

# PERSPECTIVE

## How the United States is helping equip South Africa's military

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On November 4, 1977, the United States voted along with the other 14 United Nations Security Council members to impose a mandatory arms embargo on the Republic of South Africa in response to that country's crackdown against black opposition movements and individuals. The Security Council resolution, the first of its kind ever adopted by the U.N., ordered an immediate halt in deliveries to South Africa of arms, ammunition, military vehicles and equipment, para-military gear, and spare parts for previously supplied weaponry.

"We have just sent a very clear message to the government of South Africa," Andrew Young, the United States ambassador to the U.N., declared after the vote. But whatever its symbolic significance, the U.N. action is unlikely to have much more practical effect than previous embargoes unless our government acts forcefully to close the loopholes in existing bans on arms deliveries to South Africa. For the fact is that despite a 1963 executive order banning such deliveries, the U.S. continues to be one of South Africa's leading arms suppliers.

Our research suggests that there are several clandestine or quasi-legal channels through which U.S.-produced, U.S.-designed, and U.S.-equipped weapons are transferred to South Africa. Some of these

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channels involve overseas subsidiaries and partners of U.S. arms firms. Others involve deliveries of "civilian" equipment which is modified for military purposes in South Africa or used to augment military stockpiles as needed. While these channels reach all branches of the South African military, our research has focused on the air force, where the most blatant violations have occurred.

Of the 578 aircraft listed in South African Air Force (SAAF) hands by London's prestigious International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), at least 178—more than one-third—are partly or completely of U.S. origin. Some of these—F-86 Sabre fighters and C-130 Hercules transports—were delivered before the 1963 embargo. But most have been delivered in the past few years.

Aircraft of U.S. origin delivered to the SAAF after the embargo was imposed include 15 Lockheed L-100's, 7 Swearingen Merlin-IV Transports, and at least 12 Cessna Model 185 Skywagons. U.S.-designed and U.S.-powered aircraft delivered during this period included 19 Piaggio P-166S patrol planes, 40 AM-3C Bosbok utility craft, and 40 C-4M Kudu liaison planes.

These planes may not be the most advanced aircraft in the SAAF's inventory, but they play a key role in the kind of sporadic scattered counterinsurgency struggles in which South Africa has been engaged. U.S. planes were used, for instance, to airlift supplies to South African troops fighting in the Angolan civil war of 1975, and to ferry riot troops from one embattled South African city to another following the 1976 black uprising in Soweto.

Still other U.S. aircraft, flown by the all-white, civilian "Air Commandos," are available in times of emergency for reconnaissance and liaison duties in border regions and in Namibia (Southwest Africa), which is illegally occupied by South

Africa.

In some instances, these planes were delivered directly from the United States with the government's blessing. Such, at least, was the case with the Lockheed L-100's, the Swearingen Merlin-IV's, and the Cessna 185's. These aircraft were declared "civilian" equipment by the State Department and thus exempted from the embargo—even though U.S. officials were apparently aware that they would be used by the SAAF for military purposes. In a secret 1970 National Security Council document, known in government circles as the "Tar Baby" statement (after the character in the "Uncle Remus" stories), the Nixon administration agreed to provide limited military assistance to the Pretoria regime.

According to the NSC document, portions of which were later leaked to the press, the White House decided to "enforce the arms embargo against South Africa but with liberal treatment of equipment which could serve either military or civilian purposes." The L-100's, Merlins, and 185's easily fit into this category.

The Lockheed L-100 "Commercial Hercules" is an almost exact replica of the C-130 Hercules cargo plane flown by the U.S. Air Force and many other military agencies around the world. Both can carry some 43,000 pounds of cargo or 92 combat troops over distances up to 2,500 miles. The military version has enhanced range and payload capabilities, some additional electronics and a paratroop door, but otherwise there is little to distinguish it from the civilian version. Aircraft of this type were reportedly used to carry supplies to the South African troops fighting in southern Angola during the 1975 civil war in that country.

The Swearingen Merlin-IV is a 20-passenger, all-weather, pressurized execu-



tive-type transport. It is powered by two AiResearch turboprop engines and can carry 15 to 20 passengers or up to 5,000 pounds of cargo over distances of several hundred miles. Although the Merlin is not designed specifically for military use, it has been acquired by military units in several countries, including Oman and Chile. According to *Milavnews*, a private British intelligence newsletter, the SAAF received seven Merlins in 1975-1976. Reportedly these too were used to support combat operations in southern Angola and Namibia.

Like the Lockheed L-100/C-130, the Cessna Model 185 Skywagon exists in both military and civilian versions. The military version, known as the U-17, is used for a variety of support functions including liaison, reconnaissance, and light transport duties. Both versions are powered by a single 300-horsepower piston engine, and can carry up to 6 passengers for distances of over 1,000 miles. Although the SAAF's Skywagons are hardly major combat systems, they do play an important role in guarding the South African border against guerrillas.

According to the South African military journal *Paratus*, "low level visual reconnaissance [along the border] is done with the Cessna because of its maneuverability and low fuel consumption."

Other U.S. light aircraft have been sold to individual South African buyers and then assigned to the 12 Air Commando squadrons. The Air Commandos are an all-white volunteer militia which can be called upon to back up the regular armed forces.

Although it is impossible at this point to determine which have been assigned to the Air Commando squadrons, data recently released by the U.S. Export-Import Bank on aircraft deliveries to South Africa indicates several types that have dual military/civilian capabilities. In 1973, for instance, the Eximbank guaranteed loans for sales to South African buyers of several Beechcraft Model 55 and 58 Baron twin-engined business planes. A militarized version of the Baron, the T-42A Cochrise, is used by the U.S. Army as a basic instrument trainer. The Baron is also used as a military trainer by the air forces of Spain and Turkey.

In May 1976, the Eximbank approved a \$163,000 discount loan for the sale of two Helio Aircraft Model 295 Super Couriers to a South African firm. The Super Courier is a short-takeoff-and-landing (STOL) plane, well suited for operations in rugged country. There are several military versions, one of which is equipped with paratroop doors and "has been operated in Southeast Asia, South America, and in other parts of the world, on a wide variety of military missions," according to "Jane's All the World's Aircraft."

Other U.S. aircraft sold to South African buyers since 1972 with Eximbank funding include: the Beechcraft Bonanza A-36, a single-engined utility plane which is used by the air forces of Iran, Mexico and Spain; the Rockwell Turbo-Commander, a twin-engined turboprop which is in the Iranian Air Force inventory; Cessna Executives, Golden Eagles, Conquests, and Citations; Piper Super-Cubs; and the Mitsubishi MU-2 twin-turboprop STOL transport, produced in San Angelo, Texas, by Mitsubishi Aircraft International.

The U.S. government is officially involved in these sales, not only through the Commerce Department, which must grant permission for such "commercial" exports to South Africa, but also through the Export-Import Bank, which assumes the risk (at the U.S. taxpayer's expense) for loans provided by local banks for these sales. The State Department is also involved by default, since it is responsible for monitoring the 1963 arms embargo and for ensuring that military systems—including civilian aircraft which have been modified for military purposes—are not routed to South Africa.

On December 14, 1977 the State Department announced that it was recommending approval for an aircraft sale to South Africa that reportedly involved six Cessna crop dusters valued at about \$500,000, out of some 55 Cessna aircraft being sold to South Africa this year. While details on the exact models involved were not available, one of Cessna's crop dusters is based on the Model 185 Skywagon which is used by the SAAF for border patrol.

Announcing the recommendations, State Department spokesperson John Trattner said: "It would be incorrect to infer that a decision has been made to dis-

courage the export of civilian aircraft to South Africa." According to news reports, Cessna was also planning to sell another 44 planes to South Africa for a total value of \$3 million.

The 1963 embargo applies both to complete aircraft and to major components and sub-systems such as engines. Our research, however, indicates that there are many planes in the SAAF inventory which are powered by U.S. engines. These include the Italian Piaggio P-166 and Aero-Macchi AM-3C, and the Atlas C-4M, produced in South Africa. The role of U.S. engines is particularly critical because, despite reports of South Africa having its own aircraft industry, the fact is that it still cannot produce aeronautical engines and must import them from outside.

The P-166 is a light transport plane powered by two Avco Lycoming piston engines, produced in Williamsport, Pa. The basic P-166 carries up to 12 passengers or 2,500 lbs. of cargo, and can be armed with a variety of munitions. The SAAF also uses a specialized version of the plane, the P-166S Albatross, for coastal surveillance operations.

Now that the United States has moved from a voluntary arms embargo to the much tighter U.S. resolution, it is essential to close all loopholes in the existing ban and to ensure that "civilian" export channels are not used to transfer military or para-military equipment. Clearly, the Commerce and State departments must refuse any request for licenses to ship dual military/civilian items if there is the slightest possibility that a product will be used to conduct or support military or police operations. Similarly, the Export-Import Bank should, at a minimum, put a stop to loan guarantees on aircraft sales for South Africa unless it can be established that the planes involved will not be used by the Air Commandos or other auxiliary military police forces. As specified by the Security Council resolution, the United States must also halt all deliveries of spare parts and components for weapons presently in South African hands. To do any less would be to violate our commitment to a solemn United Nations agreement while helping to perpetuate the racist regime in South Africa, where oppression is enshrined in law.