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PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNION  
OF SOUTH AFRICA



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*All members of the Intelligence Advisory Committee concurred in this estimate on 16 October 1952.*

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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October 22, 1952

MEMORANDUM

To: The Acting Secretary

Transmitted herewith for your information is a copy of MIF-72: Probable Developments in the Union of South Africa.

*W. P. A.*  
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## PROBABLE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

### THE PROBLEM

To assess the strategic importance of the Union of South Africa; analyze the political and racial situation in the Union; and estimate future developments which may affect US interests.

### CONCLUSIONS

1. The strategic importance of the Union of South Africa arises chiefly from its substantial production of chromite, manganese, and amosite asbestos; from its potential production of uranium; and from the fact that in event of general war the Union's bases and port facilities would be valuable, especially if the Suez Canal were closed.
2. We believe that under present conditions the Union will probably remain for at least four years unable to meet its commitment to provide a full armored division for Middle East defense within three months after the outbreak of war. If war should break out now, South Africa could not provide the division in less than one year, even with prompt, substantial, outside material aid.
3. The chief immediate problem in South Africa is the extreme political tension between the Nationalists and the Opposition. Nationalist and Opposition leaders will endeavor to avert civil war, but because they intend to press their positions to the limit, short of such a conflict, and because they may miscalculate their ability to control their followers in inflammable situations, the possibility of civil war cannot be excluded.
4. Over the long run the repressive racial policy of the whites will almost certainly lead to rebellion of the non-white population. Communist influence, presently small, will probably play an increasing part in stimulating unrest.
5. The tensions in South Africa are unlikely for the next several years to interfere seriously with the export of strategic materials, but they may limit the Union's ability to dispatch forces outside the country in event of war. In the longer run, when rising racial tensions erupt into widespread disorders, the outflow of strategic materials will be hampered or even halted.
6. Racial tensions in South Africa will almost certainly have an increasingly adverse effect on race relations elsewhere in Africa and on the relations of India and the rest of Asia with the West. If the UN intensifies its criticisms of the Union's racial policy, the Union may carry out its threat to withdraw from the UN.

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## DISCUSSION

## The Strategic Importance of South Africa

7. *Economic.* The strategic economic importance of the Union of South Africa arises primarily from its large-scale production of chromite, manganese, and asbestos. From the Union come about one-quarter of the West's supply of chromite (including practically all chemical-grade chromite ore), one-quarter of total Western manganese supply, and the entire Western supply of the strategic grades of amosite asbestos.<sup>1</sup> South African production of corundum, antimony, and industrial diamonds is also important. The Union is also a potential source of other strategic materials. Under US contracts, the production of uranium, as a by-product of gold mining, is just beginning. This development promises to make the Union of South Africa a substantial source of uranium. In addition, the Union's gold production is important to the financial stability of the UK and the Sterling Area.

8. *Military.* South Africa's armed forces are at present undermanned, poorly trained, and inadequately equipped. Their regular strength totals less than 6,600 and their reserves less than 28,000 men. One fighter-bomber squadron, with US equipment, is serving in Korea. The Nationalist Government is apathetic regarding military matters. Although the current military budget has increased some 35 percent over the previous fiscal year, and stands at 12.9 percent of the total national budget, it constitutes only about 2 percent of the Union's national income. Moreover, the Government's administration of the military establishment has been inept and its appointments and promotions in the three services have been largely based on political rather than professional qualifications. Morale in the services is low, retirement of able officers has accelerated, and few inducements exist to attract recruits. Union armed forces

<sup>1</sup>The US stockpile of chromite and manganese is great enough to offset for three or four years a total loss of the South African source of supply. The US stockpile of the strategic grades of amosite asbestos is very small.

are almost completely dependent upon external sources for armaments.

9. Despite its present military weakness, South Africa has considerable military potential. In World War II the South Africans demonstrated excellent fighting qualities and technical adaptability. By mid-1943 about 225,000 were serving.<sup>2</sup> Given time and equipment, substantial ground and air forces could again be made available for Middle East operations, and naval and air forces for operations in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

10. South Africa has made a commitment to the UK to contribute one armored division for the defense of the Middle East within three months after the outbreak of general war. The Government has, however, made little preparation to meet this commitment. We estimate that at least one year would be required for such a division to be organized, trained, and transported to the Middle East, even if the equipment were made available promptly from outside sources.

11. The Union's naval, air, and port facilities would also be of considerable value in event of general war, as in World War II, especially if the Suez Canal were denied the West. These facilities, including the British controlled naval base at Simonstown, would be useful for ship and aircraft maintenance work, air and sea operations against submarines, convoy organization and protection, storage and resupply operations, and troop staging operations.

## The Population

12. The two chief problems confronting South Africa — the present extreme tension between Government and Opposition and the steady deterioration of race relations — arise primarily from the conflicting aspirations and outlook of the Union's heterogeneous population elements. There is a basic division between the dominant white minority of 2.6 mil-

<sup>2</sup>The Union did not and will not permit non-whites to serve in combatant status, though it uses them in auxiliary services.

lion and the ten million Natives, Coloreds, and Asiatics. In addition, the whites themselves are divided into two hostile political groups, the Nationalists, predominantly Dutch-descent Afrikaners, and the Opposition, mainly of British descent.

13. *The Whites.* The Union's white, or "European," minority totally controls the political and economic life of South Africa. About 60 percent are Afrikaners. These speak a simplified version of Dutch called Afrikaans; and most belong to the intensely conservative Dutch Reformed Churches. The Afrikaners have been predominantly rural, but an increasing number are entering business and the professions.

14. The remaining 40 percent of the white population is largely of British descent. This group is mainly urban and commercial, and is economically the more powerful. While antagonism between Afrikaners and British antedates the Boer War, the two groups have a common interest in the perpetuation of white supremacy and in the economic development of South Africa.

15. *The Non-Whites.* The non-European population includes 8.5 million Natives (Bantu negroes), 1.1 million Coloreds (mixed breeds), and 365,000 Asiatics (mostly Indians). These three groups have little in common except dislike of the whites. The large Native majority is divided into several major linguistic groups and hundreds of tribes speaking many dialects. It is largely illiterate. Only a few thousand Natives have had a secondary education and there are few college graduates and professional people. About 40 percent of the natives are engaged in primitive agricultural pursuits in the native reserves, about one-third live in or near white urban areas, mostly in slums, and the remainder work on white farms. The Natives do most of the unskilled manual labor.

16. The Coloreds and Asiatics are better educated and culturally more advanced than the Natives. The Coloreds, 90 percent of whom live in Cape Province, regard themselves as an adjunct of white society. They work for the whites as waiters, factory workers, artisans, and farmhands. The Asiatics, of whom 82

percent live in Natal Province, are mostly Indians. They maintain close cultural relationships with India, and many are graduates of Indian or British universities. Although a small number are wealthy businessmen, most are small traders, truck gardeners, waiters, and workers in light industry.

### The Nationalist-Opposition Controversy and the Prospects of Civil War

17. *Character and Policies of the Nationalist Government.* The Nationalist Party of Prime Minister Malan came to power in May 1948 with a slim majority of five Assembly seats, although it received only 42 percent of the popular vote. It has since increased its majority to thirteen seats by winning one-by-election and sweeping the South West Africa<sup>1</sup> election in 1950. The Malan Government represents an extreme, anti-British, Afrikaner nationalism. The Cabinet is wholly Afrikaner, and the Nationalist Party and its supporters almost entirely so. The Party finds its main inspiration in the ideals of the early Boers: racial purity (free even from British admixture), white supremacy, republicanism, and a patriarchal society founded on the teachings of their church. The Party's implicit authoritarianism is evident in the Government's encroachments on civil liberties and in its moves to insure for the Afrikaners a permanent grip on political power in the Union.

18. A fundamental element of the Nationalist Party program is its policy of *apartheid*, meaning strict racial segregation, designed to insure continued white supremacy. Segregation has been practiced by the whites for generations, but influential Nationalists believe white superiority divinely ordained and they carry the policy to extremes. The Government has deprived non-Europeans of scanty privileges they had previously enjoyed, has in-

<sup>1</sup>The former German colony of South West Africa was mandated to the Union by the League of Nations in 1920. In 1949 the Union passed a law granting South West Africa representation in the Union Legislature, and the first election based on that law was held in 1950.

tensified segregation regulations, and has launched a program involving the physical transfer of long-established non-European communities. The Nationalists allege that more thorough segregation will facilitate the economic and social development of the non-Europeans and minimize inter-racial friction.

19. *The Parliamentary Opposition.* The large United Party of the late Field Marshal Smuts leads the Opposition. In 1948 it won 49 percent of the popular vote, seven percent more than the Nationalists, but — due to gerrymandering and over-representation of rural areas — only 43 percent of the Assembly seats. The Party's supporters are mainly of British descent, but include a substantial minority of moderate Afrikaners. The party leader has invariably been an Afrikaner. Because of a membership varying widely from liberal to conservative, the relative disinterest in politics of much of the English-speaking community, and the current unimpressive leadership, the United Party has virtually no positive program of its own and has confined itself largely to criticism of Nationalist programs. There is also a small Labor Party, composed mostly of intellectuals and English-speaking workers, which cooperates generally with the United Party.

20. *The Torch Commando.* Two years ago certain United Party leaders created the Torch Commando as a device to arouse and exploit popular alarm over the Nationalist threat to constitutional democracy. It is primarily an urban organization, well financed and energetic, with a membership of about 250,000. Its membership is mostly English-speaking, but includes an important minority of anti-Nationalist Afrikaners. Many thousand war veterans constitute the hard core of the Commando. A number of distinguished retired soldiers and civilians are members, and a majority of the permanent and reserve forces are members or sympathizers. With organized branches in many towns, the Commando has concentrated on expanding its membership, holding rallies and protest meetings, generating anti-Nationalist sentiment, and getting its voters registered. Although its membership overlaps that of the United and Labor Parties

and its leaders work closely with the United Party, many Commando members are dissatisfied with the cautious conservatism of the United Party leadership.

21. *Issues Between the Parties.* There is a large area of agreement between the Nationalists and the white Opposition over national policies. Foreign policy is not an issue, except that the Opposition firmly supports the Commonwealth tie. Both groups favor territorial expansion and resent foreign criticism of the Union. Both are strongly anti-Communist. Both stand for white domination and a large measure of racial segregation, but the Opposition criticizes Nationalist racial policy as needlessly provocative and economically impracticable. It is also strongly aroused against the Nationalists' grants to administrators of sweeping powers over civil liberties and the press without allowing appeal to the courts.

22. The issue which above all has inflamed relations between the Nationalists and Opposition has arisen over the Government's recent efforts to override legal and constitutional checks in order to perpetuate itself in power. Last year the Government passed, as part of its segregation program, an act which transferred Colored voters from the common electoral rolls. Since the Coloreds regularly vote United Party, the effect of this act would be to insure Nationalist victories in a number of marginal constituencies. The act, however, was declared invalid by the Supreme Court, on the grounds that such a change in the "entrenched clauses" of the South Africa Act of 1909 (the Union "constitution") required a two-thirds majority of both houses of Parliament sitting together. The Nationalists then passed a second act which establishes Parliament itself as the highest "judicial" body empowered to pass on the validity of its own acts. This attempt to circumvent constitutional checks has resulted in antagonism greater than at any time since the Boer War.

23. The Supreme Court will almost certainly rule in the near future that the second act is also invalid on the same grounds. We believe that the Government will probably defy this ruling and proceed to transfer the Col-

ored voters, unless it is convinced that such a course would provoke civil war. Defiance of the Supreme Court will raise tension to extremes, for the Opposition has declared its intention to "defend the Constitution" against Nationalist "dictatorship" and to "meet force with counterforce," while the Nationalists, with equal passion, are determined to place the supremacy of Parliament beyond constitutional checks and to carry out their program.

24. The next general election is expected in May or June 1953, although it may be called as early as February. The election campaign will be even more heated than usual. The Nationalists, solidly supported in the rural areas and bolstered by such devices as a redistricting of constituencies and the prospective transfer of the Coloreds, will probably win another 5-year term. If the aged Malan retires or dies, his successor as Prime Minister will probably be the able and emotional extremist, Strydom, perhaps after a short interregnum under the moderate Havenga. Strydom, even more than Malan, would carry forward present Nationalist policies.

25. *Prospects for Civil War.* All whites desire to avoid an armed conflict primarily for fear of jeopardizing white control over the large non-white majority. In addition the Nationalists, although determined to carry out their program by one means or another, will probably take care not to provoke an armed conflict in which they would be opposed by half of the white population, including most veterans and most of the regular military establishment. Although some hot-heads in the Torch Commando already advocate armed resistance to what they regard as in effect a Nationalist *coup d'etat*, we believe that the conservative leadership of the Opposition can and will restrain them, at least until the next general election has been held. If the Nationalists should win that election, and if they should then take steps further to entrench themselves in power, the danger of armed reaction by the Torch Commando would be great. Even in that case, however, given the general fear of the consequences of civil war on white supremacy, we believe that the lead-

ers of both parties and influential business interests would exert themselves to avert such a conflict. However, because leaders of both parties wish to press their positions to the limit, short of civil war, and because they may miscalculate their ability to control their followers in inflammable situations, the possibility of civil war cannot be excluded.

26. Should civil war occur, we believe that it would be prolonged and disorder would be widespread. The Nationalist Government could count on the loyal support of the roughly 20,000 South African police, whose key officials are Nationalists. The police serve as both local police and national gendarmerie; their morale, training, and efficiency are excellent. The government could also rely on most of the *Skiet Commando* units, about 500 of which are organized throughout the country, with a membership totaling about 85,000, almost entirely Afrikaners. Their mission is mainly to insure internal security in their local areas. Though equipped with rifles, these units are untrained and have little military effectiveness. A minority of the armed forces would also remain loyal to the Government. The Opposition forces would include most of the war veterans and younger members of the Torch Commando, as well as the majority of regular, reserve, and retired military personnel. Though virtually unarmed at present, the Torch Commando could rapidly become a formidable force. It could almost certainly acquire plenty of arms through its numerous supporters in the services. It is already organized on military lines and centrally directed. Neither side would arm non-Europeans.

27. We believe that, if civil war should occur, the Opposition would have a better than even chance of overthrowing the Government; we cannot, however, estimate subsequent developments in the Union.

### The Race Relations Problem

28. A longer range threat to South African stability is the growing hostility of the non-white population toward the dominant white minority. This hostility had been increasing for years before the Nationalists came to



power. Since 1948 the severe repressions by the Nationalists have sharply stimulated the ominous trend in relations between the races. The desire to overthrow white domination is latent throughout the non-European community, and certain advances have been made in the past few years toward organizing for this purpose. Influenced by the equalitarian tenets of western liberalism, by the political advances of non-Europeans elsewhere, and to a limited extent by Communists, the leaders of urban non-European groups have demonstrated some capacity to organize united actions. The current series of deliberate violations of racial regulations is a joint project of Indian and Native organizations. These organizations have also cooperated with Colored bodies in resisting the Government's attack on the Colored franchise. This passive resistance campaign is almost certainly an early step in a program to overturn white supremacy.

29. Generally, however, the non-Europeans are disunited and as yet appear to be poorly organized. While existing intelligence on this subject is scanty, they appear to have no widely recognized central leadership. Except among the small, educated elite, cultural differences are great between Colored, Native, and Indian; and even within each group suspicions and enmities hamper the growth of non-white unity. Native organization is rudimentary. Local or tribal leaders have their few hundreds or thousands of followers, but the masses are politically apathetic and largely absorbed in day-to-day problems of mere existence. The attitudes of the few educated native leaders are not typical of those of the majority of natives, and there is no evidence that they are effectively converting or even contacting most of those whom they claim to lead.

30. For some years the non-Europeans' leaders will be too few and too inexperienced, their economic and arms resources too meager, and their unity and organization too weak for an effective nation-wide revolt. The knowledge that the Government would react harshly is another deterrent. Local urban disorders may come earlier, but they will almost certainly be ruthlessly quelled. Even if the Na-

tionals and Opposition were to fight an early civil war, the non-Europeans would almost certainly be unable to exploit the situation effectively.

31. Nevertheless, we believe that race relations will continue to deteriorate, and will eventually produce a serious challenge to white domination. The prospective continuation of the harsh race policy will stimulate the non-white resistance movement, so that major disorders and widespread rebellion appear almost certain in the long run. More moderate treatment would not alter non-white aspirations for equality, although such benefits as better housing and economic opportunity and more freedom of movement would slow the pace toward rebellion.

32. *Communist Influence.* The small South African Communist Party publicly dissolved itself in June 1950, shortly before the Parliament voted to outlaw it. Its membership was only about 2,000, with a hard core of some 400 active workers. A fourth of the membership was white, and the bulk of the remainder were Indians, though Communism was spreading among the Coloreds. It made very slight progress among the Natives, although they had long been a major target. Forced underground, the Party's influence remains small. White workers will not tolerate Communist opposition to the color bar. Among non-European groups, the spread of Communism is hampered by the internal dissensions over tactics, lack of organizers, and the ignorance, conservatism, and distrust of the masses. Moreover, civil officials are alert to suppress its influence.

33. However, the Communist Party's longer run prospects among urban non-Europeans appear good. As non-European grievances multiply under repressive Nationalist policies, increasing racial tension and sporadic violence should expand the opportunities for Communist exploitation. A number of the top non-European leaders are Communists. The Nationalist actions against the Coloreds will probably turn more of them to the Party, creating a reservoir of educated party workers. Though Communist progress will not be swift

among the mass of the Natives, the Communists may have greater success in acquiring positions of leadership among the Native organizations.

### External Effects of Prospective Developments

34. Repression of the non-Europeans in the Union is inevitably deepening the suspicions and dislike of whites by non-whites elsewhere in Africa, particularly in British Central and East Africa, and thus contributing to instability there. The continuation of Nationalist racial policies will confirm the belief of the non-European intelligentsia in the British colonies that similar measures would be likely in their own areas if the British Colonial Office relinquished control. The Nationalists' racial measures, well-advertised in those areas, are helping to undermine Britain's efforts to find a basis for racial partnership in its colonies.

35. Prospective developments in the Union will almost certainly further isolate the Union from a majority of UN members. Moreover, failure of the US and UK to take a firm stand in the UN against South Africa would expose them to charges of race prejudice and support for colonialism, and would probably create another divisive issue between the Western and Asian powers. If the US and UK took a stand against the Union, it would cost them a significant measure of South African cooperation.

36. The internal tensions in the Union probably will not in the short run have any greatly adverse effects on the flow of strategic materials to the US and UK. All white South Africans are interested in the maintenance and expansion of commerce. However, the internal political situation will probably divert attention and energies from existing production and transport problems, and deliveries of the materials will probably fall short of US and UK expectations. In the longer run, when rising racial tensions erupt into widespread disorders, the outflow of strategic materials will be hampered or even halted.

### Probable Foreign Policies

37. Though many in the Nationalist Party are disposed toward isolationism, South Africa's desire for US-UK markets and capital, its need for allies, and its fear of Communism will lead the government to continue to cooperate with the Western Powers.

38. The Nationalist Government currently regards Commonwealth membership as temporarily useful. However, the old Afrikaner aim of an independent republic, the diametric difference between Britain's racial policy in Africa and that of the Union, Britain's probable opposition to the Union's expansionist aspirations, and South African irritations with India will probably lead in time to replacement of the Commonwealth tie by a bilateral relationship with the UK. As an interim step the Union may declare itself a republic (like India) while remaining in the Commonwealth.

39. The Nationalists denounce the UN as futile and meddling; they may carry out their threat to withdraw if the UN intensifies its criticisms of the Union's racial policy.

40. South Africans have long aimed to extend the Union's rule and influence in Africa. The present Government has urged the UK to cede the British protectorates of Basutoland, Bechuanaland, and Swaziland. Almost certainly, however, this aspiration will be frustrated for the foreseeable future by Britain's firm opposition. The Nationalists also have cultivated relations with the white settlers in Central and East Africa and may have deliberately encouraged Afrikaner emigration into Southern Rhodesia. They hope within perhaps a generation to absorb the Rhodesias.

41. Since virtually all whites are anti-Soviet and since both major parties would almost certainly desire to help defend Africa, the Union Government would make a strong effort to send forces to the Middle East as soon as possible in event of general war. On the other hand, the Nationalist Government will probably not in peacetime improve substantially the effectiveness of its armed forces. We therefore believe that under present conditions the Union will probably remain for at

least four years unable to provide a full armored division for Middle East defense within three months after the outbreak of war. If war should break out now, South Africa could not provide the division in less than one year, even with prompt, substantial, outside material aid. Moreover, rising racial tension will increase manpower and equipment requirements to insure internal security; and, if war should break out while the controversy between the white groups remains intense, recruitment for foreign service would probably

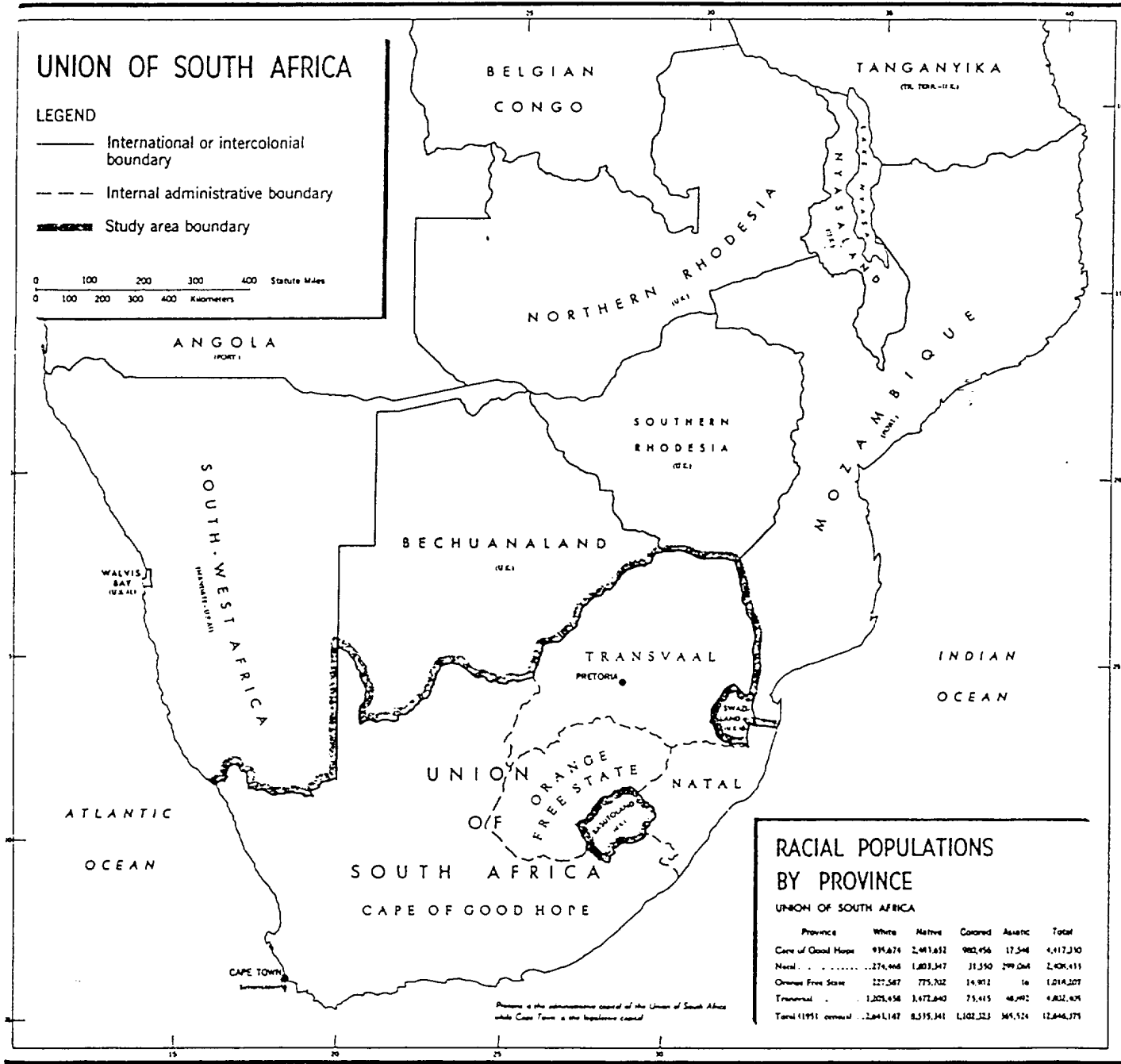
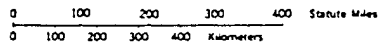
be handicapped by the preference of men to remain at home and support the interests of their group.

42. As an ally in the event of war, South Africa would be available to the West as a base. As a non-belligerent—an unlikely status in event of war on a scale sufficient to make its facilities important to the West—the Union could probably be persuaded to cooperate by economic inducements or pressures on the part of the UK and US.

# UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

## LEGEND

- International or intercolonial boundary
- - - Internal administrative boundary
- ▬▬▬▬** Study area boundary



## RACIAL POPULATIONS BY PROVINCE

### UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA

Province	White	Native	Colored	Asiatic	Total
Cape of Good Hope	915,674	2,461,652	982,456	17,548	4,417,330
Natal	274,448	1,803,347	31,550	299,044	2,408,411
Orange Free State	227,547	775,702	14,912	16	1,018,277
Transvaal	1,205,658	3,472,640	75,615	48,492	4,822,405
Total (1951 census)	2,641,147	8,515,341	1,102,523	349,124	12,648,375

*Pretoria is the administrative capital of the Union of South Africa while Cape Town is the legislative capital.*