

WASHINGTON SHOULD BEWARE OF U.N. PEACE MONITORS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa may be on the brink of civil war. The on-again-off-again multiparty negotiations for a post-apartheid South Africa are now off. On September 27, the Inkatha Freedom Party of Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi dropped out of negotiations with the government and Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. In the face of routine Inkatha-ANC violence, Buthelezi claims that Inkatha will stay away from the negotiating table until the ANC's AK-47-loaded military arm, *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, is disbanded. Meanwhile, South Africa suffers 300 politically motivated killings each month.

If South Africa erupts into full-scale violence, the United States could find itself under tremendous pressure to participate in, or even lead, a United Nations peacekeeping operation there. Participation in such a U.N. force, similar to the one now in Yugoslavia, would not be in the U.S. national interest. To avoid this predicament, Washington should resist pressuring the South African government into accepting increasing international intervention into its internal affairs.

This intervention to date consists of 65 or so U.N.-sanctioned peace monitors. By the end of October, a fifty-member U.N. delegation will be in full force in South Africa. The European Community also is providing fifteen or so monitors, under U.N. supervision. These monitors are on a mission to defuse potential acts of violence. If violence breaks out, they are to determine who is responsible.

Despite their good intentions, the peace monitors actually could encourage more violence in South Africa. Some South African activists using or contemplating violent political tactics probably view the admission of U.N. and other peace monitors as a "defeat" for the South African government. The South Africa of the past zealously guarded its sovereignty, opposing any intervention into its internal affairs. This perception of "victory" may incite radicals to increasing levels of violence, in the hope of maintaining, or even increasing, the number of peace monitors.

Violence as Political Weapon. Or the peace monitors may be ineffective. South Africa's political negotiations have foundered partly because far too many South Africans view violence as a potent political weapon. This was demonstrated tragically on September 7, when 40,000 ANC sympathizers marched in Ciskei, ostensibly to protest this quasi-independent homeland's lack of democracy. A group of ANC radicals among this crowd, however, were intent on overthrowing Ciskei's military ruler, Oupa Gqozo. Even if this attempt failed, the ANC was hoping to provoke a violent confrontation, win international sympathy, and put the South African government, which supports Gqozo, on the defensive. Gqozo's overzealous security forces killed 29 demonstrators in successfully defending Ciskei.

The fact that South African President F.W. de Klerk gave the ANC significant concessions soon after the Ciskei massacre was not lost on the ANC radicals, who have not yet given up the armed struggle. Sensing de Klerk's weakness, the ANC has not ruled out further protest marches on other homelands. Some within the ANC would like to forcibly occupy South Africa's Parliament building. These tactics are guaranteed to provoke more violence. Meanwhile, elements within the government's security forces have their own plans to continue inciting violence.

Given this potential for increased violence, it is likely that there will be pressure to dispatch more peace monitors to South Africa, regardless of their effect. The mechanism for doing so is in place. U.N. Security Council Resolution 772, passed last August, authorizes Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali to deploy an unspecified number of peace monitors to South Africa. Some Security Council members already have sought to send 400 U.N. peace monitors to South Africa. All that is needed is the South African government's permission. So far, the South African government has welcomed a "reasonable" number of peace monitors, but not as many as 400.

Unprecedented Intervention. De Klerk is in a weak position to resist demands that South Africa accept additional peace monitors, having already sanctioned an unprecedented intervention into its internal affairs. In this respect, the South African government has crossed the Rubicon. The U.S., however, must not pressure South Africa into accepting more peace monitors. In fact, the U.S. should even avoid pressuring de Klerk into keeping the current peace monitors if they are unwanted. There are two reasons for this: 1) peace monitors cannot reverse the political dynamics fueling the violence; they may, in fact, be used politically by one side against the others; and 2) if things were to get out of hand, and the U.N. had to launch a major peacekeeping operation in South Africa, the U.S. would be pressured to take the lead to finance it and possibly provide military support.

This may prove to be unwise, given the potentially intractable nature of civil conflicts in South Africa. However, if Washington repeatedly has pushed South Africa to accept a greater international involvement in its internal affairs, it will be in a weak position to shun such a peacekeeping effort for South Africa.

To be sure, the U.S. has interests in South Africa. Washington would like to see a peaceful dismantling of apartheid and a stable transition to democracy. These interests, however, in no way warrant a major U.S. financial and military commitment to a U.N. peacekeeping operation. South Africa may never reach the point where such a commitment is asked for. Yet the potential exists. Therefore, the U.S. should establish a record of detachment from the international community's increasing pressure to get involved in South Africa's internal affairs. The U.S. should respect the South African government's prerogative to reject this involvement. And it should refuse to pressure South Africa one way or another on accepting peace monitors. This will ensure that the tables will not be turned on Washington if South Africa spins out of control. Internationalizing South Africa's conflict may be, in the long run, a sure way to Americanize it.

Thomas P. Sheehy
Policy Analyst