

# SOUTH AFRICA AND THE WORLD: UNLOVED AND LONELY

This article is based on a more comprehensive study, *Internasionale Isolasië : Suid Afrika in Vergelykende Perspektief*, to be published shortly by the Rand Afrikaans University.

"A 'no' vote will only disillusion our friends and further isolate our country." This was one of the arguments used by the National Party in a press advertisement advocating a "yes" vote in the 1983 referendum on the new constitution. In the event, the white electorate overwhelmingly endorsed the government's constitutional design. The new deal – built around the three chamber Parliament – has since been implemented. And yet South Africa is today probably even more isolated than before the constitutional referendum. Clearly, the new constitution does not address the root cause of South Africa's international isolation.

The National Party's isolation argument is nonetheless significant for two reasons. First, it concedes that there is a link between South Africa's domestic policies and its international isolation. This patently obvious correlation was long denied by the government. Second, the advertisement acknowledges that the Republic's isolation can only be countered through domestic political reform. For many years, the National Party insisted that no amount of government-initiated reform could impress foreign critics or improve South Africa's international standing.

South Africa is certainly paying a heavy international price for its peculiar domestic political order. It is one of the most ostracised states in the modern world. The Republic is more isolated than two other familiar "pariah" states, Israel and Chile. The closest modern analogy is Taiwan, which is in some respects more, yet in others less, isolated than South Africa. The Republic differs from all three of these pariahs in the sense that its isolation is combined with far more intense international pressure (e.g. boycotts and sanctions) than any of the others experience. There is also a much stronger pro-isolation lobby within South Africa than in any of the other three states.

How, then, does one measure a state's isolation?

## AREAS AND INDICATORS OF ISOLATION

It is possible to distinguish four broad areas of isolation: diplomatic, economic, military and socio-cultural. In each of these, a number of specific indicators of isolation can be identified. Let us briefly apply some of the readily quantifiable indicators to South Africa, and also consider a few comparisons with other isolated states as well as with some "normal" or integrated states.

The most obvious indicator of **diplomatic isolation** is the extent of a state's formal diplomatic relations. In 1985, South Africa had resident diplomatic missions in 30 countries, including four ex-homelands. Leaving the latter aside, since they are not internationally recognised, South

Africa had diplomatic ties with only 16% of all UN-member states. Conversely, 29 states, again including the ex-homelands, maintained resident ambassadors in Pretoria in 1984. The corresponding figures for the other pariah states were Taiwan with 13, Israel with 40 and Chile with 49. Turning to "normal" states, four-year old Zimbabwe already hosts 41 embassies in Harare, Tanzania has 53, Zaire has 58 and Ethiopia has 68. Two of South Africa's former sister dominions, Australia and Canada, had 67 and 94 foreign diplomatic missions in their respective capitals in 1984.

A second indicator of diplomatic isolation is membership of inter-governmental organisations. South Africa is still a member of the United Nations, but since the rejection of its credentials by the General Assembly in 1974 it has been unable to participate in Assembly proceedings. The Republic has retained membership of a number of UN agencies, such as the International Monetary Fund and the International Atomic Energy Agency, but has resigned or been expelled from several others. In all, South Africa belongs to some 45 inter-governmental organisations dealing with technical matters, including such regional associations as the Southern African Customs Union and the Southern African Regional Tourism Council. Of the other pariahs, only Taiwan finds itself in a weaker position than South Africa. In 1971, following the People's Republic of China's admission to the UN, Taiwan lost its membership of all UN bodies. Today Taiwan belongs to only 10 inter-governmental organisations.

Third, the relative lack of official visits abroad by South African heads of state and/or government and by their opposite numbers to this country, also reflects the Republic's international isolation. In the 24 years since the establishment of a republic in 1961, South Africa's successive State Presidents paid a mere eight official foreign visits – independent ex-homelands included. The heads of government have also been remarkably home-bound. Prime Minister Vorster was, after General Smuts, the most active South African premier on the international diplomatic circuit. Particularly instructive is that no South African Prime Minister since Smuts in 1946, visited either the United States or the United Nations. Looking at foreign leaders' visits to South Africa, the last leader of a major Western power to visit this country, was Britain's Mr Harold Macmillan as far back as 1960. South African leaders' very limited involvement in personal diplomacy was not a case of self-isolation; the South Africans were simply not valued visitors to the chancelleries of the world and Pretoria was, by the

same token, a place to be avoided.

The UN's avalanche of denunciations and punitive measures directed against South Africa, provide further evidence of the Republic's alienation from the international community. Except for Rhodesia, no other state has been so persistently subjected to such drastic decisions by the world body. Many of the UN resolutions are specifically designed to isolate South Africa in virtually all areas of inter-state contact.

Finally, we can refer to the degree of diplomatic support which South Africa receives in international forums. While the vast majority of member states of international organisations as a rule side against South Africa, some Western powers are still prepared to protect the Republic in the UN on two crucial issues: membership of the organisation and comprehensive sanctions. One can thus conclude that these Western states do not wish to isolate South Africa completely — at least not at present. This kind of protection is neither unconditional nor automatic and Western powers have already supported an array of UN punitive measures against the Republic. Contrast South Africa's situation with that of other pariahs. In the case of Israel, for example, the protective diplomatic shield of particularly the US has ensured that the Security Council has not followed the General Assembly in deciding on punitive measures against Israel. Chile, in turn, has on several occasions been censured for its human rights violations but neither of the two UN organs has called for punitive measures.

### ECONOMIC

The second main area of isolation concerns **economic interaction**. The focus of international (and indeed also domestic) attempts to extend South Africa's isolation is on the economic area. The reasons are clear: it is in this field that the Republic is least isolated, and where isolation could do most material damage.

The relative lack of South Africa's economic isolation is manifested in its trade links. The Republic trades — mostly clandestinely — with 49 of the 51 African states and also with the Soviet bloc. The bulk of its trade is conducted with the industrial powers of the West, viz. the US, Britain, West Germany and Japan.

An increasing number of states are however imposing official restrictions on trade with South Africa. Recently, for example, Norway, Sweden and Ireland decided to ban the importation of South African agricultural produce. In several countries, including Britain and West Germany, private organisations engage in voluntary boycott actions against the Republic.

Foreign investment in South Africa is another prime target of the advocates of economic isolation. In a resolution adopted on 26 July 1985, the UN Security Council **inter alia** called on states to suspend all new investment in South Africa. Official restrictions on such investment have already been imposed by Sweden, Austria and France, amongst others. But the most publicised activity in this field has been the disinvestment campaign in the US. To date, the American government has not given effect to demands for official curbs on American investment in South Africa.

The Reagan Administration has, however, taken action in a related field. In September 1985, Washington announced a ban on loans by any American financial

institution to the South African government or its agencies, with certain limited exceptions.

It is safe to conclude that no other national economy is today subjected to so much international pressure as South Africa's.

### MILITARY

The two indicators of **military isolation** are formal military agreements with other states and the procurement of weapons abroad.

South Africa has since the Second World War not been a member of a military alliance, i.e. a formal agreement providing for military assistance (whether unilateral or bilateral) in the event of aggression. The Simonstown Agreement between South Africa and Britain (1955-75) was not an alliance, for neither party made any such commitments. It was nonetheless South Africa's first and last post-war treaty with a Western power. The absence of military pacts is not due to a lack of interest or trying on South Africa's part. Instead, it is attributable to Western states' unwillingness to enter into any alliance with the Republic. Not only had they a different perception of South Africa's strategic value but they also feared the political risks of becoming implicated in the defence of the "apartheid regime."

Pretoria has concluded non-aggression treaties with Swaziland (1982) and Mozambique (1984) and with four independent former homelands. The parties to these bilateral agreements give no undertakings to provide one another with military assistance in the case of external or internal aggression.

The Republic's problems in acquiring arms are well known. It is the only country against which the UN Security Council today maintains a mandatory arms embargo. In July 1985 the Council requested all states to prohibit all new nuclear contracts with South Africa and to ban the sale of computers that could be used by the South African security forces. The US is one of the Western powers that has already imposed the latter restrictions; all of them officially subscribe to the 1977 UN arms embargo.

No other pariah state is as isolated as South Africa in the military field. The US is a formal ally and principal arms supplier of both Israel and Taiwan. Chile has some problems in procuring arms from certain Western sources, but these are not nearly as serious as South Africa's difficulties.

### SOCIAL AND CULTURE

Isolation in the **socio-cultural sphere** is the fourth and final one to be considered. There is a wide range of indicators of socio-cultural isolation, most of which do not involve interaction between governments but between a foreign government and a local non-governmental organisation or between internal and external non-governmental organisations only.

South Africa's international sports isolation is well documented. The UN is the focal point of the international campaign to drive South African sport into isolation. The UN's Special Committee on Apartheid has, for example, compiled a blacklist of foreign sportsmen and women who compete in the Republic. The Commonwealth's Gleneagles Agreement of 1977 is another international attempt at isolating South African sport.

There are also numerous efforts, by foreign governments and private organisations alike, to discourage contact with South Africa in the field of the arts and entertainment.

One such is the UN blacklist of foreign artists who perform in South Africa.

Academic interchange between South Africa and the outside world still takes place on a sizeable scale, whether through individual contact or international academic organisations. There is nonetheless ample evidence of the mounting difficulties experienced by South African academics in participating in international academic interchange. Foreign academics, in turn, increasingly seem to avoid visiting or researching or teaching in South Africa.

Official cultural agreements are another indicator of socio-cultural isolation. South Africa today has such agreements with only West Germany and Paraguay – and Bonn is reconsidering its agreement to ensure that it cannot be construed as supporting apartheid. The Netherlands and Belgium suspended their cultural agreements with South Africa in the late 1970s. Given the fact that cultural agreements are common features of inter-state relations – even between ideological adversaries – South Africa's extremely limited formal ties in this field can only be regarded as yet another indication of the extent of the Republic's international isolation.

Tourism, as an indicator of socio-cultural isolation, is more difficult to assess. If one merely compares the numbers of foreign tourists visiting South Africa and countries such as Australia, Chile and Kenya, the Republic's position is relatively favourable. The central question, however, is: Does South Africa's low international political standing undermine its tourist potential? There can be little doubt about the answer, but the actual impact of isolation in terms of people and money is hard to calculate.

Turning next to the reverse flow of visitors, we should consider the question of access to other states for South African passport holders. It is common knowledge that most African states, the communist bloc, Arab states and some countries in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and Central and South America, will not permit South Africans to enter, or do so only in very exceptional cases and under strict limitations.

With regard to postal and telecommunication links with the outside world, South Africa experiences relatively few problems. Only two states, Somalia and Saudi Arabia, maintain complete postal bans against the Republic. Some seven other countries, including Lebanon and Uganda, have imposed limited postal embargoes. South Africa, in turn, accepts all foreign mail that can be delivered.

South Africa's position is less favourable when it comes to international transport by air and sea. A large number of states deny South African aircraft landing and over-flying rights and have closed their harbours to South African vessels. Conversely, they prohibit their aircraft and ships calling in the Republic.

Evidence of isolation is also to be found in the sphere of religion. It is particularly the three Afrikaans reformed churches that experience a combination of self-imposed and enforced isolation from the international ecumenical movement.

Both South African trade unions and employer organisations enjoy considerable international contact. The black unions and the predominantly white employer bodies however tend to pursue conflicting international objectives. Among the unions, there is support for South Africa's economic isolation, whereas the employer organisations are in the forefront of attempts to counter such moves abroad.

It would require a study of major proportions to apply each of these indicators of socio-cultural isolation to other pariah states. Nonetheless, it is highly unlikely that their isolation in this particular area covers such a wide spectrum as South Africa's.

#### THE PRICE OF INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION

Pariah states as a rule try to counter their international isolation and, ideally, wish to become respectable or acceptable members of the community of nations. They are particularly keen to find acceptance among Western nations, which they typically regard as their traditional or natural allies.

In recent years, a number of (moderately) ostracised states managed to return to the fold, as it were. They are Greece, Portugal, Spain and Argentina. The same applies to Rhodesia, the pariah **par excellence**. What is significant is that international approval was in each case preceded by a change of government and not merely a change of policy. The cause of a change of government was of course not in the first instance to be found in the particular state's pariah status; the end of pariahhood was a consequence thereof. Can we nonetheless conclude from these five cases that the chances are generally slim that a government whose very policy led to the State's international isolation, can in effect reform itself out of enforced isolation – and still remain in power? □