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**WALTER MONDALE AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE IN SOUTH AFRICA:
A STUDY FOR THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN FOREIGN POLICY**

This museum exhibition will center on the 1977 meeting between Vice President Mondale and the Prime Minister of South Africa, John Vorster. The events before and following this contentious meeting serve as an ideal case study into the role the U.S. can play in promoting human rights in a foreign country, while holding true to its foreign interests and security. This topic is of extreme relevance as many of the subjects surrounding the issue of principles vs. interests are at play in the current administration's foreign policy. This exhibit will analyze the chronological events surrounding the meeting in May 1977 including:

1. The state of apartheid in South Africa in 1977 and policies used by previous Administrations towards South Africa.
2. Preparation for the 1977 meeting in Vienna, including discussions within the White House regarding the correct tone and message to be delivered.
3. Coverage of the three meetings between Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster, May 19-20, through the use of memos from the meeting.
4. Developments after the meeting, including press conferences from both Vice President Mondale and Prime Minister Vorster, and reaction from within and outside the Administration.
5. Conclusions, the evolution in policy towards South African, and planting the seeds for change.

In addition to these topics, an introductory section will be presented, in conjunction with my fellow exhibitors, regarding the early life and teachings of Mr. Mondale. In relation to my exhibit, this will provide a valuable context into the beginnings of Mr. Mondale's beliefs in human rights his commitment to this cause up through his term as

Vice President. I envision my exhibit will be a mix of personally written narratives, historical document, photos, and objects. I will outline each of these for each section in this report. The narratives I give will be similar to the ones I will use to describe the panels in my exhibit. The list of documents are documents I will use in the exhibit to highlight themes and passages by the speakers themselves. The photos will be used to give context to the narratives and documents, and allow the viewer to picture the scenes and the participants.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of World War II, the United States has become a global superpower. Its influence can be felt throughout the world and many countries look to the U.S. for aid in times of crisis. Thus is the role of a global superpower. Over the years the U.S. has used the military to stop dangerous regimes and used its monetary might to assist third-world economies. Another role of a superpower, which is sometimes lost in the mix, is a leader in promoting human rights and to challenge other countries who allow human rights abuses.

Although most Presidential administrations speak of fighting for human rights in their foreign policies, there are definitely shades of gray when it comes to their actions. One administration who cannot be faulted for a lack of action is the Carter Administration, who placed the defense of human rights as one of its fundamental principles. Late in the Presidential campaign, then Vice Presidential nominee Walter Mondale asserted that a Carter White House would work for the “restoration of a foreign policy that will enable Americans to see the best of themselves reflected in our actions abroad.” With a commitment to foster majority rule, self-determination, and racial equity as a matter of fairness and basic human rights, the administration focused on the unrest in South Africa and the policy of apartheid. Vice President Mondale would serve a pivotal role in delivering this message to South Africa, while meeting with Prime Minister John Vorster in May 1977.

APARTHEID IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa has been a heterogeneous mix of races and cultures since the settlement of Dutch explorers in the 17 century. Strife was a common occurrence throughout the region, but more so upon the inception of apartheid in 1948. Under the banner of racial segregation and apartheid, the National Party swept into power thanks in part to an upswing in state nationalism. Over the next two years, the South African government instituted a variety of laws to segregate the population into separate buses, beaches, schools, and housing districts. Movement of Africans through white urban areas was controlled through Pass Laws and most Africans were only allowed in white areas to work as migrants. Each year hundreds of thousands Africans were arrested in violations of these laws and held for indefinite periods of time.

By the early 1970s, Africans started to fight back in the form of dissent and demonstrations. This growing fear of a black uprising allowed the government to abolish the judicial system and allowed the indefinite detainment of anyone considered a threat to the country. Word started to spread of mass detainment, torture, and death of black South Africans. The situation came to a head on June 17, 1976 when police opened fire on a demonstration in Soweto killing 566 blacks. The situation in South Africa was becoming dire, and with the swearing in of the Carter Administration, a policy of peace in South Africa became a top priority.

CHANGING U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN AFRICA

U.S. foreign policy in South Africa under the Nixon and Ford Administrations was centered on a policy of Communist containment. With Communist incursions in Angola and Ethiopia, many felt Africa would be the next battle ground in the Cold War. In order to maintain healthy relations with South Africa and help keep the Soviet Union from southern Africa, the U.S. turned a blind eye to apartheid.

Conversely, President Carter believed different and instead believed the best way to contain Communism was to promote human rights. The administration felt that civil war and armed struggle was exactly what the Soviets needed to establish a foothold in the continent, and that promoting human rights was promoting Democracy. Secretary of

State Cyrus Vance would later comment, “In no other aspect of foreign policy did our administration differ so fundamentally from that of our predecessors.”

The biggest step the administration faced was the mistrust old foreign policies created between the U.S., white minority rule, and black majority populations. Africans and Afrikaners alike were accustomed to a U.S. foreign policy who considered Africa a Cold War pawn, and not interested in on-the-ground issues. To combat this mistrust, Vice President Mondale was placed in charge of the administration’s African policy. The first step was to make clear to the South African government the new U.S. policy against apartheid. The task would not be easy. This message would need to be carried to the conservative Prime Minister, John Vorster, who was a staunch proponent of apartheid. It would be decided that the Vice President was the best person to deliver this message.

PREPARING FOR THE MEETING, MARCH – MAY, 1977

The Vice President would spend a great deal of time preparing for his meeting in Vienna. He studied several Department of State files on the political, social, and racial background of South Africa. Most of the administration favored using the Vice President to address Prime Minister Vorster. David Aaron, Deputy Advisor to the President for National Security Affairs, in a memo to Vice President Mondale stated the Vice President will lend legitimacy to the message of “the game is up.”

Then again, there were some in disagreement with the prospects of a meeting. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski disagreed with having the meeting stating, “I see very little merit in the Vice President meeting with Vorster. He will not single-handedly and in a single meeting alter Vorster’s point of view.” There were also concerns the meeting may lend credibility to South Africa or may derail the ongoing anti-apartheid movement. Some officials also wondered if the true language from the meeting would be broadcast to the people of South Africa considering the government’s control of the media. Nevertheless, the administration felt compelled to act and the meeting went along as scheduled.

MEETING IN VIENNA, MAY 19-20, 1977

On May 19, Vice President Mondale found himself in the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, Austria, seated across the table from Prime Minister Vorster and the South African delegation. For the next two days, the two delegations debated several topics concerning southern Africa. The first day consisted of two meetings, covering the topic of independence for the states of Rhodesia and Namibia. After a productive session, the two sides sat down again the next day to discuss the unrest in South Africa. It was during this meeting the two sides battled over the policy of apartheid.

The Vice President began the debate expressing hope the South African government would provide some progress on ending apartheid. He went on to suggest that the repeal of the Pass Laws would be helpful, and that the banishment of persons, such as Winnie Mandela, were harmful to their international relations. In the end, the Vice President would reiterate the choice was South Africa's and that change was in the country's best interests.

As expected, Prime Minister Vorster did not welcome the message, and that in fact it caused him "enormous suffering". He rejected the claim the U.S. had a good understanding of the situation because in his opinion, Africans and American blacks are not similar. Vorster felt a more appropriate comparison was the American Indian, who the U.S. had dealt with quite harshly.

The exchange continued back and forth between the two sides. Vice President Mondale continued to press for change, at one point acknowledging that the Administration would not come to South Africa's defense if internal conflict escalated. The Prime Minister responded that the country has attempted to make strides to integrate Africans into South African society, and that "We are not as white as we are painted." In the end, both sides agreed that the meeting was fruitful to the point of getting the perspectives of both sides on the table.

AFTERMATH – PRAISE AND CRITICISM

Upon returning from Vienna, Vice President Mondale received both praise and criticism from the media and political groups. The Washington Post claimed the Vice President "set an assertive, liberal tone for American foreign policy.", but Conservatives

felt differently. Among the critics was then former Governor Ronald Reagan, who felt the Carter Administration lacked recognition of international events and was ignoring the real threat – the spread of Communism. Former Under Secretary of State, George Ball, weighed in criticizing the Carter Administration’s “inability” to face “the realities of the South African scene.” Vice President Mondale fired back rejecting “any definition of this country’s national interest which fails to include a definition of our commitment to human rights.”, and that “real enthusiasm” existed abroad for the Carter initiatives. The Vice President would continue the defense in a speech at the Naval Academy stating, “We’ve survived for 200 years as a free people because we’ve had a strong defense and because we’ve never ... lost our commitment to human rights.”

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Apartheid in South Africa would continue until 1990 when newly elected Prime Minister, FW de Klerk, outlawed the policy. It is clear Vice President Mondale’s meeting with Prime Minister Vorster helped to plant the seed for ending apartheid in South Africa. Although, there are some who felt diplomatic missteps hurt the anti-apartheid movement and strengthened Vorster’s grip on the country, it should also be noted the Reagan Administration returned to a Nixon-type policy on South Africa and turned their heads on apartheid. It was not until late into his second term that Reagan was forced to deal with South Africa that U.S. foreign policy changed. One can be left to wonder if the end of apartheid would have come sooner had the Carter Administration policies been continued past 1980.

The events before and following this contentious meeting serve as an ideal case study into the role the U.S. can play in promoting human rights in a foreign country, while holding true to its foreign interests and security. In my exhibition I looked to explore these topics and provide a contrast to the lessons learned during this period to current foreign policy struggles. I hope this exhibit will encourage others to contemplate such topics, and ask themselves, what role should a free, democratic, global superpower play in promoting international human rights?

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