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Destabilizing Rhodesia

By William Safire

WASHINGTON — If the Carter-Young-McGovern campaign to “destabilize” the most freely elected government in Africa were to succeed, this would be the result:

Bishop Muzorewa’s Government, under world economic boycott and under siege from terrorists in neighboring states, would fall. The two terrorist groups would then settle their scores in a civil war. The all-black totalitarian state that would emerge would be recognized by nearby rulers, and the Carter Administration would lift its sanctions. That is called a “human rights policy.”

Even worse, in South Africa, the most extreme white racists would argue persuasively that all attempts to accommodate black self-rule are doomed.

Surely this is not the result sought by Mr. Carter and Andrew Young, any more than the slaughter in Cambodia was envisaged by Senator McGovern when he scoffed at predictions of a bloodbath if Communists took over in Southeast Asia. Why, then, has the President condemned the recent transition to black majority rule and continued our economic strangulation?

One Carter motive is to align his administration with a black “wave of the future” in Africa. Another is to fend off a Soviet-Cuban threat of invasion (although not until recently has Mr. Young seen this “stabilizing” presence as a threat). Another Carter motive is to cling to his black-activist support in the U.S., his only solid source of strength in many forthcoming primaries.

Under these pressures, our normally isolationist President has gone into a spasm of interventionism, imposing the American way of politics upon black and white Rhodesians. His imperial ruling that their election was not “free and fair” enough to rate the sort of recognition the U. S. recently extended to Peking was the height of hypocrisy.

How will Congress react to the arrogance of impotence? Not long ago, it set a standard for the lifting of sanctions, and the President has made a mockery of that Congressional intent.

But Liberals in Congress are nervous about opposing Carter on this, and some Conservatives are loath to help Mr. Carter further weaken the Presidency. The votes to overrule the President on his African blundering are certainly there — but is there a non-confrontational way out?

Enter Allard Lowenstein. Many people in Washington are wondering: what is Al Lowenstein up to? Who is he working for?

This former Democratic Congressman, best known for organizing anti-

war sentiment into the “Dump-Johnson” movement, has impeccable anti-apartheid credentials after two decades of African involvement. He served as Mr. Carter’s representative at the U. N. Human Rights Commission, and left Administration employ quietly.

As a private citizen, he was a member of a delegation that observed the Rhodesian election and pronounced it “a relatively free expression of national will.” His frequent trips to Africa are usually paid for by the U. S. Government under a vague human-rights rubric. Mr. Lowenstein operates at high levels: this month, on July 1, he met with President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and the next day with President Julius K. Nyerere of Tanzania. He has lobbied about 100 Congressmen of all persuasions on a “middle way” in Rhodesia, sees both Brzezinski and Vance, and was suspected of being a harbinger of a change in Carter policy before last week’s decision to continue sanctions.

“If the Administration does not accept the lifting of sanctions as one of its options,” Mr. Lowenstein says carefully, “the goals it asserts are doomed to failure.”

Middlemen like Lowenstein and others are seeking a deal that would lift U. S. sanctions in conjunction with a promise of British-supervised elections before long, and with a change in the current internal settlement that would give blacks a say in the Constitution.

I think it is wrong for outsiders to say, after a free election, “Now let’s make it two out of three.” As for Constitutional rights, blacks as well as women were slighted through Constitutions of the United States and recently in Kenya, but once power passes, Constitutions are changed. Liberals here and black leaders abroad may need a face-saver, however, and some minor concessions would make sense.

Al Lowenstein, certified antiwar Liberal and experienced President-dumper, clings to the hope that Mr. Carter may change his mind. How do his Democratic friends respond when Lowenstein attests firsthand to the honesty of elections Mr. Carter officially scorns? “It’s like in the dump-Johnson days,” he says. “An awful lot of people tell you privately they agree with you, but it’s going to have to catch on before they’d say so publicly.”

The idea that the President is applying an unconscionable, racist double-standard to Rhodesia Zimbabwe is catching on, but well-intentioned compromisers like Al Lowenstein still have no idea to what degree Jimmy Carter’s African policy is controlled by Andrew Young.