apartheid, assisting victims of apartheid, undermining apartheid, multilateral measures to undermine apartheid, future policy toward South Africa and enforcement.

Officially, the act required U.S. policy toward South Africa to be designed to bring about the establishment of a

³¹ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 129.

³² Lulat, *United States Relations with South Africa. A Critical Overview from the Colonial Period to the Present*, 315.

nonracial democracy in South Africa, set forth actions that the US shall encourage South Africa to take, including releasing Nelson Mandela and establishing a timetable for the elimination of apartheid laws. Additionally, it required the US to adjust its actions toward South Africa to reflect the progress made by South Africa in establishing a nonracial democracy.³³

Other important elements of the Act were that U.S. policy toward the victims of apartheid was to use economic, political, diplomatic, and other means to remove the apartheid system and to assist the victims of apartheid to overcome the handicaps imposed on them by apartheid. The Act declared that U.S. policy toward the other countries in the region should be designed to encourage democratic forms of government, respect for human rights, political independence, and economic development. It ensured that the United States would encourage all participants in the negotiations to respect the right of all South Africans to participate in the political process without fear of retribution. It further required the United States to work for an agreement to suspend violence and begin negotiations

³³ "Bill Summary 99th Congress (1985 - 1986) H.r.4868," Library of Congress, <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d099:HR04868:@@L&summ2=m&> (November 13, 2011).

through coordinated actions with the major Western allies and with the governments of the countries in the region

Reagan vetoed the law but was overridden by Congress. Not since 1973 and the War Powers Act had the US Congress overturned a presidential veto on a foreign policy matter.³⁴ By the Senate, it was 78 to 21 and the House by 313 to 83. The fact that Reagan had written individually to a number of Senators urging them not to vote for the Bill - knowing that if it was passed he would veto it and this would be treading on dangerous ground.³⁵ Shortly after the Congress overrode his vote, Reagan would state his opposition to the law in a statement:

Today's Senate vote should not be viewed as the final chapter in America's efforts, along with our allies, to address the plight of the people of South Africa. Instead, it underscores that America -- and that means all of us -- opposes apartheid, a malevolent and archaic system totally alien to our ideals. The debate, which culminated in today's vote, was not whether or not to oppose apartheid but, instead, how best to oppose it and how best to bring freedom to that troubled country. I deeply regret that Congress has seen fit to override my veto of the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986. Punitive sanctions, I believe, are not the best course of action; they hurt the very people they are intended to help. My hope is that these punitive sanctions do not lead to more violence and more repression. Our administration will,

³⁴ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 138.

³⁵ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 48.

nevertheless, implement the law. It must be recognized, however, that this will not solve the serious problems that plague that country. The United States must also move forward with positive measures to encourage peaceful change and advance the cause of democracy in South Africa. Now is the time for South Africa's Government to act with courage and good sense to avert a crisis. Moderate black leaders who are committed to democracy and oppose revolutionary violence are ready to work for peaceful change. They should not be kept waiting. It would be tragic to lose this opportunity to create a truly free society which respects the rights of the majority, the minority, and the individual. There is still time for orderly change and peaceful reform. South Africans of good will, black and white, should seize the moment.³⁶

The CAAA was far reaching in its attempt to undermine the apartheid regime. For example, it prohibited a US depository institution from accepting, receiving, or holding a deposit account from the South African Government or from any entity owned or controlled by South Africa. It prohibited any US national from making any new investment in South Africa, effective 45 days after enactment of the Act; however, it exempted firms owned by black South Africans. It prohibited using US funds to promote US tourism in South Africa. Additionally, it declared that it was to be US policy to support negotiations with the representatives of all communities.

³⁶ Statement by Ronald Reagan on the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986, October 2, 1986, <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1986/100286d.htm> (accessed March 23, 2012).

With Congress effectively rebuking constructive engagement, the CAAA was a strong condemnation of Reagan's policy. Never before had the US government enacted strong laws aimed at forcing South Africa to end its policy of apartheid. The CAAA was far reaching than other executive orders aimed at the Pretoria regime. Now that the administration's hand was tied by the CAAA, it was legally required to uphold the very punitive economic sanctions that it considered inappropriate.³⁷

By 1987, shifts in public opinion and in Congress, as well as the ongoing crisis in South Africa, had substantive effects on opinion within the Reagan administration.³⁸ At the end of 1985, Secretary of State George Shultz appointed an advisory committee on South Africa. The Tambo-Shultz meeting reflected a longer-term process of change in the Washington debate about South Africa and US ties to South Africa that had developed in the 1980s; this debate now included not only the anti-apartheid movements and the US government, but also a wide range of other institutional

³⁷ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 152.

³⁸ Minter and Hill, "Anti-Apartheid Solidarity in United States-South Africa Relations: From the Margins to the Mainstream," 806.

actors.³⁹ In July 1986, in the midst of the sanctions debate, the administration decided to appoint an African-American as US Ambassador to South Africa, thereby replacing Herman Nickel, notorious for his opposition to sanctions and his bias towards the white regime.⁴⁰

The advisory committee report, released in January 1987, acknowledged that the administration's policy of constructive engagement "had failed to achieve its objectives." The report recommended that the first priority of US policy should be to help facilitate "good faith" negotiations between Pretoria and "representative leaders of the black majority aimed at shaping a nonracial democratic political system."⁴¹ Although the report by the 12-person panel featured dissents by three members who opposed stronger sanctions, and by two who felt the report's recommendations did not go far enough, the majority approved implementation not only of the CAAA of 1986, but also additional pressures on South Africa, encouragement of negotiations, and rapid expansion of ties with anti-apartheid forces, including the ANC. Although its

³⁹ Minter and Hill, "Anti-Apartheid Solidarity in United States-South Africa Relations: From the Margins to the Mainstream," 809.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Baker, "Facing up to Apartheid," 48.

recommendations were stronger than the policies followed by the Reagan administration and its successor under President George Bush, they are worth quoting as a notable indication of the mainstreaming of anti-apartheid ideas. Some excerpts follow:

- The 'reforms' so far enacted or considered by the South African government are limited, and fall far short of what was necessary. We believe that the 1983 constitution was actually counterproductive in that it ignored the political rights of blacks.
- The first and foremost priority of US policy should be to help to facilitate the beginning of 'good faith' negotiations between the South African government and representative leaders of the black majority aimed at shaping a non-racial democratic political system.
- The first steps the South African government must take are:
 - to release Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, and all other persons imprisoned for their political beliefs or detained unduly without trial;
 - to unban the ANC, and other political organizations, and establish the right of all South Africans to form political parties, express political opinions, and otherwise participate freely in the political process;
 - to terminate the State of Emergency and release the detainees held under the State of Emergency.
- US officials in all branches and levels of government should clearly communicate to South African officials these fundamentals:
 - the restoration of national citizenship to all persons born or naturalized within the internationally recognized territory of South Africa that have been denied citizenship on the basis of race;
 - the repeal of the Group Areas Act, the Native Lands Act, and the Population Registration Act;

- the reincorporation of the "independent"
homelands into the Republic of South Africa.⁴²

The commission also recommended 'strong presidential leadership' to implement the policy. While that was not forthcoming - President Reagan and key conservative advisers at no stage abandoned their fundamental bias towards the white apartheid regime - the report still indicated an irreversible shift in the political climate of official Washington.⁴³

On communism, the report stated:

We do not believe that the escalating conflict in South Africa will precipitate a major confrontation with the Soviet Union. While Moscow is certain to continue its policy of limited financial and military support for the African National Congress (ANC), and especially the South African Communist Party component within the ANC, it shows no inclination to become directly involved. The Soviets do stand to gain considerably, however, in a protracted conflict in South Africa embitters that country's black majority against the West.⁴⁴

Yet again, constructive engagement was dealt a blow. The entire premise of constructive engagement was centered upon the Administration's view that the Soviet Union would spread communism in African countries. Reagan would be

⁴² Minter and Hill, "Anti-Apartheid Solidarity in United States-South Africa Relations: From the Margins to the Mainstream," 807.

⁴³ Ibid., 808.

⁴⁴ Baker, "Facing up to Apartheid," 49.

remiss if he neglected the careful opinions of his own advisory committee.

Another failure of constructive engagement was the over reliance of capitalism as an agent of change. Some historians argue the Reagan administration relied heavily on American corporations operating in South Africa to bring about the change it wanted under the policy. Furthermore, it was believed the administration put too much faith in the Sullivan Principles.⁴⁵ American companies had only the ability to make a small dent in an economy suffering from the legacies of apartheid. It was a question of scale: 71 percent of those South Africans employed by US corporations may have been covered by the Sullivan Principles; however, they only amounted to 17 percent of the total working population.⁴⁶

Yet, the Administration remained convinced that punitive economic sanctions only hurt the very same people the CAAA intended to help. It publicized arguments that

⁴⁵ In 1977, Rev. Leon Sullivan, a board member of General Motors, drafted a corporate code of conduct for US companies operating in South Africa in an effort to abolish that country's apartheid policies. In his words, the overarching objective of these principles is "to support economic, social and political justice by companies where they do business," including respect for human rights and equal work opportunities for all peoples. General Motors was one of the American companies operating in South Africa that employed a large number of black South Africans.

⁴⁶ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 95.

sanctions only served to harm the South African black population, while it held capitalism as the key to the elimination of apartheid.⁴⁷ Some argued within the administration that economic sanctions had put little or no effective economic pressure on the South African business community or the apartheid regime, they have not changed the politics of the South African government and sanctions had not strengthened the forces of democratic reform.⁴⁸ On the contrary, they argued, sanctions contributed to increase poverty and high unemployment in the black South African community and further hardened white attitudes. Thus, the administration continued to encourage (existing) American investments in South Africa, despite the CAAA banning a new contact of this kind from US corporations.⁴⁹

With the entire backlash against constructive engagement coming from every segment of American life, in 1987, the Administration listed the following principles in which they expected South Africa to abide by:

- A new constitutional order for a united South Africa establishing equal political, economic, and social rights,

⁴⁷ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 154.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

- A democratic electoral system with multiparty participation and universal franchise for all adult South Africans,
- Effective constitutional guarantees of basic human rights,
- An independent judiciary,
- A constitutional allocation of powers between the national government and its constituent regional and local jurisdictions, in keeping with South Africa's deeply rooted regional and cultural traditions, and
- An economic system that guarantees economic freedom for every South African.⁵⁰

Another factor in constructive engagement's failure was the US anti-apartheid movement. Although public condemnation of apartheid had been present for decades, constructive engagement further increased their activism to finally end this political system. Since the early 1970's, anti-apartheid groups made gradual advances in their stated purpose of ending apartheid. The passage of the CAAA gave them increased momentum. Major groups such as TransAfrica and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), mostly made up of African-American Democratic lawmakers, took the lead in focusing America's attention back on the issue of apartheid. The CBC had been very vocal in its opposition to constructive engagement since Reagan introduced the

⁵⁰ Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa 1948-1994: Conflict of Interests*, 157.

policy. Each group was outspoken in their disdain for constructive engagement.

Moreover, many were calling for divesting in South African. Divesting was an idea that was the antithesis of constructive engagement. It was first advocated in the late 1960s but it was not until the 1980s when the idea was fully endorsed. Universities, state and local governments, corporations all joined the divestment movement. By the end of Reagan's presidency, numerous colleges and universities in the US had partially and/or fully divested in South Africa.

By the beginning of Reagan's second term, constructive engagement was on a downward trajectory. The reaction was intense and came from all areas of the US and international community. America's creditability amongst those in the international community that constructive engagement would ultimately end apartheid and create peace in the region was in doubt. Botha's limited reforms were only cosmetic on the surface. All attempts to change course only turned to appease the hardcore nationalists within his party. In order to save the policy, Reagan and his administration had to change course and redirect their attention to the language of the policy. They had hoped the limited

sanctions they enacted would quell the rising dissent from the left and right. In an action that could not have made their disdain for constructive engagement more clear, Congress enacted an anti-apartheid law aimed at finally ending apartheid and seeking stability in the country and southern Africa region. Constructive engagement did not live up to its promise creating a country in which every citizen of South Africa enjoyed the same rights.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

We should forgive but not forget. Truth and reconciliation are the only hope for nations that are bitterly divided.

-Nelson R. Mandela, Presidential Inaugural Address

When anyone attempts to describe the unique relationship between the US and South Africa under the policy of constructive engagement, they are attempting to describe a relationship based on a policy that was implemented with dual contradictions. On one hand, this policy was meant to stop the incursion of communism into a region that was strategically important to the US and the West. On the other, the policy was meant to align the United States with a government that had been castigated by the international community, as the administration would unaccountably state. The relationship between the two countries during the Cold War was a marriage of convenience based on common interests and ideologies. The United States viewed the debate over South Africa through the scope of the Cold War and the containment of communism.

The policy of constructive engagement illustrated that the US was willing to protect its interests and values. In the period that the policy was put into effect, the Cold War mentality was pervasive. Reagan was adamant about stopping the growing influence of communism in southern Africa. Moreover, the policy assumed that Pretoria was willing to change its political system of apartheid through a peaceful transition. Pretoria was too important in the US fight against communism to risk alienating them.

Chester Crocker stated that American involvement in South Africa should be pursued for reasons both ideological and humanitarian, both strategic and moral, in helping to bring about change in South Africa.¹ Trying to put the focus on American ideals of justice and liberty, constructive engagement's aim was to engage with South Africa on a friendly basis in hopes that the government would change their position on apartheid and make peace with their neighbors. By interlinking the two, Crocker unwisely assumed these two issues would be resolved under the administration of Ronald Reagan.

¹ Davies, *Constructive Engagement? How Reagan's Administration Tried to support South Africa without appearing to Endorse Apartheid*, 199.

It is widely accepted that the US foreign policy toward South Africa from the early days of the Cold War until the end of apartheid was ambiguous at best. Different presidential administrations offered positions that overlapped with or were extensions of the policies of their predecessor. Although the majority of the administrations offered condemnation of apartheid, all of them refused to implement tough economic and trade sanctions that could have crippled the South African economy. However, under Reagan, apartheid became an important issue in domestic politics.

When Reagan left office in 1989, constructive engagement was essentially dead, and, plans were underway to further undermine the institution of apartheid by Democrats and Republicans in Congress. The CAAA of 1986 led way to stricter economic sanctions. In addition, calls for Mandela's release from prison became vociferous. South Africa was faced with louder international calls to end apartheid, with many of Pretoria's staunchest allies, namely the governments of United States and United Kingdom, finally giving in to the growing public outcry in their countries to end the institution.

In assessing constructive engagement, one of the most extraordinary aspects of Reagan's policy of both of his terms was the failure to understand the level of reform the National Party was willing to make. South Africa showed little interest in changing its policies to simply appease the US. None of the reforms initiated by South Africa were meant to diminish the white power structure. Instead, Pretoria viewed itself as a stalwart ally to the US and the West in their attempt to prevent of communism in southern Africa. Pretoria was comfortable in its role as Africa's de facto hegemon and refused to change its policies regardless of the international community insistence that it change.

As noted above, when the policy of constructive engagement was put into effect, the Cold War mentality was pervasive. The administration's major concern was demonstrating to the world that constructive engagement was the best chance for real change in South Africa and stopping the spread of communism. South Africa's racial policies were not so much morally reprehensible as they were nuisance in America's quest to stop the growing influence of communism. The policy was meant to engage with South Africa in the hopes that the US could have strong

influence in South Africa when apartheid ended.

Yet, the question that still remains amongst foreign policy watchers: why did constructive engagement fail? From this, various conclusions emerge. The administration was convinced that orderly and peaceful change would occur without imposing strict conditions on South Africa. The problem with this questionable premise was that Pretoria wasn't open to any change that might undermine apartheid. By this measure, constructive engagement was formulated on a false sense of reality.

Another conclusion for the failure of constructive engagement was the linkage of the Namibia/Angola situation. This quid-pro-quo meant that Cuba must withdrawal from Angola and South Africa would grant Namibia its independence. However, this was never the aim of the policy. As long as South Africa was willing to help the US stop communism from entering the region, Washington was willing to overlook the Namibia situation.

Constructive engagement offered very little in tangible results. Botha reforms, implemented on his limited terms, offered little in results. With much fanfare, Botha and his regime pretended to reform their country. Botha

would begrudgingly denounce apartheid, and pretended to be friends with the US, especially with the advent of constructive engagement. But, this was a deceptive maneuver to conceal the reality: Botha wasn't willing to accept the US overtures and risking the minority white's hold on power.

Furthermore, the black opposition was suspicious of Reagan's overtures toward the regime. The administration was viewed as sympathetic to the National Party. Reagan and his administration did little to reach out to the black opposition groups, until the final months of Reagan's second term. Constructive engagement did not originally include securing the black opposition's concurrence of the policy. This was a flaw that continues to have historical ramifications in the present day.

Leading up to the end of the apartheid era, the subsequent release of Nelson Mandela from prison in 1990 and to present day, the relationship between the US and South Africa remains sensitive. Many leaders within the old guard of the ANC remain skeptical of America's intentions regarding a wide range of foreign policy issues. They often recall America's ambivalent attitude toward the

ANC during their struggle to end apartheid

In the end, apartheid ended in February 1990. Mandela was released from prison on February 11, 1990, having served 27 years in prison for his opposition to apartheid. On April 27, 1994, South Africa held its first multiracial election in the country's history, with the ANC² taking the majority of the votes. On May 10, 1994, Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa's first black President.

² Through a series of secret meetings, South Africa's President F.W. de Klerk (1989-1994), lifted the ban on the ANC and other black opposition groups to apartheid in 1990.

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