

SECRET

C12

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

OD(80)54
19 September 1980

COPY NO 44

CABINET
DEFENCE AND OVERSEA POLICY COMMITTEE

UK INTERESTS IN AFRICA AND DEMANDS FOR INTERNATIONAL MEASURES
AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth
Affairs

1. Officials have been considering the implications of a call for general economic sanctions against South Africa. Their report is being circulated separately (OD(80)53). It highlights the extent to which British interests will be at grave risk either if we were to acquiesce in the imposition of sanctions against South Africa or if we were to veto sanctions in isolation from our American and French partners.
2. The harm we should suffer from a complete trade embargo against South Africa would be so great that we would seem to have little alternative but to veto any such proposal, even if necessary in isolation. If faced with a demand for much more limited measures than a total embargo (and especially if the situation prompting the demand for them had given rise to widespread Western support for some such measures), the decision would be far less clear-cut. Whether we could acquiesce in a carefully negotiated package of limited measures, or should veto if necessary alone, is a decision we could only take in the light of circumstances at the time.

SECRET

/3.

189

65

66

55 67

56 68

57 69

58 70

59 71

60 72

61 73

62 74

63 75

64 76

65 77

66 78

67 79

68 80

69 81

70 82

71 83

72 84

3. Meanwhile our best course is to concentrate our efforts on seeking American and French solidarity in resisting any demands for new measures against South Africa, and discouraging them from assuming that they could safely hide behind our veto, thus leaving us to bear the brunt of African anger and retaliation alone. For this purpose we are trying to bring home to our partners the serious damage we might suffer at the hands of the African and other Third World countries if we were to cast a veto in isolation, the grave consequences (and futility) of imposing sanctions against South Africa for them as well as for us and the West generally, and the consequent necessity for a united Western front in resolute opposition, if necessary by triple veto, to any such demands.

4. For electoral and other reasons I am not optimistic that the present American administration will be willing to join us in vetoing sanctions; and if the Americans will not, the French are much less likely to do so either. The objective of avoiding a situation in which the decision has to be made is thus overriding. But if the worst comes to the worst we shall have to make a difficult decision on the basis of our best judgement of the balance of British and Western political and commercial interests. The group's report will be of great assistance to us if and when that decision has to be made.

5. One of the contingencies foreseen in the report - African pressures for extending the existing arms embargo against South Africa so as to cover items or activities which are now borderline cases or (according to our interpretation) not embargoed - will arise in the Security Council next week. We are consulting the Americans and French in the effort to maintain Western solidarity in opposing those demands which would be objectionable to us. We

do not yet know precisely what recommendations will be made. I have instructed my officials to keep in close touch with officials of the other departments mainly concerned and I shall be ready to consult my colleagues immediately the situation becomes sufficiently clear to enable us to consider collectively the decisions that may need to be made.

6. I invite my colleagues:

- (a) to take note of the report by officials and to endorse its conclusions;
- (b) to acknowledge that the interests of HMG would be seriously affected by the imposition of general economic sanctions against South Africa, or by an isolated UK veto of a sanctions resolution;
- (c) to agree that our primary objective should be to avoid a situation in which a general sanctions resolution would be put before the Security Council;
- (d) to agree that we should continue to impress upon the United States and French Governments the advantages to our joint national interests of a joint veto of a sanctions resolution whilst leaving them in doubt over the question as to whether we would be prepared to veto alone;
- (e) to confirm that officials should remain in close contact on this issue and that we should be ready to consider this issue further collectively in the light of subsequent developments.

c