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Kenneth Kaunda and the Johnson Administration

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Why focus on Zambia? Bill Clinton might simply respond, 'because I can,' but there are better reasons. First, in this conference about 'borders,' it would be difficult to find a more compelling case than Zambia for their significance. In the 1960s, of Zambia's 8 neighbors, 5 were directly involved in serious conflicts (Rhodesia, Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, and Zaire). Second, Zambia provides an ideal opportunity to follow the advice of Emily Rosenberg and analyze US foreign relations from 'perspectives situated on the periphery.'^[1] For these reasons, therefore, an examination of relations between the US and Zambia during the Johnson years is worthwhile and relevant.

Former Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda recently characterized Lyndon Johnson's 1965 decision not to fund a railroad to Tanzania as a 'disappointment.' He praised the US contribution to the 1966 airlift as 'helpful.' Regarding Johnson's overall policy Kaunda concluded that 'the support he gave us was quite important.'^[2] Does the Johnson administration deserve even this much praise for its policies toward Zambia? A careful examination of events from 1964 to 1968 reveals a different story. Perhaps forty years and many larger setbacks had lessened Kaunda's disappointment with US policy, but there is no doubt that at the time he and his advisors were hoping for much more than the Johnson administration delivered.

In many respects Kaunda was right to expect a lot of international backing in 1964. Officials around the world had been praising him for several years. After a September 1962 conversation in which Kaunda denounced apartheid and called for the release of Nelson Mandela, the South African diplomat H.L. Taswell nevertheless admitted to being 'impressed by his sincerity, intellectual ability, kindly manner and strong personality.'^[3] In December 1963 the CIA described Kaunda as an 'ascetic' who modeled himself after Gandhi and as one of the few 'able moderates' in Zambian politics. In adding that 'moderation is the only road to stability' the CIA strongly suggested that Kaunda deserved support.^[4]

Zambia's official independence ceremony on 24 October 1964 raised expectations inside and outside of the new nation. Its significance was best captured by John Lewis. The civil rights leader and future congressman observed: 'I'd never seen anything like this in my life, this nation of black and brown people tasting their moment of history, celebrating their first step into liberation. I remember thinking that this needed to be felt in Alabama and Mississippi.'^[5]

Shortly after independence day, Kaunda addressed the United Nations, and met briefly with President Johnson. It seems unlikely that much of substance was discussed during their 33

minutes together, but the background documents for the meeting are nonetheless quite revealing. Secretary of State Dean Rusk highlighted the importance of Zambia's copper mines. He expressed the hope that concrete aid to Zambia would primarily come from the UK, but indicated that the US would 'supplement this assistance where we can be particularly helpful.' Rusk summed up the significance of Kaunda's nation as a 'potential island of stability in an ocean of angry cross-currents.' When it came to assessing Kaunda himself, Rusk sung his praises: 'He is a devout Christian, a sincere advocate of multiracialism, a man of democratic instincts and one who generally prefers compromise to conflict. Kaunda should be treated as a good friend of the US...'[6]

The first major request for American assistance from Kaunda, the 'good friend of the US,' came in May 1965. He asked the US to help finance the construction of a railroad linking Zambia to Tanzania, thus ending Zambia's dependency on Rhodesia for transportation of coal in and copper out.[7] His chief advocate in Washington was G. Mennen Williams, the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa,[8] who 'strongly urged' Johnson to fund the railroad.[9] In spite of his pleas, the President rejected the request. The Johnson administration concluded that the railroad did not make economic sense, and also expected Congress to vehemently oppose it. Summarizing the decision in late May, National Security Council Staffer Robert Komer described the railroad as a '\$400 million boondoggle.' [10]

As Kaunda unsuccessfully sought funds from the West, Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere looked to the East. The People's Republic of China offered to conduct a preliminary survey in Tanzania, and Chou En-Lai visited Nyerere in early June. The possibility of Chinese intervention in southern Africa had already set off alarms in Washington, and earlier in the spring the top US diplomat in Zambia, Robert Foulon, was ordered to warn Kaunda against working with the PRC. The warning did not go over well with Kaunda, but this was not because he wanted to work with China.[11]

Indeed, Kaunda disagreed with Nyerere about Chinese help, and rather than accepting the idea initially, he tried to use it as leverage to convince US and UK officials to change their minds on the railroad. The Johnson administration held firm, but the British wavered. At the late June Commonwealth Conference, Canada and the UK agreed to fund another railroad feasibility study, by the Stamp company. The consensus among Johnson administration officials, however, was still that the project was not worth supporting. George Ball opposed the railroad as 'uneconomic.' Komer remained against the railroad, although he revised his description from '\$400 million boondoggle' to 'multi-million dollar white elephant.' Not wanting to finance either boondoggles or white elephants, Komer proposed instead that the US help improve the highway from Zambia to Tanzania. Kaunda ultimately accepted the offer. [12]

Kaunda's foreign relations challenges multiplied exponentially on 11 November 1965 with Ian Smith's unilateral declaration of independence (UDI). Over the next few days the UK announced that its response would consist of economic sanctions, and the Johnson administration did the same. Kaunda pledged to participate fully in the effort to end Smith's rebellion, which in turn meant Zambia was very vulnerable to retaliation from Rhodesia. Most importantly, if an oil embargo was imposed on Smith's regime, he could terminate the flow of oil and coal into Zambia, which would paralyze the copper industry. This was the Johnson administration's biggest

concern, and it is exactly what happened. American officials such as George Ball worked with their British counterparts to organize an airlift to maintain access to Zambian copper.[13]

Kaunda expressed his gratitude to Johnson for the American efforts to plan an airlift.[14] Though thankful for US help on the airlift, Kaunda was becoming increasingly concerned that the British were not doing enough. As it looked like their response to UDI would not end the rebellion quickly, he feared the crisis would last a long time and hurt Zambia badly. He decided to request additional help directly from the great powers to supplement what the British were doing, and also perhaps to shock them into a more forceful policy. Therefore, in mid-December 1965 he sent delegations of his top advisors to Moscow and Washington.[15]

Kaunda sent Agriculture Minister Elijah Mudenda to the Soviet Union. The Zambian ambassador there, Vernon Mwaanga, arranged for a meeting with Head of State Nikolai Podgorny at the Kremlin. Mwaanga had high hopes that the Soviets 'would see this as a clear case requiring urgent assistance.' [16] Mudenda was also hopeful, but that soon changed. Immediately upon arrival in the Soviet Union he started to be discouraged, first by the brutal cold and second by his host's attempt to warm him (a teetotaler like Kaunda) with cognac. His meeting with Podgorny was no better. Mudenda explained that Zambia desperately needed fuel and trucks, but 'no positive response was forthcoming. It became clear that they were not willing to help.' [17]

Kaunda's delegation to the US, led by Foreign Minister Simon Kapwepwe, also fared poorly. In Washington on 22 December Kapwepwe talked with Assistant Secretary Williams, who simply reiterated the American intention to assist with the airlift and repair the highway to Tanzania. Kapwepwe believed the US only cared about the UK, not Zambia, and summed up his meeting with Williams by saying 'we were treated like fools.' A few days later he met with Secretary Rusk, a session he deemed 'not fruitful at all.' Back in Zambia on New Year's Day, he gloomily assessed his mission to the US as 'the most hopeless of all trips I made to any government in the world. [18]

American participation in the airlift, which obviously was much less than Kapwepwe had hoped for, began in early January. Two Boeing 707s made three trips per day, delivering the oil vital for the Zambian copper mines, while Kaunda faced off with Ian Smith. In late January Kaunda thanked Johnson for 'this great contribution to the Zambian economy.' He then elaborated on the increasing difficulties his country faced and asked Johnson to extend the airlift to the end of April.[19] Johnson responded favorably.[20] US participation in the airlift continued until 30 April, and by then the planes had provided over 3.6 million gallons of fuel to Zambia.[21]

Kaunda appreciated the Johnson administration's role in the airlift, which had been necessitated by the decision to impose sanctions against Rhodesia. The fact remained, however, that Kaunda did not think sanctions were the solution. He made his views very clear in early March in the British publication *Punch*, contending that 'the use of British troops is the one way of minimizing conflict...' He argued that Smith's forces would never fire on British forces, and thus by sending troops the UK could end the rebellion quickly and non-violently. He concluded that 'only Britain can bring down the Smith regime without violence.' Failure to do so could well open the door to race wars throughout southern Africa.[22]

Kaunda's opinion that sanctions were failing and troops were required grew stronger by Fall 1966, and he sent Foreign Minister Kapwepwe to the Commonwealth Conference in London to deliver the message. After British Prime Minister Harold Wilson addressed the gathering and opined that sanctions just needed more time, Kapwepwe presented Zambia's case which directly challenged Wilson's view. Kapwepwe simply stated that the 'use of force was the answer to the problem.' He added statistics demonstrating the failure of sanctions, and concluded with the point that taking the issue to the UN would not do any good since South Africa would get involved.[23]

In October Kaunda wrote to Johnson, hoping that the US would 'keep the British honest' in the UN debates over Rhodesia, and requesting a meeting in November when he would be addressing the General Assembly. Ed Hamilton, the National Security Council staffer responsible for Africa, suggested that Johnson meet with Kaunda.[24] On 14 November Kaunda arrived in New York, and the next day he delivered a powerful speech to the UN calling for the use of force to end the Rhodesian rebellion quickly. The delegates responded to the address with a two-minute ovation. It turned out that Kaunda would not see Johnson, who was in the hospital. Instead, Secretary Rusk consulted with Kaunda on the 16th. The Zambian leader told Rusk that the US should play a larger role in southern Africa before it was too late, in order to prevent a race war that could spread around the world. The Secretary listened passively and promised to report to Johnson. Kapwepwe characterized Rusk as 'really cold.' [25]

Returning to the warmth of Central Africa, Kaunda and his advisors carried on in spite of ongoing setbacks. The British and Canadian survey concluded that the Tan-Zam railroad was economically sound. Refusal of the major mining companies in the region such as Anglo-American to reroute their products to the north, however, ended the possibility of British funding for the railroad.[26] Kaunda consulted with Nyerere and decided to request help from the PRC. In July 1967 he spent five days in China. Robert Good, the US ambassador to Zambia, noted a new attitude by Kaunda regarding nuclear non-proliferation. Kaunda praised the Chinese for their successful testing of a hydrogen bomb. He stated that if more nations had nukes, there would be less chance of any nation using them. In addition to this seeming philosophical shift by Kaunda, Ambassador Good also emphasized that Zambia and China had discussed economic issues. Most importantly, the Chinese agreed to build the Tan-Zam railroad.[27]

In Peking on 5 September 1967, officials from Zambia, Tanzania, and China signed a formal plan for railroad construction. Even then, Kaunda was still hoping for additional support from the West, and not just for transportation.[28] Twice in September Kaunda wrote Johnson requesting military assistance. In the first letter he asked the US to build a weapons factory in Zambia to produce anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons. In the second letter he expanded his wish list to include ballistic missiles and 'missiles with nuclear warheads.' Kaunda felt that raids into Zambia from Rhodesia, Angola, and South Africa necessitated drastic defensive measures.[29] Johnson denied the request for military assistance but pledged to keep Zambia's security needs under review.[30]

Attacks on Zambia continued, so early in 1968 Kaunda sent Foreign Minister Reuben Kamanga to ask again. Kamanga told Rusk that 'Zambia was surrounded by hostile countries like Southern

Rhodesia, South Africa and the Portuguese territories and felt threatened.’ Rusk discussed the issue thoroughly with Kamanga, but offered no military assistance.[31] Things only got worse. Elijah Mudenda, who served as Foreign Minister from 1969 to 1973, later stated that by mid-1969 there had been sixty attacks against Zambia. According to Mudenda, ‘The fascist Portuguese soldiers planted anti-personnel and anti-vehicle land mines. Zambia sustained heavy losses in life and property.’ Ongoing pleas to the West for support were rejected. Eventually Yugoslavia provided Zambia with military support which included pilot training and anti-aircraft guns.[32]

As the Johnson administration entered what turned out to be its last full-year in power, there was one final indication of how subsequent US/Zambian relations might have been very different. On January 5, Vice President Hubert Humphrey met for two hours with Kaunda during a brief stop in Lusaka.[33] Humphrey praised Zambian efforts to expand education and fight poverty and racism, in spite of the economic hardships exacerbated by Rhodesia's rebellion. To help alleviate those hardships, he pledged American funds for the Great North Road to Tanzania.[34] Humphrey left Zambia very impressed with its people and its leader. In his report to Johnson he elaborated on Zambia's significance.

‘1) We have a basic community of principles which support non-racial societies and open opportunities for all; 2) Zambia's success in this approach is economically important to the West (over 15 percent of its copper)... (3) Zambia's failure would also be our failure.[35]

Humphrey concluded his prescription for a healthier American policy with two final pills of wisdom: the US should be patient and ‘settle in for the long-haul,’ and communication between the leaders of the US and Zambia had to be ‘much better.’ To facilitate the latter he proposed inviting Kaunda for an official visit in the near future.[36]

Here we can only wonder ‘what if?’ What if Humphrey had succeeded Johnson? What would US relations with Zambia in the early 1970s have looked like? As we all know, instead of Humphrey and closer ties with Zambia, Americans got a Tricky Dick of a President who never found time to meet with Kaunda, chose the ‘Tar Baby’ option for southern Africa, and was occasionally too drunk to answer the phone. Indeed, Kaunda's recent praise for Johnson makes more sense when he is compared with Nixon. Kaunda and his advisors, particularly Simon Kapwepwe, were understandably disappointed during the Johnson years, but Nixon soon showed them that things could be much worse.

Notes:

[1]. Emily Rosenberg, ‘Walking the Borders,’ in Michael Hogan and Thomas Patterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge, 1991), 27.

[2]. Kenneth Kaunda interview with the author, Boulder, CO, 10 April 2003.

[3]. ‘Interview with Kaunda,’ Secret telegram from H.L.T. Taswell in Salisbury to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs in Pretoria, 28 September 1962, Vol.6 Subfile: Northern Rhodesia Political

Situation and Developments, BTS 1/157/1, National Archive of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

[4]. Central Intelligence Agency, Office of Current Intelligence, Special Report, 'Breakup of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland,' 27 December 1963, 'Rhodesia Memos & Misc, 12/63-1/66,' Box 97, National Security Country File, Lyndon Johnson Library, Austin, Texas; Pearson, Consul General in Salisbury, telegram to the Secretary of State, 20 April 1964, 'Rho Cables, 12/63-1/66,' Box 97, National Security Country File, Lyndon Johnson Library (hereafter LBJ).

[5]. John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 288-9.

[6]. Dean Rusk, memo to President Johnson, 'Your Meeting with President Kaunda of the Republic of Zambia,' 28 November 1964, 'Zambia Kaunda Visit,' Box 102, NSF-Country File, LBJ. Numerous other background documents drafted at the State Department on 11/25/64 elaborate on issues such as Kaunda's desire for a railroad and the Rhodesia crisis in depth. The 12/2/64 meeting is described briefly in the Daily Diary, detailed in an email to me on 4/15/04 from LBJ archivist Jennifer Cuddeback. At the time of this writing I have discovered no other record of what Kaunda and Johnson actually discussed.

[7]. Bertha Zimba Osei-Hwedie and Kwaku Osei-Hwedie, *Tanzania-Zambia Railroad: An Analysis of Zambia's Decision-Making in Transportation* (Lawrenceville, VA: Brunswick, 1990), 28-9, 43.

[8]. Andrew DeRoche, *Black, White, and Chrome: The United States and Zimbabwe, 1953-1998* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2001), 57. The incident will assumedly also get a thorough treatment in Tom Noers forthcoming bio of Williams.

[9]. G. Mennen Williams interview by Joe Frantz, 8 March 1974, Oral History Collection, LBJ, 16.

[10]. Memo from Robert Komer to McGeorge Bundy, 28 May 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968 Volume XXIV Africa* (Washington: USGPO, 1999), 798-9; role of expected opposition from Congress mentioned in Robert Good, *UDI: The International Politics of the Rhodesian Rebellion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 93-4.

[11]. Arthur Tinken 22 April 1988 interview with Robert Foulon, US Charge to Zambia from October 1964 to March 1965, Association for Diplomatic Studies, Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, 12-13; Osei-Hwedie and Osei-Hwedie, *Tanzania-Zambia Railroad*, 44-5.

[12]. Osei-Hwedie and Osei-Hwedie, *Tanzania-Zambia Railroad*, 12-13; Memo from Komer and Ulric Haynes to President Johnson, 12 July 1965, *FRUS, 1964-68 XXIV Africa*, 800-1; G. Mennen Williams, 'Memo for the Files: J. Wayne Fredericks Request for Contribution to the Stamp Survey,' 29 June 1965, Folder 'Zambia,' Box 28, Country Files, Records of G. Mennen Williams, State Record Group 59, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

[13]. The Johnson administrations response to UDI and its concern for Zambian copper is thoroughly analyzed in DeRoche, *_Black, White, and Chrome_*, 112-127.

[14]. Kenneth Kaunda to Lyndon Johnson, 15 December 1965, 'Zambia-Kaunda Corresp.,' Box 61, Special Head of State Correspondence, National Security File, LBJ.

[15]. The decision to send the missions, and the missions themselves, are insightfully analyzed in Douglas Anglin, *_Zambian Crisis Behavior: Confronting Rhodesias Unilateral Declaration of Independence, 1965-1966_* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994), 147-151.

[16]. Vernon Mwaanga, *_An Extraordinary Life_* (Lusaka: Multimedia Publications, 1982), 110. Mwaangas book, which I stumbled upon in a used bookshop in Pretoria, is a fascinating account of his experiences as a diplomat in the 1960s and 1970s. His adventures included being robbed by a prostitute in New York and skiing in the Soviet Union.

[17]. Elijah Mudenda, *_Zambia: A Generation of Struggle_* (Harare: SAPES Books, 1999), 50-51. Mudendas book, along with Mwaangas, is one of the very few detailed first-person accounts of Zambian foreign relations. Thanks to the University of Colorado's interlibrary loan department for quickly finding it. Mudenda's book was brought to my attention by Gabriel Banda, Kaunda's personal assistant, during a dinner in Lusaka in July 2003. We searched unsuccessfully for it on the way to the airport. I missed my flight to Victoria Falls, but with Gabriel's help managed to get on a bus. The only seat available was next to a woman named Heather, who is now my wife.

[18]. Goodwin Mwangilwa, *_The Kapwepwe Diaries_* (Lusaka: Multimedia Publications, 1986), 61-62. Kapwepwe's diaries from 1965 and 1966, edited and published by Mwangilwa after Kapwepwe's 1980 death, are a unique and invaluable insight into Zambian politics and foreign relations. Thanks to Douglas Anglin for citing this work in his *_Zambian Crisis Behavior_*, and again to the University of Colorado interlibrary loan department for tracking it down.

[19]. Kenneth Kaunda to Lyndon Johnson, 26 January 1966, 'Zambia-Kaunda Corresp.,' Box 61, Special Head of State Correspondence, National Security File, LBJ.

[20]. Johnson to Kaunda, 10 February 1966, *ibid.*

[21]. Good, *_UDI_*, 109-110.

[22]. Kenneth Kaunda, 'A Racial Holocaust In Central Africa?' *_Punch_* 9 March 1966, 334-5.

[23]. Mwangilwa, *_The Kapwepwe Diaries_*, 78-79.

[24]. Ed Hamilton, memo: 'Possible Presidential decisions on Africa during the Asian trip,' 16 October 1966, Hamilton Memos, Box 3, Name File, National Security File, LBJ.

[25]. Mwangilwa, *_The Kapwepwe Diaries_*, 82.

[26]. Gabriel Banda, *_Zambia Against Apartheid: A Case on Apartheid-Caused Debt_* (Lusaka: Action on Southern Africa, 2000), 15.

[27]. Telegram, Good to State, 31 July 1967, *ibid.* Good's point about the Zambian shift on non-proliferation proved prescient, as Zambia joined Tanzania, Albania, and Cuba as the only four nations to vote against the Non-Proliferation Treaty proposed by the US and USSR in June 1968. Mwaanga was then UN Ambassador and he discusses the vote in *_Extraordinary Life_*, 127.

[28]. Osei-Hwedie and Osei-Hwedie, *_Tanzania-Zambia Railroad_*, 53.

[29]. Kaunda to Johnson, 27 September 1967, 'Zambia, Presidential Corresp.,' Box 61, Special Head of State Correspondence, National Security File, LBJ. These letters were only declassified in 1999 in response to my Mandatory Review request. Their revelation about Kaunda asking for US weapons, nuclear or not, was quite significant. Douglas Anglin, one of the most knowledgeable scholars on Kaunda's foreign policy, stated in 1994 that 'it appears that there was never any intention of asking for Soviet or American troops or arms,' *_Zambian Crisis Behavior_*, 336, note 42.

[30]. State Department memo for the Vice President, 'Meeting with Zambian Foreign Minister Kamanga,' 18 January 1968, Pol 7 Zambia, Box 2847, Record Group 59, NA2.

[31]. State Department memo of conversation between Rusk, Kamanga, et al., 18 January 1968, *ibid.*

[32]. Mudenda, *_Zambia_*, 93-4.

[33]. Vice President Humphreys report to Johnson, 12 January 1968, 'Africa--VP's Report on African Visit,' Box 77, Country File, National Security File, LBJ, 28.

[34]. The exact details of US involvement on the highway project are spelled out in a memo from Ed Hamilton to Walt Rostow, 18 January 1968, 'Hamilton Memos,' Box 3, Name File, National Security File, LBJ.

[35]. Humphreys report to Johnson, 29.

[36]. *Ibid.*, 30.