

Has Kissinger really persuaded Ian Smith to end Rhodesia's 11-year rebellion? And what was Vorster's secret role?

Sunday Times foreign reporters reconstruct the sequence of events that forced Ian Smith to accept majority rule

BY LAST NIGHT, as all the whites in Rhodesia digested the tearful truth, Salisbury was a muted, stunned city. Above one of its wide, jacaranda-lined avenues hung a contemptuous sign: a white flag at half mast.

Back in London, the Foreign Office was putting out faintly smug statements calling the whole affair "a victory for realism and commonsense" and talking of "laying the foundations for an independent Zimbabwe in peace and prosperity." ("Zimbabwe?" someone queried, surprised by Britain's use, at last, of the African name for Rhodesia. The official shrugged: "That's the way it's going," he said.) But in Rhodesia it does not look quite so simple.

Certainly, among the hard-line whites, there is despair. One of Smith's own party said simply: "The best thing Smith can do is blow his brains out." But also there is suspicion. Already the shrewder among them are combing Smith's "surrender speech" — and finding in it, as one lawyer said, "loopholes, imprecisions and winks at the white electorate." It is a suspicion the blacks wholly share. Morton Malianga, prominent in the African nationalist movement, said: "The proposals are unclear, and many interpretations could be put on them. We could be back to square one."

But that is too pessimistic. As both sides try to regain balance after the week's tumultuous events, it is too soon to predict even what will happen next, let alone the eventual outcome. But whatever emerges, nothing in Rhodesia will be the same again. Factually as well as emotionally, Smith was apt in quoting Churchill: "... the end of the beginning." For when Smith journeyed to Pretoria to meet Kissinger and Vorster, something irrevocable occurred. One Rhodesian Government official described the confrontation: "They had us in the nutcrackers." Henry Kissinger explains that crucial meeting in South Africa last Sunday in colder terms: it was, he says, "the politics of power."

Indeed, whatever the fate of Ian Smith's Rhodesia, the events of the past fortnight are best seen as another study in Kissinger's deployment of the "politics of power." What Kissinger did was to pressure Smith's only ally, John Vorster, Prime Minister of South Africa, to abandon him. Then, in Pretoria, Kissinger personally threatened the friendless Smith with the most terrible consequences if he refused to capitulate. Smith had no choice.

The problem, as Kissinger returns to Washington and the

By James Fox and Bruce Palling in Salisbury; Denis Herstein in Johannesburg; John Borell in Lusaka; Martin Meredith, Nicholas Carroll and Parin Janmohamed in London.



Shopping in Salisbury, Rhodesia. Frank Herrmann's picture said it all

thought the other was to convey the last details to Rhodesia. So Kissinger had to explain them to Smith. Then "the politics of power" began.

Vorster's threat was that, without taking visible action, he would ensure that Smith's export route became even more congested. Rhodesia would be ruined. Kissinger's threat was equally subtle, but still more brutal. The United States, he told Smith, would pour development aid into the countries bordering Rhodesia — and would turn a blind eye if some of the aid found its way to the guerrillas. And the United States would then not intervene to save Rhodesia. What choice did Smith have?

The verdict: a dollar coup d'etat

When Smith broke the news to the Rhodesia Front caucus last Thursday, it was worse than any of them had suspected. Des Frost, party chairman, already knew the outlines, but somehow imagined that "as those negotiations are basically concerned with the for most overall government control and not with local or provincial government function" it would be possible to preserve the peculiarly Rhodesian form of apartheid, known as "provincialisation" (hinging on their reservation of the best land for whites). But Smith had been forced at least to promise to sweep away not only this but every other principle the Rhodesia Front has stood for.

Will the package work? It is too soon to say. As a way of tackling the problem of Rhodesia, Kissinger's approach could not have been cruder. Indeed it is reminiscent of the motto of Charles Colson, special assistant to Kissinger's former boss, President Nixon: "When you have them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow."

But will they? The Government-owned Zambia Daily Mail had an interesting perspective. An ingenious paper (it overcame the absence of any picture of Kissinger with Smith, something Kissinger was at pains to avoid by simply faking one for its front page) the Zambia Daily Mail called Kissinger's triumph "a dollar coup d'etat." But then, what else could have worked?

GOODBYE TO ALL THAT?

British Government persists in its reluctance to become more centrally involved, is that Kissinger has changed nobody's mind. Smith himself says: "The proposals ... do not represent what in our view would be the best solution for Rhodesia's problems." As for the black view, even the most moderate opinion — voiced by Josiah Chinamano, right-hand man of the nationalist Kissinger favours to take power, Joshua Nkomo — is wary. "I wouldn't say we are happy about the proposals. I wouldn't say we accept them. We are prepared to consider them." So what, really, has Kissinger achieved?

"I WILL TELL you two things about my method of tackling disputes," Kissinger once said. "The first is that I do not like to approach any dispute until I feel that its basic elements — or at least the great part of its basic elements — are within my hand. The second thing is that I hate failure." The elements of the Rhodesian conflict began to come into Kissinger's hands last February.

The US Secretary of State had always considered Africa "a bore." His senior African desk officials in the State Department had not seen him for a year. Kissinger's interest was, and remains, the conflict between the superpowers. Only the Soviet victory in February with Cuban troops

in Angola elevated Africa to his attention. Faced with such Communist gains, the traditional American response would have been to ally itself still more strongly with the major power in the area, South Africa. But that, post-Angola, was impossible. The daring of Kissinger's approach was that, at least in his public statements, he appeared to turn that traditional American policy on its head. He decided to "stem the Communist tide" by publicly confronting the white minority régimes. And Rhodesia was the obvious target.

Why Kissinger gave Callaghan credit

Over the last week, Kissinger had been punctilious in giving more than fair credit to the British Government and in particular James Callaghan. And the Prime Minister himself points to his March 22 speech, when he talked of a solution to the Rhodesian deadlock depending upon white acceptance of majority rule in two years or less. That, Callaghan now says, was the start of the affair. Indeed it was, but not for the reason given.

For Kissinger the importance of that speech was that Callaghan publicly confirmed Britain's impotence. Callaghan's objectives were fine. (Though his "two years" was a purely notional timescale to which Britain was not committed, one Minister said privately at the time.) But British objectives had always been fine. All Britain had ever lacked was the power to impose them. Kissinger had that power. And now, he could step into the vacuum left by Callaghan.

On April 27, Kissinger, on his first visit to Africa, announced: "We support majority rule for all the peoples of southern Africa." It was the most important statement on Africa ever made by an American leader. There were, and are, many in Africa who doubt the commitment. This misses the point. With that one sentence, Kissinger made it impossible for any responsible black African leader to refuse to assist an American endeavour to bring about majority rule. He also put himself in a position to lean on Vorster. For the route to Ian Smith, Kissinger had grasped, lay through South Africa.

ANGOLA SHOCKED Vorster: he saw that, with Russia at last in Southern Africa, his old allies in Europe — the investors of Britain and France — were not enough. South Africa needed American protection.

Private approaches could achieve something. Pik Botha, the lively South African Ambassador in Washington, broke the ice. South Africa even had a line to President Ford: John McGoff, a Right-Wing US newspaper owner, and a close friend of Connie Mulder, Vorster's right-hand man in the policy of detente with black Africa, approached Ford on Vorster's behalf. But, eventually, Vorster had to meet Kissinger.

When Kissinger and Vorster first met, in a village in the Bavarian Mountains on June 23, they discovered that their interests converged.

Kissinger, like Vorster, was primarily concerned to keep Communism out of Southern Africa. Vorster, like Kissinger, recognised that another Angola would be disastrous. And Rhodesia, they agreed, was a potential Angola. If the price of staving off Communism was a multi-racial Rhodesia, then Vorster would acquiesce — so long as Smith's downfall was organised discreetly. Vorster, too, has his white constituents to consider.

If Vorster still had doubts about the explosion that was coming in Rhodesia, Ian Smith himself now removed them. He spread the Rhodesian war outside his own borders.

IN JUNE, when the then Rhodesian Defence Minister, Pieter van der Byl, dismissed the chances of the Russian-trained guerrillas with the phrase: "I wouldn't give a kopek for them," he knew that in fact his military were desperately worried. The mid-year months, when the hills are scorched bare and water is scarce, favour the Government troops. But even then 20,000 men were needed to combat the 1,200 or so guerrillas already inside Rhodesia. And over the border in Mozambique another 6,000 guerrillas are in training — waiting for the rains in November. Van der Byl himself has described the cover the rains bring: "You get an enormous canopy of trees, the grass is high and the whole vegetation is extremely dense. You get a situation like the Americans experienced in Vietnam."

Alan Savoury, vice president of the Rhodesia Party and once the Rhodesian army's anti-guerrilla specialist, explains the prospect: "By summer most of the army was aware they were getting nowhere. The sheer increase of guerrilla incidents in the past few months and the army's inability to follow them up turned talk of a guerrilla 'operational area' into a joke. They used to be confined to a pocket up north, but now it's the whole country."

At the end of June, Rhodesian army commander, told Smith that unless the could go into Mozambique to kill guerrillas in their camps, the army could not contain the rainy season onslaught. But when a worried Smith broached the plan to South Africa, Vorster objected that the proposal would "bring every Cuban in sight" to Rhodesia's borders. Under pressure from his "hawks," Smith agreed to one cross-border raid. On August 10, Rhodesian forces killed several hundred blacks in Mozambique. But such raids could not be repeated. In retrospect, that seems to have been the moment when the Rhodesian army realised that it could not win.

Three days after the raid, South Africa switched. The South African Foreign Minister, Hilgard Muller, spoke at a political rally in Durban. It was an ambiguous speech. But when the South African mission at the United Nations released Muller's text, a short preamble had been attached: "A solution to the Rhodesian issue on the basis of majority rule with adequate protection for minority rights is acceptable to the South African Government." No such "clarification" had been made inside South Africa. And

Smith had not been warned it was coming.

MEANWHILE, a plan for the transition of power in Rhodesia was emerging from a quartet of British and American officials: Sir Anthony Duff (the top Foreign Office Africa man) and Patrick Laver (head of the Rhodesia Department); William Rodgers (deputy secretary in the State Department) and William Schaufele (United States' top Africa man). The scaffolding of the plan — an interim régime of a multiracial council of state and a council of ministers — could be easily constructed. But the foundation always had to be money: cash to develop Rhodesia to keep any new black government stable; and cash to underwrite the inevitably frightened whites.

It is an indication, however, of how unclear everyone remains about the real shape of the Zimbabwe-to-come that the crucial question about the cash has still not been resolved. For a long time, the official plan was to use the cash to bail out emigrating whites. Then it was realised that to encourage a white exodus was madness. Rhodesia would be in chaos. A new idea was born: pay the whites to stay. But African leaders like President Nyerere of Tanzania promptly labelled the idea as absurd: how can loyalty to a new country be bought?

How the nutcracker was tightened

Even with such confusions, thought, Kissinger and Vorster — when they met for the second time in Zurich on September 4-6 — were ready to take the next step. Vorster flew home — to begin closing the nutcracker on Smith.

It was done quite secretly. South African military aid to Rhodesia is vital to the regime's survival, and nothing more vital than helicopters. Vorster began to withdraw these.

There are two versions. South African sources say merely that Vorster withdrew 40 South African helicopter crewmen. The Rhodesian version is that Vorster also withdrew perhaps as many as 26 of a reported 40 helicopters, and a helicopter training scheme in Pretoria for Rhodesian pilots was cancelled.

The attrition of Rhodesia's other priority, its export trade, has been less secret. After the Mozambique Government jostled in March Rhodesia's rail link to the port of Beira and Lourenco Marques, Rhodesia's only export route has lain through South Africa. In the last six months, South African railways have let the question on this route pile up.

KISSINGER arrived in Pretoria on September 11, trailing predictions of doom from his meetings in Dar es Salaam and Lusaka. "You have only a few days, not weeks, to succeed," President Kaunda of Zambia had obligingly said. It would take "a miracle," President Nyerere of Tanzania echoed (Gloom as a form of pressure was a tactic Kissinger had used to advantage in the Middle East.) When Ian Smith arrived in Pretoria next day, ostensibly to watch a rugby match, the pressure was applied even

there: certainly he was in the VIP box, but seated some distance from Vorster.

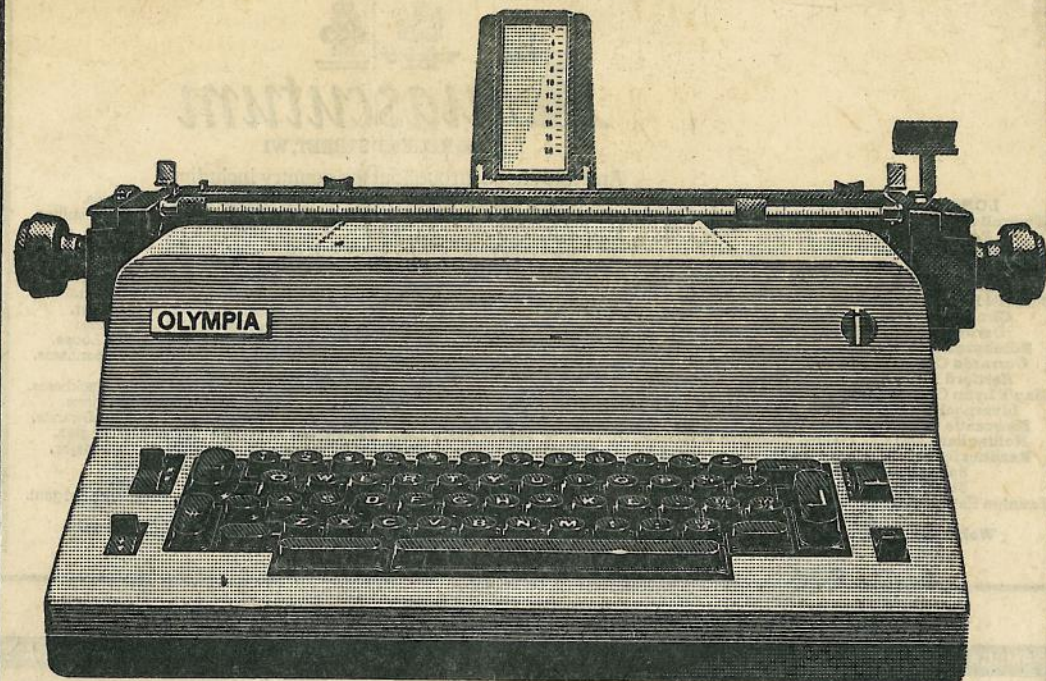
Back in Rhodesia, Smith's party had only a glimpse of what was coming. Behind closed doors in Umtali, only a mile from the Mozambique border, a congress of astonished Rhodesian Front faithful had heard the Finance Minister, David Smith, declare bluntly that Rhodesia was "bust." Rhodesia had almost no foreign exchange he said. Without an infusion of soft loans and grant aid, Rhodesia could neither pay for more arms, nor cope with increasing inflation; or keep industry supplied with spare parts and

replacement equipment for more than about six months.

The Rhodesia Front still felt able to pass traditional resolutions about the need for "responsible" (their euphemism for white) government — adding for Kissinger's benefit that a swift transfer of power would turn Rhodesia into a "Marxist-Communist State." But they gave Smith a free hand to negotiate.

But in eight hours of talks in Pretoria, facing both Vorster and Kissinger, Smith was left with no hand at all. He had not even seen the proposed package in its final form. Through a mix-up, Vorster and Kissinger had each

It's simply perfect.



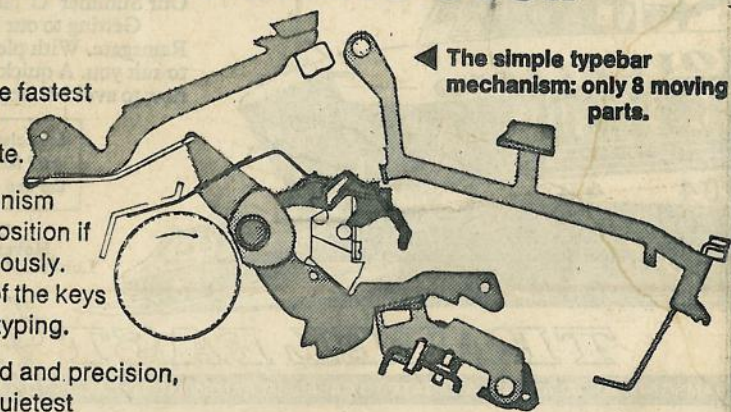
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