

Dealing with African Conflict and Underdevelopment: Progress through Partnership?

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At the start of the new millennium, we face a world which is both fragmenting and integrating.

It is integrating because we operate in an age of global communications and information technology -- what is termed 'globalisation'. Globalisation, among other things, means that international capital markets are working together at an unprecedented pace -- and illustrates how the fortunes of states are now, more than ever before, inextricably connected to external events, and especially to the degree to which countries interact productively or destructively with each other.

It is fragmenting because this emerging world has not brought benefits for all.

In today's environment, the poverty gap between peoples within states and between states themselves is widening. We see the fragmentation of the global community into rich and poor groupings, between those with and those without access to the global economy and to inter-state justice. This poses immense challenges to practitioners of international relations seeking an equitable and stable world order.

My talk today will cover two central issues:²

- First, what are the challenges posed by today's environment?
- Second, how can Africa, and especially Southern Africa, work together in tandem with the international community to meet these challenges? In this regard, I would like to stress the theme of partnership – not just between South Africa and its neighbours and partners further afield in the South and the North, but within South Africa and other African states in the manufacture and implementation of foreign policy.

Today's Challenges

What are the challenges that Africa and South Africa faces in the emerging world order?

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² This talk draws on Greg Mills, *The Wired Model: South Africa, Foreign Policy and Globalisation*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2000. Please see this publication for a full list of citations/references.

Five issues have been identified as critical challenges for developing countries in particular and for the inter-state system in general:

- First, the declining ability of the state to provide for the welfare of its burgeoning numbers of citizens, and to generate economic activity.
- Second, the increase in activities, both legal and illegal, across state frontiers. The former, legal category includes the vast increase in the flow of international capital where the global value of foreign direct investment topped US\$800 billion in 1999 and where an estimated US\$1.5 trillion is traded in foreign exchange daily; while the latter category involves pestiferous trans-national activities such as arms, drugs, vehicle and even people smuggling.
- Third, the emergence of issues that cannot be solved by states acting alone, accompanied paradoxically by the fragmentation of systems of global governance into action by, at best, regional units.
- Fourth, the existence of widening inter- and intra-state social, economic and political divides and tensions between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. As the UN Development Programme (UNDP) has noted, the gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest nations and the fifth in the poorest has more than doubled between 1960 and 1997, to 74 to 1. Nearly one quarter of the world's population today lives in absolute poverty.
- Fifth, the growing importance of access to technology and knowledge as a basis for wealth creation.

One issue binds all these factors: that governments cannot alone meet the challenge, and requires others, acting in partnership, to ensure a common yet fragile good.

The African Challenge

Africa remains pegged at the bottom of the global development tree. For example, in the UN's *Human Development Report*, which indexes 174 countries on the basis of literacy, life expectancy, schooling, population growth, and per capita GDP, the bottom 20 countries are all African. Personal conditions have scarcely improved, and in many cases declined, in an environment of war and economic collapse in many of Africa's 54 states.³

In the emerging global context, Africa thus faces a demanding set of twin challenges:

³ Including the Western Sahara.

Firstly, the need to adapt to external realities in adopting democratic political and liberal economic policies.

Secondly, the need to co-operate to end conflict, to promote stability and security, and to foster regional economic partnership.

For South Africa, the challenge is all the more onerous, since the expectation of the external community is that its national success will have a great impact on the fortunes of future generations not only of South Africans, but on those of the rest of the continent too. Here, perhaps South Africa's most important foreign policy tool is arguably therefore less the influence it carries abroad than the success of its democracy and economic transition at home. As Robin Renwick, the former UK Ambassador to South Africa, has argued: "[i]n the degree of economic success that can be achieved, will lie the ultimate test of the proposition that South Africa *can* escape the fate of much of the rest of Africa and, more than that, it can help to lead the renaissance of southern Africa..."⁴

Notwithstanding these domestic goals and their linkage with external relations, the emerging global environment poses critical challenges for foreign policy, intent as it is in South Africa's case on achieving an African renaissance. Yet South Africa is today aware that engagement with Africa in seeking to promote this, will not always be smooth sailing. Pretoria's experience since 1994 has taught that democratic values do not always (if ever until now) hold sway over vested personal financial and political interests; and indeed, such values may be threatening to these interests.

Indeed, what have been the hard results of a democratic South Africa's foreign policy in Africa in turning this situation around?

In Africa, there has been, over the past five years, the development of an arc of instability across the continent from Somalia in the East through Sudan, the Great Lakes, the Congo, Angola and Sierra Leone in the West. However, in too many cases, the resolution of conflict has been held hostage to vested political interests and, even more tragically, to the economic stakes of different actors with an interest in perpetuating war.

This is what we have come to term the "political-economy" of African conflicts, where wars are fuelled by the export of diamonds, oil and other commodities, and by the import of all-too readily-available weaponry. Of course, Africa's natural resources should be used as critical assets for development and wealth creation. Yet in the absence of political stability, a popularly accountable government and necessary regulatory environment, these resources have brought only continued misery and sometimes death to

⁴ Robin Renwick, *Unconventional Diplomacy in Southern Africa*. London: Macmillan, 1997, p.158.

the vast majority of the Africans in states mired in civil wars and inter-state conflicts.

In the southern Africa region, things at the end of 2000 looked considerably worse than they did 12 months earlier. Peace in the Congo still appears elusive, despite considerable diplomatic efforts; mainly it seems because the warring parties do not want peace at all. The assassination of President Laurent-Desire Kabila in January 2001 might make the search for a peace easier, though his role in the process was only part of the overall problem that is the dysfunctional nature of the Congo itself.⁵

Peace also appears a long way off in Angola, and its prospects may have been worsened by the strengthening alliance of the disaffected throughout the western coast of Africa involving Charles Taylor's Liberia, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Togo, Jonas Savimbi's UNITA movement in Angola, and Libya's Muammar Ghaddafi. Elsewhere, even relatively stable Mozambique and Tanzania have suffered election-related violence hiccups, while the Swazi monarchy's reluctance to reform the political system threatens a full-scale civil unrest backlash. Nearly three years after the last general election resulted in widespread violence and a South African military intervention, a much-anticipated election process remains uncertain in Lesotho. Critically, following President Robert Mugabe's failure to alter the constitution through a referendum in February 2000, violence, too, has been the order of the day in South Africa's largest African trade partner and neighbour, Zimbabwe, an issue that had racial connotations inside the Republic and has also posed questions about the willingness of Pretoria to make hard choices with its erstwhile Southern African Development Community (SADC) and liberation movement partners.

Ironically, the issue that has arguably contained the greatest costs for Africa in terms of negative perception – Zimbabwe – was the one that Pretoria was paradoxically best placed to address, though it apparently lacked the political will to do so. And the issues where South Africa has placed the greatest (at least presidential) effort, were those on the global stage where the country has possessed the least immediate leverage.

A More Positive Picture?

While many might prefer to view African events in a sensationalistic and tragic manner, it should be said that there is also much to be optimistic about on the African continent.

⁵ For an excellent description of these problems see Michela Wrong, *In the Footsteps of Mr Kurtz*. London: Fourth Estate, 2000; and Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Herosim in Colonial Africa*. New York: Mariner, 1999.

Although this was not widely reported in the media, there was overall improvement in Africa during the 1990s. Between 1996 and 1998, 35 of the 48 sub-Saharan African countries registered positive GDP growth per capita, with 29 countries achieving this in 1998. According to the World Bank, sub-Saharan economic growth per capita is expected to rise to 3.3% in 2000-01. Between 2002 and 2008, this is expected to rise again to 3.6%.

This is not by accident. Many African countries, including South Africa, have liberalised their economies and instituted macro-economic reforms including privatisation, deregulation, currency exchangeability, and fiscal restraint.

And such reforms are not confined to the area of economics. There were just four democracies in Africa in 1980. Since the early 1990s, 42 sub-Saharan states have held multiparty presidential or parliamentary elections.

A recent editorial in the *Washington Post* noted:

“Africa's apparent hopelessness is now so widely accepted that it is in danger of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

But it went on:

“Yet this does not mean that progress is impossible. In the 1960s and 1970s, East Asia shared many of these weaknesses; but the pessimists who dismissed the region as caught in a poverty trap have been proved spectacularly wrong”.

How can Africa and the international community join in partnership in turning this situation around?

The Need for Strategic Partnership and Shared Vision

The question that South Africa is asking at this point is how we can advance in co-operation with key partners in addressing these critical issues of African stability and development. There are a number of self-evidently important reasons why the international community must work together to solve these problems:

First, we know today that threats to human security and development, like Aids, tuberculosis, water shortages, ecological imbalances and new trans-national criminal threats such as drug, people, arms and vehicle smuggling and money laundering, are no longer limited by national boundaries. These problems are also closely inter-related and are impossible to solve in isolation from each other.

These are global problems that demand global answers. The existence of sound functioning states in Africa is part of the solution. The chaos brought by failed or dysfunctional states in Africa (or elsewhere) has costs for global stability. Conversely, stability in a region inhabited by 800 million people, as Africa is, offers a larger world economy and market for products, capital and services.

Second, it is axiomatic that South Africa has a special responsibility in Africa, and Africa's fortunes will reflect those of the Republic. As the economically most powerful state in the continent where its GDP equals nearly 45% of the total of sub-Saharan Africa's, we have an obligation to help combat these insecurities and the perception of inevitable failure they bring, by engaging constructively and by demonstrating the possibility of success in our own country. But this arguably cannot be done alone -- neither South Africa nor Africa can succeed without a global political and economic system that accommodates the complex and daunting developmental challenges of the African state.

These challenges are related to the colonial history and the cultural and linguistic make-up of African states. The nature of the colonial administration in the Congo, Angola and Mozambique, for example, and the manner in which independence was gained and ultimately ceded, is in no small part accountable for the difficulties that have ensued.

Our own experience has taught us that only a sustained commitment to peace and not attempts to impose victory by force of arms can bring a long-term solution. In the same vein, we should strongly oppose those, in Angola, in Africa or elsewhere, who seek to profit financially from the misery of such wars. Similarly, corruption is a blight that cannot be addressed solely by African governments. The European and other corporations doing business with Africa have also to bear their share of the blame -- for participating in corrupt practices -- and the obligation to help stamp it out.

The Importance of Domestic Peace and Visionary Leadership

How can stability be brought about in African conflict situations?

South Africa's own transition and its experience in African conflict mediation illustrates that successful resolution of inter-communal problems rests on the need for communities to recognise the rewards of co-operating -- and, conversely, the costs of not doing so.

Here it is possible to identify four criteria (or conditions) for successful mediation from African attempts:

First, there has to be a real basis for an internal settlement. This must not thus be viewed as a *zero-sum* game, and a way has to be found in which the major conflicting parties can both simultaneously achieve essential elements of what they want. If the settlement merely puts off the day of reckoning (as, for example, it has done in Angola), then mediation efforts are not going to progress far or any agreement stick for a prolonged period of time.

In South Africa, it could be argued that while the African National Congress wanted to be in government, it recognised, too, that it required the white governmental and business establishment if it was going to make a success of things. At the same time, the white establishment wanted to preserve its position in South Africa, but needed the involvement and support of the ANC government in order to prosper and achieve this goal in the long-term.

Here the critical issue is less the need for institutional mechanisms that can serve to provide this 'glue' in society, as shared normative political values which can hold a settlement together in the event of the collapse of trust between leaders or of institutions.

Second, there has to be a reasonably united international community, in which different outside parties can bring pressure on the rival domestic parties to settle.

Apart from South Africa itself, the only post-Cold War case in which a negotiated solution to a Southern African conflict situation has worked successfully, is Mozambique. There, as in the transfer from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe in 1979, the amount of leverage that the external mediators could bring on the domestic combatants was critical. The same could be said of the Namibian side of the Angolan-Namibian accords in 1988 which stuck, even if the Angolan part of that deal did not.

By contrast, in the turbulent transition from the rule of President Mobutu Sese Seko in the former Zaire in 1997, another unsuccessful attempt, Washington and Paris had their own (sometimes competing) agendas. It was clear, too, that southern African leaders were also, often for reasons of personality and jealousies rather than policy substance, not in agreement over what to do in Zaire.

Critical in this external engagement is the need to give the parties the tools to do the job properly. Some 350 military UN peacekeepers in Angola were not sufficient for UNAVEM II's mandate between May 1991-February 1995 – leading Margaret Anstee to comment “I have been a 747 to fly with only enough fuel for a DC-3” in joking reference to the UN Security Council Resolution 747 which formed the mandate for UNAVEM II;⁶ nor were 4,220

⁶ Cited in Judith Matloff, *Fragments of a Forgotten War*. Penguin: London, 1997, p.75. See also Dennis Jett, *Why Peacekeeping Fails?*. St Martin's Press: New York.

military personnel for UNAVEM III (1995-97); neither will 5,500 be in the context of MONUC's inter-positional mission in the DRC. But 8,000 UN forces (including 4,500 military observers) were sufficient to do the job necessary in Namibia (UNTAG) from April 1989-March 1990, as were some 10,000 personnels (with 6,625 troops) in Mozambique (ONUMOZ) between December 1992 and 1994.⁷ Why the unwillingness to contribute enough troops to do the job properly, particularly in places like Angola and the Congo which are both vast territories with poor infrastructure? A combination of the end of the strategic imperative that drove Cold War engagement, pressing domestic political and regional economic integration initiatives, doubts about the efficacy of UN peacekeeping, and a weariness of Africa's seemingly unsolvable problems have all contributed in compounding fashion to an increasing unwillingness overall by the West to offer forces to such African missions.

Third, most successful transitions have hinged on crises (or historical turning points) to bring about change, such as the end of the Cold War impacted positively on transition in Namibia, South Africa and Mozambique. It could be argued that events in the DRC, Angola and Zimbabwe, in this regard, do more for the creation of common value systems in the longer-term than a slow disintegration of regional political fabric and values.

Fourth, and finally, there is a need for leadership to seize the moment. It is unclear whether African leadership, say for example in Angola, can make the necessary mental leap from ethnic to national politics as displayed, for example, by Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk between 1990-94. There is also, related to my first point, a need for civil society institutions to bridge these divides in the absence of such leadership.

The Need for External Partnership and Action

Once peace has been established, however, how can states progress economically and socially and maintain the support of their domestic electorate in the face of the (competing) forces of high local expectations and globalisation? The latter offers, after all, little manoeuvre for policy experimentation, though the former demands rapid delivery.

In this regard, South Africa's president, Thabo Mbeki, explicitly sees Africa's difficulties and solutions in terms of external, global action. This belief has found expression in the Millennium Africa Renaissance Plan (MAP), in which Africa takes responsibility for its own destiny, but does so in partnership and for the joint benefit together with the North.

⁷ See <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/ops.htm>.

Mbeki has set his foreign sights on creating a “rules-based” international system, attempting to level the global playing fields between rich and poor states, and to effect a “resource-transfer” from the developed North to developing South. As he put it at the EU-Africa Summit in Cairo in April 2000,⁸ “Most of our countries [in Africa] are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty and lack of capital. A good part of the required capital must therefore come from abroad... We seek the agreement of our European friends that extraordinary measures will have to be taken to encourage larger foreign direct investment inflows into Africa”.

Africa has not yet been privy to the finer details of the Millennium Africa Renaissance Programme outlined by Mr Mbeki at the World Economic Forum (WEF) summit in Davos in January 2001, and developed jointly with presidents Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria and Olesegun Obasanjo of Nigeria.

As Mbeki announced at the unveiling in Davos, “Our starting point is a critical examination of Africa’s post-independence experience, and acceptance that things have to be done differently to achieve meaningful progress”. The South African president argued that the MAP would hinge on a “concrete programme of action” covering the following “priority areas”:⁹

- The creation of peace, security and stability along with democratic governance.
- A comprehensive human resource strategy.
- The development of Africa’s resource-based sectors to lead an industrial strategy.
- Investment in the IT sector “to bridge the digital divide”.
- Improved infrastructure.
- The development of a financing mechanism.

The MAP could thus represent a significant departure from past largely rhetorical attempts to create a new (and positive) future for Africa. Unlike the usual begging bowl approach of which donors have tired, Mbeki said that “The focus of the programme is not increased aid but increased investments in viable infrastructure and business opportunities”. This language represents a refreshing break from the past – and sends out also a more positive image and message from South Africa’s sometimes beleaguered president under personal attack throughout 2000 for his stance on Zimbabwe and HIV-Aids, and the controversial manner in which he has handled allegations of financial impropriety and corruption over South Africa’s R44 billion arms package.¹⁰

⁸ ‘Africa calls on fortress Europe’, *Business Day*, 5 April 2000.

⁹ For the full text of his speech, see ‘Sideline Africa a risk to global stability’, *The Star*, 29 January 2001.

¹⁰ In September 1999, the South African government agreed to purchase arms initially worth R21.3 billion, later escalating to R43.8 billion, namely: 3 Type 209 (German) submarines; 4 German Meko corvettes; 9 Swedish/UK Gripen fighters; 12 British Hawk jet trainers; and 30 Augusta A-109 (Italian) light helicopters.

However, in addition to the obvious reaction to such a framework as presented to the WEF of the 'devil lying in the detail', it must be noted that this plan, like the African renaissance notion itself may obscure the hard choices behind African development in its attempts to solicit global assistance. An Africa-wide plan contains, by definition, the danger of a sweeping and not nuanced approach to African development: lumping South Africa with Nigeria let alone Somalia and Sierra Leone is not only analytically misleading but could contain risks for the more stable and prosperous African states. In a related area, while actions (ironically non-governmental- rather than state-led) at debt-relief have been largely successful, developing country efforts, of which South Africa has been part, to bring about a more equitable international trade regime, have delivered little.

Moreover, the need for action in the external milieu cannot, and should not however, obscure the need for difficult domestic choices.

The Importance of Domestic Partnership

Once peace is achieved, there is a need for an inclusive approach domestically to development.

For example, South Africa's strongest assets lie in the strength of its human and technological skills base. These are the assets that will make South Africa and the Africa continent prosper. But in realising this fact, Pretoria also has to employ these skills in the manufacture and implementation of its foreign policy.

As is highlighted above, this includes the building of a closer relationship between government, business as critical partners in African development and prosperity, civil society, and the media. For example, in realising the key objectives in the SADC region of fiscal discipline, appropriate monetary policies, a liberal trade regime, the restructuring of the state sector, the provision of modern infrastructure, and constitutionally guaranteed property rights, South Africa's business and government will in the future have to work together in the following practical ways, through:

- First, sharing professional expertise and experience, and developing human capital – through secondments, training programmes and internships.
- Second, jointly promoting South African trade and investment efforts through information sharing, and joint policy planning and advice with the establishment of business-government delegations and corporate councils.
- Third, the creation of public-private African investment partnerships.

Conclusion

The overarching theme of this talk has been on partnership, on the critical value of a sometimes overlooked, yet most positive aspect of inter- and intra-state activity. Strategic partnership is imperative if Africa's vicious cycle of underdevelopment, poverty and instability is to be broken and a more positive virtuous cycle realised. In this way Africa is not simply a passive adherent but rather a strong proponent of globalisation and the benefits it offers.

The creation of a virtuous circle of peace, stability, economic growth and social provision has to flow both from global action and from the dedicated commitment of African states themselves. Bad governance is a deterrent to foreign investment in Africa and a curse too often in the past visited on the peoples of our continent.

There is an old African saying that "...it takes a village to make a child". In the age of globalisation, it is in our best direct interests to engage together in partnership, both domestically and internationally, with the problems facing African and other developing states, so as to arrive at global solutions to what are, indeed, global problems.