

December 16, 1974

US Department of State, Intelligence Note, 'Rhodesia: A Breakthrough Toward Settlement?'

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Summary:

Description of Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith's new announcement regarding the settling of Rhodesia's nine year old constitutional stalemate. Hostilities would cease and negotiations would be renewed, along with a release of all African political detainees.

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INTELLIGENCE NOTE

BUREAU OF INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH

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RHODESIA: A BREAKTHROUGH TOWARD SETTLEMENT?

In a surprise radio broadcast December 11, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith announced a dramatic new step toward solving Rhodesia's nine-year-old constitutional stalemate. Smith said he had received assurances that Rhodesian insurgents:

- would cease hostilities immediately;
- were prepared to enter into new constitutional negotiations without preconditions.

In return, Smith agreed to:

- release all African political detainees;
- guarantee their freedom to participate in normal political activities.

A joint communique by Rhodesia's African nationalist leaders on December 12 confirmed the agreement. The communique, differing from Smith's announcement, however, stated that cease-fire instructions would not be issued to insurgents in the field until a firm date had been fixed for the start of the proposed talks. The contradiction appeared to be a technical one that could be easily resolved.

Smith's announcement mentioned no date, but the talks are expected to begin within two months. They may be chaired by the British Government.

An Intensive Series of Maneuvers. The surprise development came only four days after an intensive diplomatic campaign, which was jointly initiated by Zambia

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- 2 -

and South Africa in strict secrecy in September, appeared to have reached a serious impasse. That campaign brought together, in Lusaka in early December, leaders of Rhodesia's four nationalist movements* and the Presidents of Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana for meetings aimed at establishing a basis for new constitutional talks.

The nationalist leaders, after agreeing to form a common front under the ANC to negotiate with Rhodesia's white minority regime, reportedly added--in the last session of the talks--a demand that future negotiations be conditioned on Smith's acceptance of the principle of immediate majority (i.e., African) rule. Smith rejected this demand on December 7.

What happened between then and December 11 to cause the dramatic turnabout?

- The earlier deadlock may have resulted from misrepresentations and/or misinterpretations of the Africans' position. At any rate, the demand for immediate majority rule was not included in the joint communique issued by African leaders at the conclusion of their talks in Lusaka. (The communique did imply, however, that the insurgency would continue until a settlement had been achieved.)
- An ANC spokesman who participated in the Lusaka meeting said that while the issue of majority rule had been discussed, the question of timing was to be negotiable.
- South African Prime Minister Vorster, who was kept informed of developments in Lusaka, told our Ambassador that the demand for immediate majority rule had been put forward by ZANU's militant leader, Ndabaningi Sithole, during the closing sessions of the Lusaka meeting; the demand was subsequently presented to two Rhodesian emissaries who journeyed to Lusaka on December 6 to learn the results of the meeting.

* Bishop Abel Muzorewa, chairman of the African National Council (ANC); Joshua Nkomo, leader of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU); Ndabaningi Sithole, leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU); and James Chikerema, head of the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI), a splinter group comprised of ZANU and ZAPU dissidents.

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- 3 -

--Smith publicly blamed Tanzania's President Nyerere, who chaired the meeting between the nationalist leaders and Smith's emissaries, for encouraging the hard-line position.

Whatever the cause of the apparent deadlock, Smith remained in contact with Zambia's President Kaunda, who in turn consulted with the four nationalist leaders. Kaunda evidently was successful in persuading the nationalists to withdraw their demand for immediate majority rule.

According to Vorster, Kaunda and Smith were then able to reach agreement that, subject to the approval of Presidents Nyerere and Khama, Smith would announce:

- an immediate release of political prisoners; and
- a mutually agreed cease-fire, effective almost immediately.

Following Smith's announcement on December 12, the nationalist leaders returned to Salisbury, where they issued their communique confirming that an agreement had been reached. ZANU's Sithole and ZAPU's Nkomo, whom Smith had provisionally released from prison to attend the Lusaka meeting, returned to Salisbury as free men for the first time in almost 10 years. The Rhodesian Government's ban on activities by ZANU and ZAPU will not be lifted, but both men and their followers will be allowed to engage in political activities as members of the expanded African National Council, the only effective black political organization not proscribed by the regime.

Nine Years of Settlement Efforts. For the nine years that Smith has governed Southern Rhodesia, meaningful political participation by the black population has been virtually suspended. Britain, as the responsible power, has repeatedly failed in its efforts to negotiate a settlement acceptable to both the white minority, numbering 250,000, and the African majority of over 5 million. Despite the pressure of UN-enforced economic sanctions, the Smith regime grew increasingly intransigent in its refusal to allow even a gradual diminution of its political control.

Good Offices From Rhodesia's Neighbors. But a new event--the April coup in Portugal, which precipitated progress toward independence and majority rule in Angola and Mozambique--destroyed South Africa's geo-political

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- 4 -

rationale for supporting Rhodesia as a "buffer state." In refusing to take action, covert or overt, to interfere with Mozambique's progress toward independence under a FRELIMO government, Pretoria tacitly implemented the carrot side of a carrot-and-stick approach to black governments in the region: the assumption or hope that new black governments, once in power, will recognize their undeniable economic need for South African good will.

Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda, always an astute politician, seized on this opening in South African policy to enlist Pretoria's aid in pressing Rhodesia to negotiate. Discreet consultations with the South Africans prepared the way for a new round of talks about a Rhodesian settlement.

The Zambian-South African campaign took a dramatic turn early in November, when Smith agreed to release prominent Rhodesian nationalists to attend secret talks in Lusaka which were aimed at establishing a unified black Rhodesian position on settlement.

This first round of Lusaka talks (about November 8) did not produce a united front despite:

- the unusual efforts made to include long-imprisoned nationalists Nkomo and Sithole. (Sithole first sent substitutes but shortly afterward visited Lusaka secretly himself.)
- a concerted drive by the presidents of the neighboring states of Tanzania and Botswana, along with Kaunda and the prospective head of Mozambique's independent government, Samora Machel (all present in Lusaka), to bring into one fold (1) Rhodesians in exile, (2) the imprisoned leaders, and (3) Bishop Abel Muzorewa, leader of the African National Council.

Smith--Signs of Movement. Responding to pressure from his neighbors, notably South Africa, Prime Minister Smith told the press on December 1 that he:

- favored "detente" in southern Africa; and
- would talk to those who previously supported "terrorism" if they were now prepared to work constitutionally.

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- 5 -

Smith's statement suggested that he and many white Rhodesians were reluctantly being forced to consider alternatives to the relatively comfortable situation they had enjoyed since 1965. Long accustomed to the reassuring presence of the Portuguese on their eastern flank in Mozambique and of South Africa on the south, they face a changing situation in which they cannot be sure of Pretoria's continuing support if guerrilla warfare spreads or intensifies.

Rhodesian Nationalists Unite. Smith again agreed to release Nkomo and Sithole to participate in a second round of talks among the nationalist leaders, which got underway in Lusaka on December 4. Kaunda, aided by Nyerere and Botswana's President, Sir Seretse Khama, evidently succeeded in pressuring the four nationalist groups into forming a common front, a goal which has persistently eluded the OAU and other outside mediators. The joint communique stated their agreement to:

- unite under the umbrella of the ANC for the purpose of conducting negotiations;
- accept the ANC's Muzorewa as temporary leader of the coalition, pending the convening within four months of a conference to decide on permanent leadership and organizational structure.

The apparent price for acceptance by the militants in ZANU, ZANU, and FROLIZI of a merger under Muzorewa's moderate leadership was the inclusion in the communique of language endorsing the continuation of the insurgent struggle until a settlement was achieved.

Prospects. Smith's surprise announcement and its confirmation by African leaders give cause for renewed optimism that the Rhodesian constitutional deadlock may be closer to resolution than at any time in the past nine years. But the toughest bargaining still lies ahead:

- As in past settlement efforts, the greatest difficulties will center on how rapidly the transition to majority rule will be achieved. African demands for immediate majority rule will be unacceptable to Smith and perhaps represent a maximum bid put forth by the liberation groups for bargaining purposes.

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An Intensive Series of Maneuvers.

The surprise development came only four days after an intensive diplomatic campaign, which was jointly initiated by Zambia and South Africa in strict secrecy in September, appeared to have reached a serious impasse. That campaign brought together, in Lusaka in early December, leaders of Rhodesia's four nationalist movements [Bishop Abel Muzorewa, chairman of the African National Council (ANC); Joshua Nkomo, leader of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU); Ndabaningi Sithole, leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU); and James Chikerema, head of the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI), a splinter group comprised of ZANU and ZAPU dissidents], and the Presidents of Zambia, Tanzania, and Botswana for meetings aimed at establishing a basis for new constitutional talks.

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