



March 31, 1967

Letter, South African Ambassador to the United States Taswell, "United States Defence Policy"

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Summary:

The South African ambassador to the United States writes to the South African Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Cape Town to discuss a story published in the Rand Daily Mail that reported a United States plan to invade Southern Africa.

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VERTROUOLIK.

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PRETORIA.

144 -4- 1967

DIE KOMMANDANT-GENERAAL VAN DIE S.A. WEERMAG EN
SEKRETARIS VAN VERDEDIGING.

V.S.A. : Verdedigingsbeleid teenoor S.A.

Ek stuur u hiermee ter inligting asseblief
n afskrif van diensbrief 8/24/2, 8/6 van 31 Maart 1967
ontvang van die Ambassade in Washington.

D. S. FRANKLIN

SEKRETARIS VAN BUITELANDSE SAKE.

VERTROUOLIK.

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quickly into trouble spots around the world. The
was that if the United States decided to intervene in a
the fighting troops and initial supporting elements for
missions would be flown to the scene. They would then
be trucks, tanks, helicopters and other equipment as they
unloaded from the F.D.L.S.

The core of the programme was the F.D.L.S. ships and
first one is already under construction in a Georgia ship
in the defence budget for this year \$33 million was requ
for the programme.

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8/6

31st March, 1967.

CONFIDENTIAL

THE SECRETARY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, CAPE TOWN.

(Original and one copy to Cape Town
2 Copies to Pretoria)

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINISTER VAN BUITENLANDSE ZAKEN
MINISTRY/REISBURG KOP
3-2-1967
PLAASD OR FILE
3/4 M. J.

United States Defence Policy: Southern Africa.

We have learnt that the Rand Daily Mail published a banner headlined story on Wednesday originating from its correspondent in Washington (Ray Heard) alleging the existence of a vast United States plan for the invasion of Southern Africa. We have not seen the full report but we can give some factual background to Mr. Heard's rather fanciful story.

Some years ago planners in the United States Department of Defence conceived the idea of equipping the United States army/navy with Fast Deployment Landing Ships (FDLS). These ships were to be used as floating supply depots, filled with troops and equipped for 15 days of operation. They were to be stationed along the United States coast and around Eurasia. Having an operational speed of 25 knots they were intended to move quickly into trouble spots around the world. The idea was that if the United States decided to intervene in a crisis the fighting troops and initial supporting elements for two divisions would be flown to the scene. They would then pick up trucks, tanks, helicopters and other equipment as they are unloaded from the F.D.L.S.

The core of the programme was the F.D.L. ships and the first one is already under construction in a Georgia shipyard. In the Defence budget for this year \$302 million was requested for the programme.

When the budget came before the Senate Committee on Armed Services and the Subcommittee on Defence of the Appropriations Committee late January early February 1967 this item on the budget/...

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get encountered unexpected opposition. The Committee turned down and the Senate in turn rejected it with only two votes against the rejection.

The text of the hearings in the Committee - expurgated for security reasons - has just been published and it reveals that the opposition was sparked by Senator Richard Russel, Democrat from Georgia, who is also the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and one of the most powerful men in the Senate. I attach an extract of the relevant passages from the hearings.

Senator Russel's remarks bear reading. You will observe that he coupled his opposition to this programme to a fear that the existence of these ships will encourage the United States towards interventionism - and specifically so in Southern Africa.

This then is the story behind Mr. Heard's report. (Actually the SABC referred to Senator Russel's remarks in a news broadcast we heard in Washington about two weeks ago). It seems to us that Mr. Heard missed the significance of the incident. As we see it it was not a question of some diabolical scheme against Southern Africa having been revealed. If such a scheme exists it is not revealed by this exchange. Indeed Mr. McNamara's and General Wheeler's evidence suggested that these ships were intended for use in Europe and Asia, (although they could always be used elsewhere as well).

What is to our mind significant is that the purely coincidental tying by Russel of the programme to possible use of the ships in Southern Africa sparked such massive opposition from him that he changed his position despite the fact that it meant giving up a lucrative contract for his State.

In the process he carried the vast majority with him. There were obviously others who opposed it for other reasons. Senator Margeret Chase Smith told me that she opposed it because the contract for the ships was being given to one firm. This was detrimental to shipbuilding interests in her State, Maine.

We/...

We are intrigued with the thought that Senator Russel's interest in the matter possibly came about as a result of a talk I had with him late last year. I reported on it to you at the time and you will recall that he then expressed his astonishment at the possibility that the United States could be moving into a confrontation with South Africa.

Another part of Heard's story apparently alleged that 100 United States military officers were being taught Afrikaans. We understand that he has since indicated that this information was not correct. As you know United States personnel serving in South Africa - particularly service personnel - are given lessons in Afrikaanse prior to their transfer, Wives of Embassy officials often assist in this. At the present time there are three receiving instruction.

The State Department spokesman was asked to comment about Heard's report and he said that "I can assure you there is no basis for it."

AMBASSADOR.

H. L. T. Taswell

J3FB/KP