

CONCLUSION

Burdens of Past and Present: Some Concluding Reflections

A CENTURY may be a long or short time. Three centuries ago the slave trade had not yet reached its peak; the U.S. constitution, which counted slaves as "three-fifths of a man," is approaching its bicentennial. The conquest of southern Africa, the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand, and the system of racial domination later labeled apartheid—all date back barely one hundred years. In 1899 a young Afrikaner attorney named Jan Smuts wrote *A Century of Injustice*, detailing the Afrikaners' grievances against British imperialism. The title might well be applied more appropriately to the last hundred years, in which gold and black labor have produced riches for a white oligarchy and foreign investors, while opportunities for the majority were systematically blocked.

Four decades have passed since World War II, when the Allies proclaimed support for freedom of all peoples against the Nazi doctrines of racial and ethnic superiority. Apartheid has long since lost its legitimacy and the protective coloration of the colonial era, where it fitted without embarrassment. Yet the skeletal structures of the last hundred years stand in large part intact: racially defined political rights; ownership of land, mineral wealth, and industry by local or foreign whites; the dominance of the white-led state.

The end may be at hand, or it may be postponed yet again. In any case, lifting the burden of racial tyranny will not be easy, the death pangs of apartheid a faithful witness to the violence on which it has been built. Many factors may shorten or lengthen the agony, most internal to South Africa. But just as British imperialists helped conquer the subcontinent and design the polity of the Union of South Africa, and just as investors from both sides of the north Atlantic bought into the goldmines, so Western involvement weighs heavily in the present and future conflict. If the patterns of the past persist, the Western powers will only reluctantly and belatedly abandon their old friends, fearing the future and failing to share the vision of a free southern Africa.

CHOOSING FRIENDS AND MAKING ENEMIES

At the close of the nineteenth century, British imperialists, convinced that the "richest spot on earth" had to be part of their domain, fought a war with the Boer Republics to ensure their dominance in southern Africa. Yet as the regional colonial system was organized, Britain conceived the role of local whites—Boer or British—quite differently from that of the Africans who had also been forced to submit to the imperial sway. The British-initiated Union of South Africa was the symbol and instrument of a favoritism that virtually excluded Africans from ownership of the new riches, deprived them of political rights, and systematically discriminated against them as farmers and workers. London might feel more comfortable with the English-speaking entrepreneurs of Johannesburg or Salisbury, but Pretoria's rulers too took priority over the presumed imperial mandate to benefit all the subjects of the British monarch.

After World War II, Britain gradually accepted the necessity to concede the force of nationalism and to foster new allies among peoples formerly subject to the colonial bureaucracy. Spurred by the prospect of violence, London applied the decolonization schemas of India and west Africa to portions of "white man's Africa" as well. The former era lived on, however, in British involvement with the post-1960 "Triple Alliance" of Lisbon, Salisbury, and Pretoria. Seeking both to please its partners in the new Commonwealth and to keep old friendships intact, London tried to shake reason into its now-embarrassing Rhodesian protégé while simultaneously fending off more radical steps that might have brought it down.

The London-Pretoria axis was also beset with ambiguity. The postwar National Party included ideological admirers of the Nazis and kept alive the anti-British sentiments of the Anglo-Boer War. Yet just as South Africa's own English-speaking capitalists learned to live with and prosper under the Nationalist-dominated apartheid state, so Britain preserved the international alliance with South Africa. Diplomatic support began to erode after Sharpeville, and African pressures occasionally won token steps of disengagement. The relative economic importance of South Africa for Britain diminished, but the deeply rooted tangle of ties continued to flourish, barely checked by shocks such as Sharpeville or Soweto. British envoy David Scott, who pleaded with Pretoria for signs of reform to be used in the international debate and then returned home to join the board of the UK-SA trade association, epitomized the stance that still held sway more than a quarter century after Sharpeville.

The United States, assuming the British mantle of world leadership after World War II, gathered Pretoria as well as the European colonial posses-

sions into the Free World fold. Cooperating more than competing with London, Lisbon, and Brussels, the United States became alarmed only when it appeared colonial collapse might create opportunities for revolution. Like Britain and South Africa's English-speakers, Washington was skeptical of the extremes of the Afrikaner nationalists. In the sixties and after, U.S. questioning of white leadership was accelerated by the desire to win credibility with the "emerging nations" of Asia and Africa, and by the domestic political impact of the civil-rights movement.

Still, in the twenty-five years after Sharpeville, policy currents favoring disengagement from "white man's Africa" prevailed only during two brief periods of less than two years each. These interludes at the outset of the Kennedy and Carter administrations, moreover, promised far more than they delivered; each time, the image of pro-African liberation dissolved to reveal business-as-usual ties with the white regimes. By the 1980s the steady growth of anti-apartheid forces impelled further disengagement from Pretoria. But the trend still faced adamant opposition from the Republican administration in power, and could rely on only hesitant support from the Democratic establishment.

This halfhearted opposition to the white regimes is even more striking when contrasted with the two occasions on which the United States did intervene actively in the subcontinent. The retreat of Belgium from colonial responsibility in 1960 and of Portugal fifteen years later each precipitated a hasty effort by Washington to install protégés who would commit themselves to continue the colonial exclusion of Soviet influence and radical ideology. In each case, independent nationalists of a leftist bent were ruled out as unreliable, their protestations of intent to relate to both West and East disregarded. Success in the Congo brought the corrupt and brutal Mobutu to power. Angola was saved from a probably similar fate by the timely assistance of Cuban troops and the international political backlash against open South African invasion. But Angola incurred the undying hostility of Washington's cold warriors, who joined Pretoria in blaming the region's problems on Soviet intervention.

No other outside power assumed such multifaceted roles in southern Africa as Britain or the United States, who successively took up the Anglo-Saxon burden to police the world. Apart from the military link with Angola and, on a much smaller scale, with Mozambique, the Soviet Union and its allies played a minor role, their economic presence taking a distant second place to the West even in Luanda and Maputo. In the Western world, official involvement ranged the gamut from Scandinavian aid to liberation movements to Israel's military cooperation with Pretoria. Most Western powers pragmatically pursued economic ties with both the SADCC countries and South Africa, hoping the difficult choices could be

postponed. Bonn in the 1980s, like Paris in the 1960s, seemed the least embarrassed at the South African connection. Switzerland and the international network of bankers provided a capital lifeline on which Pretoria depended.

The turmoil of 1985 shook the confidence of South Africa's foreign friends. If the system in South Africa was really about to collapse, then the West might move beyond embarrassment to more genuine ostracism of Pretoria. Bankers and businessmen seeking to salvage their investments might add to pressure for reform or for a quick transition to a new order that could restore stability. Even conservative Western governments would more insistently demand signals of "change" that could be used in the international debate.

Still, only a minority in positions of power in the West shared the African perspective that the apartheid regime was an enemy. Clinging to the hope of "white-led change," the majority held back from severing the most substantial ties, which reinforced Pretoria's superiority in force.

APARTHEID'S LAST STAND?

In the mid-1980s the South African system was facing a far more profound crisis than in 1960 or 1976. The political depth of the opposition in the black community was more formidable. Its organizational networks—in churches, community organizations, unions, and *ad hoc* groups of an incredible variety—had so far survived repeated decapitation. A few leaders had won limited protection from government reprisals by their international visibility. Black economic muscle had been flexed through consumer boycotts and strikes. Suspended bank loans had punctured the facile assumption that sanctions could not hit the white power structure. The opposition had a clear vision of a nonracial South Africa, and welcomed the growing minority of whites who were willing to share a future.

In material terms, however, the South African state still held a decisive advantage. Internally, its opponents still lacked the capacity to impose significant losses on the state's military apparatus. Significant support from outside was still ruled out by South Africa's overwhelming conventional military superiority. Only in distant Angola did the South African Defense Force come close to meeting its match, where well-trained and well-equipped Angolan troops could count on rearguard Cuban reinforcements. There can be few more telling comments on the limits to Western anti-apartheid sentiment than the fact that this defensive counterbalance to Pretoria was seen, particularly in Washington, as a problem and a threat.

The extension of Soviet-bloc military involvement to protect other southern African countries, much less to aid forces inside Namibia and

South Africa, was unlikely. The Soviet Union had little interest in overextending its resources in an area still peripheral to its geostrategic interests. African countries feared that such involvement could further solidify the Western alliance with South Africa, damaging efforts to isolate Pretoria. It could, moreover, aid the regime in rallying its internal power bloc and painting its opponents as tools of the Communist "total onslaught."

By the mid-1980s the anticommunist appeal had virtually replaced explicit racism as the ideological glue of the apartheid regime. Prime Minister Botha proclaimed apartheid "outdated" and preached the need for "power sharing." The Afrikaner theological consensus in favor of racial separation had collapsed, although the majority of white Dutch Reformed clergy continued to back the government. In September 1985 a poll of white South Africans revealed 63 percent who said that they expected apartheid would not exist in ten years time; 12 percent, that they expected to leave the country; and 11 percent, that violence was justified to overthrow the apartheid system.¹

The majority of whites, however, still had little contact with black opinion; almost half felt any joint government of black and white impossible. The Afrikaner establishment still hoped for some form of "separate but equal" power sharing, in which the white state could incorporate racially and ethnically divided segments of the majority population without surrendering command of the ship of state. They ruled out as totally unacceptable a unitary nonracial state with equal rights for all, the bottom-line objective of the vast majority of blacks.

The most likely prospect, therefore, was for a halting progression down the path of Rhodesia or Namibia, where formal concessions to black participation, under white leadership, paralleled a more and more brutal effort to wipe out those who advocated full democratic rights. The reforms might win temporary relief from international pressure; black allies who opted to buy into Pretoria's schemes would be handsomely rewarded and offered the media spotlight; the ranks of the armies defending the white-led state would increasingly be filled with black troops. The opposition, though its support from the majority might be obvious to any who troubled to inquire, would be denounced as terrorists and communists or their dupes, the fit target for "preventive retaliation," banning, torture, or assassination. Tighter controls over the media would, as in Rhodesia and Namibia, reinforce the official version.

Meanwhile, the white business establishment, English-speaking, Afrikaner, and foreign, seemed destined to continue its ambivalent stand, which, as one wit said of Oppenheimer, might best be called "multifacialism." As business executives ventured to Lusaka to talk with the exiled ANC, and issued newspaper advertisements calling for reform, some ob-

servers speculated that the capitalists would after all tip the balance against apartheid. To the extent that they suffered from external sanctions and internal unrest, it was indeed likely that business leaders would lobby for accelerated reform and perhaps even for serious negotiations. But as the history of Rhodesia or countless other disputes around the world should caution, willingness to begin talking about talks could be years or even decades removed from willingness to concede the essential points at issue.

South African businessmen, despite their visits to Lusaka, campaigned vigorously against the sanctions that had aided them to sit up and take notice of the crisis. They continued to lend their support to the arming of the South African state. Many denounced "one person, one vote" as likely to lead to unacceptably radical changes. "If South Africa is cast into simple majoritarianism," commented new Anglo American chief Gavin Relly after an initial meeting with the ANC, "the place would dissolve into chaos." "In a completely free-voting society," he added in an opinion still typical of his class, "the demands on the populist-elected top are so great . . . that it simply cannot be held together. I don't think our generation is going to see majority rule."²

Observers speculated about possible white political realignments or even coups that might revise the mix of carrot and stick in the regime's survival strategy. Both government and business in South Africa would undoubtedly adjust their views repeatedly, more rapidly if the crisis continued to escalate unchecked, more slowly if the latest combination of reform and repression won additional breathing space. One determinant of the pace, which all parties saw as critical if not necessarily decisive, was the sanctions debate, so long on the international agenda but only beginning to threaten the central strands of Pretoria's Western lifeline.

BEGINNING THE SANCTIONS DEBATE

South African black leaders have been requesting comprehensive sanctions since the mid-1950s. Since the early 1960s they have been supported by impressive majorities in the United Nations General Assembly. An international conference on sanctions in London in 1964, after detailed study, concluded sanctions to be "necessary, urgent, legal and practical, but likely to succeed only with the full cooperation of Britain and the United States."³ In neither country did that possibility even reach the stage of serious discussion among policymakers. The arms bans adopted in 1963 (voluntary) and 1977 (mandatory) were approved by the Western powers as gestures to appease world opinion, not in order to attack Pretoria's military might. Such measures did impose a cost on South Africa, but one

that was easily bearable in the context of a growing economy with virtually unimpaired access to Western capital and technology.

In the mid-1980s, for the first time, the parameters of debate seemed to be changing. The shift was far from definite. Two preeminent journals in the United States, for example, ran articles announcing the failure of constructive engagement while performing elaborate intellectual gymnastics to avoid even considering sanctions as an alternative.* The subject was inevitable, however. The conservative *Economist*, which had provided the intellectual inspiration for the Nixon communication policy, published a survey of South African affairs concluding that subtle persuasion had "run its course" and that coercive sanctions were necessary to force Pretoria to give up power.⁴

As the debate entered the new phase, the arguments changed little from the well-worn tracks of the past two decades. But events had changed, and it became more and more obvious that particular lines of argument often rested on different premises about the desired or possible future order in South Africa.

Those who had confidence in the potential leadership of a South Africa where white skin no longer granted special privileges, or who simply felt that the horrors of racial tyranny were worse than the risks of an unknown future, tended to support sanctions. Those who still felt that change without a controlling white hand ran unacceptable risks of chaos or communism tended to oppose sanctions. If one assumed that the white regime would survive indefinitely to oversee whatever reforms were necessary, or that it should, then "coercive measures" that might antagonize or weaken it were logically excluded.

One of the debate lines that most transparently revealed underlying views was use of the hoary maxim "sanctions don't work." Often cited as a fact that "everybody knows," it was useful in avoiding the issues of particular cases. One could oppose sanctions against a particular target—Nicaragua, Poland, or South Africa—without incurring the political opprobrium of defending the target regime or of pleading the case of those whose business interests would be impaired.

In Europe such general opposition to sanctions was strong, reflecting Europe's deep involvement in world trade and willingness to deal with

* In "Why Constructive Engagement Failed" (*Foreign Affairs*, Winter 1985–86), U.S. liberal commentator Sanford Ungar and South African social scientist Peter Vale proposed a program heavily stacked with symbolic actions to improve the U.S. image, but dismissed in a paragraph sanctions strong enough to hurt and the disinvestment movement. Right-wing pragmatist Michael Clough, soon to be chosen to staff a Reagan administration panel on South Africa policy, called for going "Beyond Constructive Engagement" (*Foreign Policy*, Winter 1985–86) to shape a new nonpartisan approach, cautiously suggesting in a final sentence that the administration should say it might be willing to accept sanctions in the future.

regimes in power regardless of their internal policies. In the United States, where politicians often appeared ready to impose sanctions against leftist regimes on a moment's notice, the "sanctions don't work" thesis acquired new life whenever the South African issue surfaced.

In fact, recent scholarly work has confirmed the commonsense observation based on historical experience that sometimes sanctions work and sometimes they do not.⁵ The Institute for International Economics cited a 36 percent success rate for the 103 cases they studied, including Iran (1951-53), Chile, Rhodesia, and Uganda. David Baldwin logically dissected classic cases to show that the judgment of "failure" often rested on ignoring the actual objectives of those who adopted sanctions, or on failing to consider indirect as well as direct effects. Both studies rated Rhodesian sanctions a success, in contrast to other analysts who considered them a failure because they did not work quickly or because they were not the only factor leading to Smith's eventual downfall. In spite of the ambivalent commitment of the Western powers to the African goal of majority rule, and the gigantic loopholes deliberately left open, sanctions contributed to the final outcome by imposing economic costs on the white regime and undermining its legitimacy.

But South Africa, it was often said when debate descended to particulars, was too strong to be seriously hurt by sanctions. Its industrial economy and mineral-export sector gave it a shield of invulnerability, and sanctions would only lead to increased self-reliance. This argument, made by the South African government and business sector, also impressed other, less biased analysts. The South African economy was considerably larger in comparison to the potential sanctioners than the average in the successful cases studied by the Institute of International Economics, and gold at least would undoubtedly find a market even with the tightest embargo. Overenthusiastic advocates of sanctions who rhetorically claimed they could work "overnight" were almost certainly engaged in wishful thinking.

Nevertheless, South Africa was vulnerable. Its economy was highly dependent on foreign trade. It lacked domestic sources of oil, except for expensive coal-to-oil conversion plants. The high-technology military machine depended not only on oil, but also on continued access to advanced technology, including computers. Without a steady flow of foreign capital, in direct investment and in loans, economic crisis might well prove endemic. In 1985, when bankers began to hold back on new loans, when most countries banned Krugerrand sales, and when major markets for South African coal began canceling contracts, the "sanctions can't hurt us" argument went out the window. The efforts of Pretoria's politicians to

please foreign opinion assumed a frantic appearance, and business lobbying for reform took on new urgency.

The effects fell far short of any basic change in South Africa, but the sanctions imposed were also modest in comparison to hypothetical comprehensive measures. These were still rejected by all of South Africa's major economic partners as "unrealistic." As Voice of America UN correspondent Richard Walton had already observed in the 1960s, however, the primary reason that they were unrealistic was precisely that they were rejected by the Western powers.⁶

Other lines of argument against sanctions involved admitting that they would have significant effects, but arguing that the effects would be undesirable. Each rested in large part on conceding primary credibility to white South African opinion and assuming the permanency of the apartheid regime.

The argument that blacks would suffer most from sanctions, for example, might or might not be confirmed by detailed economic projections.⁷ But the credibility of the argument suffered considerably from the fact that the South African government, white businessmen, and others not previously noted for concern with black welfare were its most enthusiastic advocates. Moreover, it clearly excluded consideration of the possible future opportunities after an end to apartheid, in favor of the possible consequences while the white regime remained in power. Virtually all black spokespersons not tied to the South African government, whether inside South Africa or in the neighboring states, said that the possible suffering would be worth it if the sanctions were severe enough to help bring Pretoria to its knees.

A parallel argument cited the presumed Afrikaner tendency to retreat under pressure into the frontier *laager* of circled oxwagons. This hypothesis focused exclusively on short-term effects on the government's Afrikaner constituency. But it ignored the increasing fragmentation of that constituency under long-term pressure, as some indeed sought to reinforce the *laager* while others began to search for possible paths of escape. Most of all, the *laager* hypothesis failed to explore the effects on other sectors of South African society—apartheid opponents who would be encouraged by the international support, and white "moderates" who might be led by hardship to feel they should take chances with other alliances. Defenders of the apartheid system might indeed become more desperate as they tried to fend off the inevitable, but that was happening in any case. Delaying sanctions would only prolong the death throes—unless one assumed the regime should or could survive indefinitely.

Those arguing against sanctions were coming to rely less on the contention that they wouldn't work and more on the fear that they would.

Whether relatively optimistic about Pretoria's reform plans or more cynical, sanctions opponents sought to shift the debate. Apartheid might be bad, they admitted, but look at Africa. Majority rule would be even worse. The productive whites would be expelled or subjected to reverse apartheid. Most fearful of all, a strategic region could fall under communist influence. A successor regime, in short, might not be, as Pretoria had been, a reliable friend of the West.

PLANTING THE TREES OF FREEDOM

Twenty-five years after the first wave of independence, it was indeed easy to point to disappointing examples elsewhere in Africa. Poverty, ethnic and national conflict, dictators, and massacres were all available and could be assembled into a composite image that was truly frightening. The expectation that the political kingdom of independence would quickly lead to the promised land of peace and prosperity could not be sustained, even by those who had most genuinely believed it. Some, in some of the countries worst devastated by war or economic crisis, muttered that at least the old order had been predictable in its denial of political rights and allocation of economic privilege.

Yet Africa was neither uniform nor unique in its disabilities, and Africans rightly resented those who conflated its plight into one racial image. Africa's ethnic conflicts and tensions were most commonly labeled "tribal," but in fact were as diverse in cause and intensity as were the European counterparts in Northern Ireland, Belgium, Alsace, or Yugoslavia. No African conflict had yet approached in horror the Holocaust perpetrated by one of the most "civilized" and economically developed of European peoples. Few countries around the world could boast a history free of civil war, corruption, and turmoil before establishing stable political institutions. African economies, starting with dependent export enclaves and minuscule pools of personnel trained in technical skills, had indeed suffered from internal mistakes as well as external obstacles. Africa had, as before independence, a disproportionate number of the world's "least developed countries." Even so, growth rates in per capita income for a number of African countries were greater than for the United States.

During the war against Portugal, Mozambican liberation leader Marcelino dos Santos wrote a poem entitled "*É Preciso Plantar*." Along the roads to freedom, the verse counseled, we must plant, plant everywhere, the reason for bodies destroyed, the certainty of tomorrow's good, the new tree of independence. A tree takes time to grow. Some may take longer than a human generation. The peoples of most African countries have barely had time to plant the seedlings in their orchard of freedom; many

have had as yet no interludes to tend them in peace. In southern Africa, apartheid's shadow is not yet lifted, and what is planted is still in constant danger of being trampled underfoot.

The countries of southern Africa gained their independence later than those elsewhere on the continent, some only after more than a decade of war. Angola and Mozambique have suffered in addition the exodus of a high proportion of the skilled work force and incessant military assault from outside. Each country has its distinct problems, and the ideological perspectives of the governments range from conservative to Marxist.

Yet there are common elements, which should pose questions for those who fear black tyranny or outside communist influence. All the countries of the region with the exception of South Africa and Zaire have joined in the SADCC project for regional economic cooperation, across ideological dividing lines. The Frontline States have successfully maintained a consensus on the liberation of the region and, far from taking their cue from any external power, have established the guidelines against which those powers are judged.

In no southern African country have white citizens been subject to the systematic racial penalties they imposed on blacks in the past, and indeed their previous assets and skills continue to assure them a disproportionate share in national wealth. There is no special political privilege for whites, save the extra seats in parliament still allocated under Zimbabwe's transitional constitution. But in Angola, Mozambique, and other countries whites serve in the governments, not as whites or as representing whites, but as citizens.

Angola and Mozambique have opted for ideological alliances with the Soviet Union, and sought to build their own societies along Marxist lines. But neither has taken a dogmatic approach to development or surrendered its political independence. Each has tried to develop good working relationships with Western countries and diversify sources of economic and even military support. While trying to increase their independence, both still find the West an essential economic partner.

No other country, even in southern Africa, can be a model for the future of South Africa. The differences are numerous and substantial. A far greater percentage of the population is white. The country is rich and well developed in economic terms. The black population contains a far larger urban and industrial working class than other African countries. The conflict is far closer to the center stage of international attention.

These are only a few of the factors that make detailed prediction futile. Whatever the scenario followed, however, one can be sure that the end of apartheid will be only the opportunity to plant the tree of freedom. The successors will have to face not only the inherited inequalities of the past,

but also the devastation caused by the desperate attempts to stave off a new beginning. South Africa's neighbors may be even more ravaged than South Africa itself. The ANC's strategy has carefully avoided destruction that could cripple a future economic recovery, and has opened the door wide for whites who want to defect from racialism. But if the balance of forces fails to take a decisive turn against Pretoria; the bitter toll of conflict could still mount up for years.

And the role of the West? The West has neither the power nor the mandate to step in and impose a solution. But the actions taken or not taken will make a difference. The Western powers can continue to trust primarily in the white power structures of South Africa, the politicians of Pretoria, and the businessmen of Johannesburg. They can join Pretoria in trying to pick blacks who will accept special privileges for their former masters, and who will pledge their loyalty to the global anti-Communist crusade. Or they may disengage from the ties that strengthen the South African system, encouraging those southern Africans, black and white, who may still hold many different views on the future shape of their societies, but who agree that racial domination, like slavery a century ago, should be thrown onto the scrapheap of history.

The particulars of the policy debate will undoubtedly shift repeatedly as apartheid makes its violent exit from history. But much will depend on the basic issue of whom to trust—will Western policymakers give greater credence to the Bothas, the Oppenheimers and their friends, or to a Nelson Mandela? Speaking to the court that sentenced him to life imprisonment in 1964, Mandela concluded with these words:

Above all, we want equal political rights, because without them our disabilities will be permanent. I know this sounds revolutionary to the whites in this country, because the majority of voters will be Africans. This makes the white man fear democracy.

But this fear cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the only solution which will guarantee racial harmony and freedom for all. It is not true that the enfranchisement of all will result in racial domination. . . . The ANC has spent half a century fighting against racialism. When it triumphs it will not change that policy. . . .

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. . . . I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.⁸

