

# AFRICA PUTS

The Security Council's debate on South Africa, which will continue at the U.N. this week, is a test case, says our Commonwealth Correspondent, by which the world will judge Britain and America.

## THE WEST ON TRIAL

by Colin Legum

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THE PERIOD in which the West could call the tune or command the loyalty of its allies on major colonial issues is over. So much is clear from last week's Security Council debate on Portugal's policy in Africa. For the first time in the 18-year life of the Council the major Western Powers—the United States, Britain and France—were reduced to voting in a minority of three at the end of this debate.

Among eight nations who voted for United Nations action against Portugal were such devoted friends of the West as Nationalist China, the Philippines, Venezuela and even one Nato ally, Norway. The drama of last week's debate as viewed from Washington was the desperate behind-the-scenes struggle fought by the U.S. and Britain once they sensed the impending loss of their initiative.

### Moderation

Adlai Stevenson negotiated for a week to find an acceptable accommodation with the 32 African States. He actually got them to moderate their original proposals to the point where he clearly thought his Government could decently vote with the majority. There is little doubt that Washington would have agreed if it had not been for pressure by Britain.

"Lord Home is the most baneful influence on American policies in Africa," a senior adviser of the Kennedy Administration expostulated as America's decision lay in the balance.

President Kennedy's decision was not taken easily. Right up to an hour before the Security Council vote on Wednesday the Capitol was held in painful indecision. The President's action is only partly explained by his concern for Anglo-American and American-Portuguese relations. A more important consideration was the

attitude America would take on South Africa, for which the Portuguese debate was the curtain-raiser.

Commitment to sanctions against Salazar would make it hard to resist demands for similar action against Verwoerd. But while the U.S. is nearing the point where she might be willing to burn her Portuguese boats, she is not yet nearly ready to commit herself so completely on South Africa.

### Showdown

One important reason for this unreadiness is that neither President Kennedy nor his Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, has given any real thought to their policy on South Africa. It was not until the decision to force a showdown with the West was taken at the African summit conference in Addis Ababa last May that the South African question was regarded as having any priority in the White House. Today, if you go into the State Department, you find everybody from Dean Rusk and his economic adviser, Professor Walt Rostow, to the lowest officials wrestling with the problems of South Africa. But they are still only at the point of

asking questions. They are nowhere near formulating any clear policy.

That is why the West is almost certain to go down to a second diplomatic defeat in the current Security Council debate on South Africa. ("Russia is sitting on the fence watching the West do the job for her in Africa," was the acid comment of the staunchly pro-Commonwealth Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, Dr. John Karefa-Smart, a few days ago.)

There is an overwhelmingly strong feeling in Washington that there can be no effective Western initiative over South Africa without strong Anglo-American accord on this question. There is an equally strong feeling that such accord is unlikely to come from the present British Government. What Washington hopes for, therefore, is that the U.N. can be prevented from taking a strong position on South Africa for a year or so.

This has not, however, prevented the U.S. from taking its surprise decision to impose a total arms embargo on South Africa from the end of this year—to the great embarrassment of Britain which, on this issue at least, is likely to find herself in a minority

of two, with France, in the Security Council.

President Kennedy's decision impose an arms embargo marks an important turning point in American policy. It also represents a defeat for those elements in the Pentagon which insist on making Cold War issues a priority in American policy. But, although the American position has changed on the question of an arms embargo, Mr. Adlai Stevenson made it clear that the U.S. is determined to resist any form of diplomatic or economic sanctions.

The immediate African target is therefore to deny the African States the seven votes they need under the rules of the Security Council to decide on diplomatic or economic sanctions enforceable through U.N. machinery. To block these major African demands, American tactics are to detach of the eight votes that went against them last week. They might succeed in this stratagem, but at the cost of great bitterness among the 32 African States, who are deeply angry over *apartheid*.

### Weakness

It is possible that the British American spokesmen are more emotion than thought is going on when they complain that African thinking about the South African problem. But this criticism would make more impact if they could indicate more effective alternatives to economic and diplomatic sanctions. Because the major Western countries have alternative policies, all they can do is react defensively. It is this weakness that has let the initiative slip from their fingers at this critical juncture and produced their isolation in the international community.

It is a situation that cannot give real satisfaction to Verwoerd, Mr. Khrushchev or Mao Tse-tung.

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