



U.S.-South Africa Relations: Tensions Rise

March 6, 2025

On February 7, 2025, President Donald Trump issued [Executive Order \(EO\) 14204](#), which stated that the South African government “has taken aggressive positions towards the United States and its allies” and “egregious actions” on land reform and racial relations. The EO reportedly has accentuated strains that had emerged in U.S.-South African relations since late 2022, largely over varied Government of South African (GoSA) foreign policy stances, regarding which multiple Members of Congress of Congress had expressed concerns. The Biden Administration, while acknowledging such concerns, largely sought to maintain bilateral [collaboration on multiple issues](#).

Executive Order

The EO sets out concerns over South Africa’s [Expropriation Act](#), enacted on [January 23, 2025](#), which the EO asserts aims to enable GoSA seizures of “ethnic minority Afrikaners’ agricultural property without compensation.” The act does not mention Afrikaners (a predominantly White Dutch settler-descended ethno-racial group). The EO also says the GoSA has pursued “countless”

polices designed to dismantle equal opportunity in employment, education, and business, and hateful rhetoric and government actions fueling disproportionate violence against racially disfavored landowners.

The EO further criticizes the GoSA for “accusing Israel, not Hamas, of genocide in the International Court of Justice, and reinvigorating its relations with Iran to develop commercial, military, and nuclear arrangements,” and declares that the “United States cannot support” GoSA domestic “rights violations … or its undermining United States foreign policy.” It states that while such alleged “unjust and immoral practices” persist, the United States

- “shall not provide aid or assistance to South Africa” and
- “shall promote the resettlement of Afrikaner refugees escaping government-sponsored race-based discrimination, including racially discriminatory property confiscation.”

The assistance provision permits “necessary” exceptions. These reportedly [had included](#) certain U.S. [President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief \(PEPFAR\) programs](#) in South Africa, under a [waiver](#) to a separate foreign aid “pause” and [program review](#) under [EO 14169](#) (January 20, 2025). Per that review, the Administration has terminated numerous PEPFAR programs in South Africa. In FY2023 ([latest full](#)

annual data), South Africa was allocated \$492 million in U.S. aid—99% for health and 94% to counter HIV/AIDS—of which \$440 million is obligated.

South African Responses

In response to the EO, the African National Congress (ANC)-dominated **coalition government** has stated that “no arbitrary dispossession of land/private property” has occurred, **self-attested** to the Expropriation Act’s **constitutionality**, and **likened** it to **eminent domain** laws in other countries. Officials, calling Afrikaners an “**economically privileged**” group, have **refuted** as untrue assertions “that Afrikaners face arbitrary deprivation and, therefore, need to flee” South Africa as refugees.

While the Expropriation Act permits state expropriation of private land **without compensation** in limited circumstances, it otherwise calls for “just and equitable” remuneration. The act, ANC-affiliated GoSA officials contend, is public interest measure to help redress enduring racial socioeconomic **inequalities** rooted in **apartheid**, which **systematically dispossessed** non-Whites of land. It is tied to GoSA land reform efforts **intended** to increase racially equitable access to privately held agricultural land; in 2015, roughly 72% of such property was owned by Whites (about 7% of the population). The act, however, is domestically controversial; the **Democratic Alliance**, the ANC’s main governing **coalition partner**, has **sued to overturn** it on constitutional grounds and compared it to apartheid-era land seizures.

Afrikaner responses to the EO’s refugee provisions have been mixed. While **some Afrikaners** reportedly have shown interest in the EO’s **refugee** and its alleged **racial injustice** provisions, several influential Afrikaner interest groups have **rejected** the refugee resettlement offer and **denied** that their **advocacy efforts** helped trigger the EO.

U.S.-GoSA Relations Issues and Congress

Prior to the EO, some congressional concerns with the GoSA’s foreign policy **focused** on

- **Russia**, including **allegations** in 2022 by then-U.S. Ambassador to South Africa Reuben Brigety—**denied** by the GoSA—that South Africa had armed Russia, aiding its war on Ukraine;
- the **People’s Republic of China**, and GoSA support for China’s “**One China**” policy (e.g., via **pressure** on Taiwan), over which some Members **raised concerns**;
- Amicable GoSA relations with **Iran**, a **U.S.-designated state sponsor of terrorism** and a **funder of Hamas**, a U.S. designated **Foreign Terrorist Organization**; and
- **GoSA positions on Israel**, a product of decades-long ANC-led **political support** for the Palestinians have also drawn many Members’ concern. In early 2024, **over 200** Members **denounced** South Africa’s **litigation against Israel** before the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Israel, the **GoSA alleged**, “has violated the genocide convention” during its military actions in Gaza.

In February 2025, neither Secretary of State **Marco Rubio** nor Treasury Secretary **Scott Bessent** attended GoSA-led G20 **ministerial meetings** in South Africa, precedent to a November 2025 heads of state summit, underscoring current bilateral strains. Secretary Rubio said South Africa was “**doing very bad things**” as **G20 president**. A lower-profile U.S. **presence** in the G20 summit process could enable greater influence by **China** and **Russia** within the G20.

GoSA leaders, **calling** the United States “a key strategic political and trade partner,” said that they seek “**diplomatic solutions to any**” EO-linked “misunderstandings or disputes.” The Administration has reportedly **rebuffed** GoSA diplomatic outreach. Another GoSA response was the mining minister’s

[proposal](#) to “withhold minerals to the US” if U.S. aid was cut. The GoSA also has sought to mend relations with Congress, address issues of congressional [concern](#), and [downplay](#) the ICJ issue.

Possible issues of relevance to congressional oversight, authorization, and appropriations consideration on U.S. South-Africa relations may include the following:

- The scope of bilateral [aid terminations](#) under EOs 14204 and 14169, and how this may affect U.S. foreign policy and health sector priorities in South Africa.
- Whether or to what degree South Africa’s foreign policy positions may have [undermined](#) U.S. national security and [foreign policy interests](#), potentially violating an [eligibility criteria](#) for [African Growth and Opportunity Act](#) (AGOA) trade benefits, including in the context of a possible AGOA program reauthorization. H.R. 7256 (118th Congress) would have required presidential certification of GoSA compliance with such criteria and a comprehensive review of bilateral relations.
- Stated congressional concerns about the PRC, Russia, and Iran; access to strategic minerals; and bilateral policy differences and shared views on other regional or global issues.

Author Information

Nicolas Cook
Specialist in African Affairs

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