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Clark reviews U.S. policy in Africa

By Karen Wittwer

After holding an attitude of neglect for many years, United States policy toward Southern Africa is much more promising today, a former U.S. senator from Iowa said Saturday.

Dick Clark, who served as senator from 1973 to 1979 and was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, spoke at the Nebraskans for Peace annual meeting at the First United Methodist Church in Lincoln. President Carter recently appointed Clark to the post of ambassador at large for the U.S. refugee policy.

Clark said the U.S.'s attitude of neglect was not surprising because the United States never had colonies in Africa like some European countries did.

The United States showed very little interest in Africa until the last 20 years when the European colonies began to gain their independence, he said.

Differing treatment

Since 1957, U.S. policy can be examined according to how different administrations treated relations with Africa, Clark said.

The Kennedy administration showed more interest in African affairs than did any previous administration, but contact was still minimal, he said.

However, JFK talked with leaders of the liberation movements within emerging African nations and managed to establish at least some communication between the U.S. and these countries.

But as the Vietnam War intensified and Lyndon Johnson became president, foreign policy concerns, including Africa, gave way to the problems in Vietnam, Clark said.

After Richard Nixon was elected, the National Security Council conducted a study to determine what the U.S. policy toward Africa should be, he said. The study concluded that the white minority regimes were in solid condition and black uprisings were not anticipated.

On this basis the United States decided to favor the minority regimes, he said.

Suspicious of U.S.

But, subsequent black uprisings proved the study wrong and created a "great and well-founded suspicion" toward the United States, Clark said.

By 1976 it was clear that the Nixon policy was a failure and the United States would have to deal with the black majorities, Clark said. But the change in policy failed because it was a cold war attempt to keep the Soviets out of Africa and not a human rights issue. Clark said that when Jimmy Carter became president there were significant changes in attitudes as the United States began to look at Africa as important in and of itself and not as another theatre of the cold war.

He said Rhodesia, Southwest Africa or Namibia and the Republic of South Africa are the most critical areas in Southern Africa today.

U.S. policy in Rhodesia was moving in the right direction although a settlement appears increasingly dim, he said. The plan for Rhodesia calls for getting all parties involved and holding a brief transition period with United Nations supervised elections.

Settlement promising

The policy for Southwest Africa is much the same as the Rhodesian policy including United Nations supervised elections, Clark said, Southwest Africa is the most promising for a settlement soon.

He said the problem in South Africa is much more difficult as it is the most racist country in the world. Eightythree percent of the population including Blacks, Indians and those of mixed heritage cannot vote, hold office or own property. Racism in South Africa is institutionalized and written into law.

U.S. policy in South Africa is headed toward more economic, political and diplomatic isolation from South Africa if that country refuses to change its power structure, Clark said.

Although he approved of this policy, he said he would like to see the United States take stronger action. A large range of policy options exists, from breaking off relations entirely to more actively discouraging U.S. investment there.

Our business

However, Clark said "it's not for the United States to determine the internal policy of South Africa, the policy ultimately has to be that of South Africa, but as the United States has an impact on South Africa is our business."

African nations are politically important to U.S. policy as they symbolize the developing third world countries, Clark said.

One-third of the world's countries are in Africa, he said. Economically, Africa is important because of the rich mineral resources it holds, and Africa is important culturally because of the many Americans whose heritage comes from the continent.

Africa is important to the United States in terms of human rights because racism is more apparent in South Africa than anywhere else in the world, Clark said.

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