

DIPLOMACY AND DELUSION: THE BOTHAS IN SEARCH OF AFRICA

Each year the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) issues a head count of world armies and weapons called *The Military Balance*. Although weighted in favour of the explosive arms build-up in central Europe, the publication's Third World section has steadily grown over the years.

A few weeks ago the 1988-89 edition crossed my desk and I turned up "Sub-Saharan Africa". It makes dismal reading: increased expenditure, more sophisticated weapons and deepening outside involvement in the region's many conflicts. The phrase which struck me, however, was, "the balance (in the Angolan war) was tilting against South Africa." All the evidence suggests that this is fair comment on what has happened over the past year. But has this setback altered the primacy of South Africa in the region? The answer is obviously, no. Nevertheless, things have changed and the Bothas have sought to carve-out new African trails to counter the reversals.

★ ★ ★

Two refrains — it overstates their importance to call them doctrines — have driven Pretoria's African strategies since the mid-1960s: South Africa is an African power and the route back to international acceptability lies through Africa. John Vorster's trilogy of *African Efforts*² were part of the search to give substance to these understandings; P. W. Botha's much-vaunted "constellation of states" had the same goals. When stripped of rhetoric, all were driven by a fairly base reality: *apartheid* has formally isolated South Africa. Anxiety is added to isolation by boycotts and sanctions. The reaction is to do something close to home which avoids tackling *apartheid* itself: Africa provides thus a diversionary hinterland.

But where do the recent journeys lead? Are they a real breakthrough or was President P. W. Botha exaggerating with his triumphant claim that "Africa is talking to South Africa"? This short article explores these and other questions before turning to reiterate old truths.

NAMIBIA: FREE AT LAST?

Like many other international disputes, the one over Namibia has an intractable quality. The contest for control of the territory — in the United Nations alone, that is — has been going since the League of Nations final session in 1946. Three international court cases and countless deaths later, is the South African government finally willing to settle?

Yes, is the quick answer. Why? Because the tide of the war in neighbouring Angola turned. A more reasoned response holds that a settlement in Namibia can buy time and open periodic — but unstable, as we shall see — contacts with Africa.

On top of these considerations, the post-1945 truism that invading armies lose the battle in their own bedrooms played an immediate role in concentrating the official mind on a peace. Just two examples illustrate this point. *Insig* — the Nasionale Pers monthly news digest — carried a remarkable cover on its August edition. In descending order three banners announced (with translations) "Die oorlog in Angola" (The war in Angola); "Kenners oor Soldates" (Experts comment on stress amongst soldiers); "Raak SA Bankrot?" (Is South Africa becoming bankrupt?). The cover picture however left no illusions about the seriousness of these issues. It showed the near-nude, blood-stained body of a wounded white cradled in an army-issue groundsheet. In the near corner was an army boot; only two visible hands clasped the cradle: one white, the other black.

The second example was even closer to the bone: *Die Kerkbode*, official mouthpiece of the Dutch Reformed Church, asked "whether South Africa would not be acting morally and ethically to withdraw completely her troops from Angola?" (my translation).

Although patently not nearly akin to a Vietnam syndrome, sections of white public opinion have turned against³ the Namibian war. This was underscored by the government's banning of the End Conscription Campaign after they had staged a number of high-profile public meetings on the Angolan/Namibian situation.

But was this enough to abandon long-held interests in southern Angola?

The government's determination to press ahead with talks on ending their presence in Angola took even seasoned observers by surprise. More remarkable was the suggestion that — indeed — Namibia might finally be independent. A series of parleys saw a rhythm emerge which was characterised by Pretoria's determination not to give an inch on Namibia until there were serious concessions on a Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola.

The immediate strategic considerations aside, the Cuban factor has been central to South Africa's relationship with the United States these past eight years. President Reagan's determination to oppose "Marxist forces" world-wide dovetailed with South Africa's desire to do precisely the same in its own backyard. But times change, and there were no guarantees that a new President might be so convinced of the need to follow the Reagan Doctrine. Besides, adventuring in blind opposition to Communism does not really lend itself to the new mood — to which we will return — between the Superpowers.

Clearly, it is not possible to set strategic considerations aside and all evidence suggests that the failure of the South African Airforce (SAAF) to lend cover led to a serious reversal at Cuito Cuanavale. Understandably, the SADF and the SAAF, in particular, refute this claim. But informed western sources seem to have no doubt that the siege of Cuito was South Africa's bridge too far. Why the SAAF failed is an important question. The successful deployment of a radar system in south and central Angola was effective against well-trained SAAF pilots. More importantly, the arms embargo and the resulting failure to secure craft which could match what the combined Soviet-Cuban-Angolan forces could put in the air decimated an important strategic advantage.

TURNING POINT

The turning point came sometime in late-February or early-March. Then the Cubans, who had hung back, took a tougher stand turning certain Angolan defeat into victory. Later in May, the Cubans advised the Americans that they were deploying a crack Brigade to open a new front in the south; authorities on the war claim that Washington "did nothing to discourage Havana". By the end of May, the Cubans had 15 000 troops along a 500 kilometer band north of the Namibian border. The subsequent skirmish at the Caleque Dam in which up to thirteen national servicemen were killed was, according to the same American sources, a "sobering experience" for both sides.⁴ Pretoria wanted out.

Serious political problems remain in Luanda — Unita being the most important. Here, South African interests meshed immediately with those of the United States. So, although not at the talks, Savimbi's interests were represented by his most intimate patron, South Africa supported by the United States. Realistically, however, politics are secondary to the agonising process of trying to set Angola back on the path to economic recovery because the war has crippled the country. The haunting question for the Angolans remains: can there be economic recovery without the discovery of some device to include Savimbi in their government?

The South African team at the negotiations, which was led by the talented Director General of Foreign Affairs, Neil van Heerden, was an interesting one because it included Dr Neil Barnard of National Intelligence and the SADF's General Jannie Geldenhuys. Presumably, the possibility that sectional interests within the state bureaucracy might kibosh the separate packages of the peace process as these were cobbled together, had to be avoided. In the entire exercise the self-styled doves in Department of Foreign Affairs were leading, but the gnawing question remains whether the final package will be accepted and implemented by the State Security Council. Parenthetically, diplomatic sources were of the opinion that Geldenhuys was "strongly" committed to the process but that Barnard was "more difficult to read".

Prospects for Namibian independence were sweetened by the persuasive argument that a SWAPO government in Windhoek would have limited manoeuvrability. The degree of economic integration

with the Republic is simply staggering: an estimated 80 cents in every Rand in that country is generated from, or mortgaged to, South Africa. In addition, the very intimacy of the SADF with the country also poses huge problems for the new government. Having been there for seventy years, the SADF knows the location of every lightswitch, every pane of glass. This makes Namibia far and away the most vulnerable southern African state, strategically speaking. As if to emphasise this point, the South African Navy staged a spectacular training exercise in and around the enclave of Walvis Bay, as the talk of independence gained currency.

NKOMATI AGAIN?

The same sets of regional dependencies which may have set Namibia on the path to independence partially account for the rekindling of a relationship with Mozambique. The sheer extent of Mozambique's economic integration with South Africa is difficult to exaggerate. Add to this an horrific war fought against shadowy — to use the Mozambican term — bandits, and it is not difficult to see why the Chissano government has been so keen to talk to Pretoria. Only South Africa can cut off the supply lines which keep the bandits in their murky trade.

But the pressure on Pretoria to enter a rapprochement with Mozambique also follows deepening international concern over the plight of neighbouring states, especially Mozambique. Mrs Thatcher is said to have taken a personal interest in the Mozambican issue; British pressure on South Africa has been immense and seemingly successful.⁵ Both London and Washington see a direct link between their resistance to sanctions, and the need to strengthen the Frontline states.

Symbolism also played a role in the meeting between President Chissano and President Botha. They met at Songo at the very edge of the Cahora Bassa Dam in which South Africa, Mozambique and Portugal have a financial stake. The re-establishment of functional ties of this kind seem still the best guarantor of harmonious relations and, so the Mozambican's argue, can stem the temptation to foster Renamo's cause.⁶

Although Pretoria is keen to be counted amongst the growing international fraternity of Mozambican friends, the Chissano government has some real cause to suspect that South Africa can lapse into delinquency if its interests seem threatened. In short, as the disastrous failure of the Nkomati Accord shows, South Africa does not have a strong record in keeping its word. Hence, the Songo meeting and the subsequent toing and froing of Ministers and officials has not quite reached the fever pitch which marked the March 1984 signing of the Nkomati Accord.

IN THE HEART OF THE JUNGLE

Understandably, the Bothas will regard the day trip to Gbadolite, President Mobuto's birthplace, as the highlight of their African discoveries. This visit makes good sense when seen against the background of the Angolan talks: South Africa's interests in securing a role for Savimbi in Angola are shared by Zaire's President.

While they will be buoyed by the meeting, the Bothas ought, perhaps, to be mindful that Mobuto is not a leader held in high regard in major capitals. This year he has come under intense criticism both from the United States and France, formerly his strongest patrons. An American author noted that in Zaire graft and plain corruption ensured that the country's mineral wealth never bettered "the lot of the ordinary people but . . . (lined) . . . the pockets of President Mobuto Sese Seko and his henchmen."⁷

The point is not further to besmirch Mobuto's record, but simply to record that the high moment of the recent travels was with a leader who — to say it politely — also has bad breath in the international community.

More applause might have been forthcoming from a meeting with the Congolese leader, Denis Sassou-Nguesso who is more favourably viewed in the international community. Indeed, at one moment it seemed as if this might happen until it emerged that the South African government was using its position in the Angolan negotiations to press for bilateral advantage with the Congo. There were some indications, for example, that the Congolese and South African Presidents might meet and, certainly, the SABC TV gave every indication that South Africa's business community could benefit from the contacts made between the two states.

ANY NEW LESSONS FROM OLD TRUTHS?

Given South Africa's isolation and the belief that the path to wider international recognition lies through Africa, the temptation to use all opportunities to press for wider breakthroughs, as in the Congo, is perfectly understandable. However, such efforts are doomed to failure because the essential tenets of Africa's view of South Africa have not altered since the late 1950s — *apartheid* is the wall.

If this is so, how does one account for the periodic cracks which appear in that wall?

With the notable exception of Malawi, South Africa's relations with all African states have been highly unstable, positively erratic. Even the relationship with Lesotho — the clearest example of a "captive state" — has been turbulent. This is an interesting case because more than any other, it demonstrates the power of South Africa's purse: Lesotho will perish without South Africa's economic support. Despite South Africa's strong commitment to make Lesotho "work" — the SADF is building a hospital and South Africa is bankrolling the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme — there was considerable resentment at Pretoria's action during the hi-jack tragedy which marked the visit of the Pope. In anyone's book, this was gross interference in the domestic affairs of another state.

Behaviour of this type highlights the seemingly pathological belief within South Africa that it has a duty to fashion its neighbours (or other African states) into its own version of what is good for them.⁸ There is no clearer example of this than the series of incidents which have become known by the generic term destabilisation. The tell-tale signs of South Africa's hand, especially in the sub-continent, are everywhere to be seen. Even distant Nigeria had cause to sound alarm

bells when it emerged that Pretoria was unduly interested in a small group of islands, belonging to Equatorial Guinea, which are only 20 kilometres from the Nigerian coast.

Exploiting such dependencies, as other states have learnt, both upsets gains and creates wider international suspicion of motives.

States or, rather, individual leaders often take advantage of isolated regimes. This too has also played a role in creating cracks in the wall of isolation, but this also lends itself to chronic instability as the currently strong links with President Banda of Malawi promises to reveal. The end of the Banda era will almost certainly result in new directions.

It is true that international relations turn on opportunism and comparative advantage. However, most modern inter-state relations are conducted within a framework of understandings. This is where the important shifts in the relationship between the Superpowers provide a helpful analogy to this discussion. In the Superpower case, the enthusiasm for the historical changes in the relationship flows from deep-seated paradigmatic shifts within which the United States and the Soviet Union operate. Simply put, the context itself has changed. As a result, the degree of interchanges and the concessions made both publicly and privately between the two sides offer opportunities for new understandings.

In contrast, the relations between South Africa and her new African partners is marked by hesitation which, at times, borders on the grudging. For example, it speaks volumes of diplomatic niceties that South Africa's President still has to visit an African capital, and that no African leader has visited South Africa since 1971.

Thus, for all their claims and impressive list of meanderings, the Bothas have failed in their bid to discover Africa.

Because there are few iron laws in the theory and practice of international relations, it is helpful to highlight them when they do occur. In its search for a wider international role through Africa, South Africa has established such a rule: There can be no lasting breakthroughs with — never mind acceptance of — South Africa until Namibia is independent and *apartheid* ends.

There is no doubt that South Africa ultimately has an African destiny. General Olusegun Obasanjo, the distinguished former Nigerian Head of State and member of the Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, captured its spirit in closing the Russel C. Leffingwell Lectures in New York in 1987. In a forward-looking and constructive mood, the General writes:

"with the eradication of apartheid in South Africa, whenever it may come, I see an evolving Southern African region of prosperity and stability, making a contribution to the development of the rest of the continent as one of the six confederations of Africa in the twenty-first century."⁹

★ ★ ★

I penned these lines on the eve of the Fortieth Anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, and wanted to make the obvious point which follows from the significance of that day. As I did so, however, the latest

issue of *Die Suid-Afrikaan* also crossed my desk. In it Professor J. L. Boshoff, former Rector of the University of the North, put it more strongly than I would dare. He closes a piece entitled, "Veertig Verlore Jare"

(Forty Lost Years), by paraphrasing Shakespeare thus, "The fault, dear fellow Afrikaners, is not in our enemies, but in ourselves that we are the polecats of the world."¹⁰

REFERENCES

1. *The Military Balance*, 1988-1989. London. International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1988. p. 120.
2. In sequence they were called "The Outward Movement", "Detente" and "Dialogue" and are well analysed in Deon Geldenhuys: *The Diplomacy of Isolation: South Africa Foreign Policy Making*. Johannesburg. MacMillan; for the South African Institute of International Affairs, 1984.
3. Overall public opinion, however, seems to have held fast or strengthened a belief that the war in that country is winnable. For example, in response to the statement, "South Africa cannot win the military struggle against Swapo in the long run" the following percentages disagreed:

Language Affiliation	1988	1986	1984	1982
Afrikaans	86,5	82,5	82,1	81,9
English	65,4	62,5	63,1	59,5

"What do we think? A survey of white opinion on foreign policy issues." No. 4. Analysed by Andre du Pisani. Johannesburg. South African Institute of International Affairs, 1988. p. 16.
4. Private discussion with American colleagues. 9 December, 1988.
5. In a speech delivered before the South African Institute of International Affairs and reported in the *Daily Dispatch*, East London, 8 December 1988, the British Ambassador to South Africa, Robin Renwick, said: "... we have worked hard to

- contribute to the process of attempting to normalise relations between SA and Mozambique, which culminated in the meeting between President Botha and President Chissano."
6. Proof of continued SADF support for the Renamo emerged from a press conference held in Maputo on March 23, 1988, when Paulo Oliveira, a defector from Renamo, named SADF officers who were involved with the movement in Malawi. (Oliveira also named a South African-based university professor who is involved in shaping the movement's political agenda.) *South Africa Dossier*, Centro de Estudos Africanos, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane, December, 1988.
7. Jennifer Seymour Whitaker. *How Can Africa Survive?* New York, Harper & Row, 1988, pp. 33-34.
8. The Lesotho incident resembles what Dr Gerrit Olivier, Chief Director: Communication of the Department of Foreign Affairs calls "the racialistic and paternalistic overtones which at some stage in the past seemed to permeate our relations towards ... Africa. ..." Contrasting sharply with his claims that "concrete ... (examples) ... of new thinking and innovation in our African policy" ... are now operating. *Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, 11 December, 1988.
9. Olusegun Obsanjo. *Africa in Perspective: Myths and Realities*. New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 1987. p. 50.
10. J. L. Boshoff. "Veertig Verlore Jare", *Die Suid-Afrikaan*, December 88/January 89, p. 23.

by Michael Worship

A LITTLE LIGHT ON THE LEGION

The Legion of Christ's Witnesses: Change within the Anglican Diocese of Zululand 1948-1984.

R.J. Shorten

Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, Communications, No. 15, 1987, 171 pp, R8,00

Richard Shorten has undoubtedly provided Anglican churchophiles with a great deal of information with a certain amount of analysis of the strange and rather curious Zulu-based Anglican movement called *Iviyo lofakazi bakaKristu*, 'The Legion of Christ's Witnesses'. It is exceedingly good that research such as this is being made generally available and as such is a welcome addition to Southern African Anglican studies.

Shorten deals with the movement by tracing its historical origins and development; by looking at its structure and membership procedure; by assessing it as a charismatic movement and by analysing it in terms of its Anglican roots. He goes on to examine the movement in terms of its commitment to holiness, evangelism and prayer.

The movement was begun by two priests in the Zululand and Natal Dioceses in 1948, Philip Mbatha and Alphaeus Zulu. Their desire in starting the movement was to act on the basis of various visionary and paranormal experien-

ces and because of a certain disenchantment with the dryness and equivocation (as they saw it) in the Anglican church. They formed a movement which was essentially extremely High Church in ethos, but which incorporated and encouraged what can only be described as Pentecostal Evangelicalism. The picture which emerges is of a Zulu Anglican Movement which is at one and the same time expressly High Church and which is also consciously charismatic and evangelical. The High Church roots can be explained by the founders' close association with the Community of the Resurrection. The other is more difficult.

Shorten adequately describes the phenomenon but fails to apply any real analysis to it. And in this way, the book is deeply unsatisfying because it never really gets beyond description. Shorten relies heavily on a relatively small body of primary material, which includes laborious use of the movement's prayer book and constitution which are quoted *ad nauseam* and often with little apparent reason. Extensive use is also made of taped recordings of