



Foreign policy

Pretoria's need to crush domestic opposition to apartheid while smiling on the world has led to a foreign policy which often appears schizophrenic and contradictory. DAVID COETZEE reports from London on perceptions of this 'smiling death' policy, and the implications of events such as the Angolan peace talks, the US elections and persistent dirty tricks carried out by South African agents.

South Africa's twin policies of domestic repression and regional destabilisation have brought their inevitable negative international repercussions - but at the same time sharpened Pretoria's need to call on its traditional Western allies for help.

In Western Europe Pretoria's major efforts were devoted to attempts - often with the aid of organised right-wing and neo-fascist political pressure groups - to stem anti-apartheid mobilisation and limit the sanctions movement.

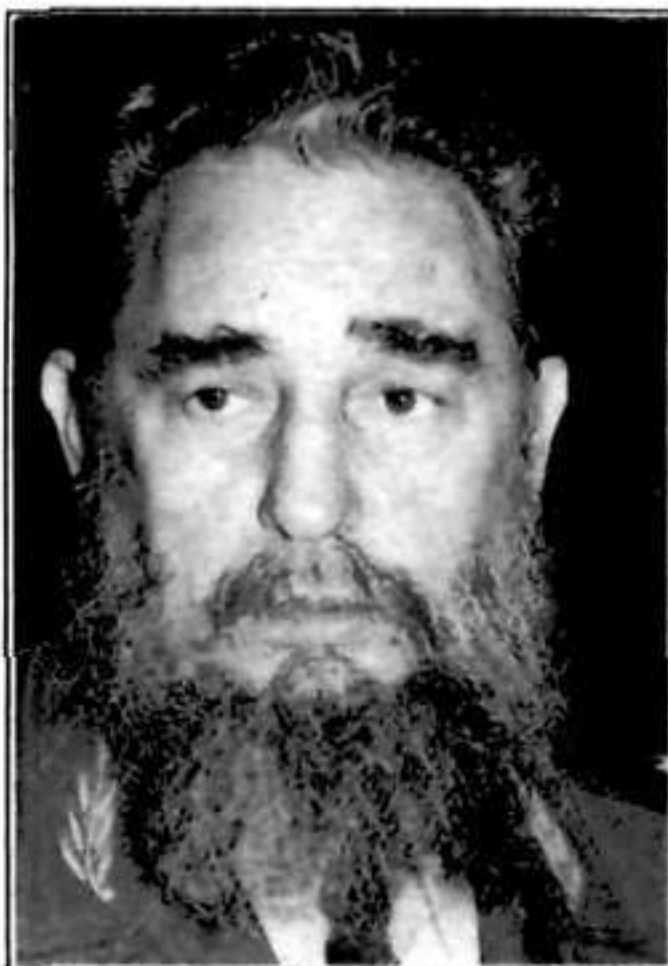
By the year end, however, Pretoria was facing a Europe in which Britain's Margaret Thatcher seemed more isolated than ever in her strident insistence on constructive engagement with South Africa's rulers.

Domestic South African events, such as the banning of anti-apartheid groups and the trial of the Sharpeville Six, pushed West German leader Helmut Kohl to reassess his sanctions stand in March - though no official measures followed. Already, however, South African exports had registered a sharp decline in West Germany, the country's third largest trading partner.

The bid to cut off European Community (EC) funding for anti-apartheid groups within South Africa also raised a storm of protest in EC institutions. This funding for 'acceptable' opposition bodies is one way of avoiding sharper decisions about sanctions. Pretoria eventually backed down on proposed legislation effectively blocking international funding for internal anti-apartheid activities.

Gangsterism used as an adjunct of policy, always so visible inside South Africa and the region, was extended to Europe with no apparent concern for diplomatic consequences - and again brought a clamour of protest against the South African connection.

In London the embarrassed British security services bundled off



Cuban President Fidel Castro: SADF's defeat at Cuito Cuanavale was historic



Foreign Minister Pik Botha: Some diplomatic gains — behind closed doors

into oblivion the chief conspirators in the case of an attempted kidnapping of ANC leaders.

The twice-attempted murder of the ANC's Brussels representative, Godfrey Motsepe, and the successful murder of Paris representative Dulcie September in March, isolated Pretoria's best friends.

Even in Thatcher's London, the ANC representative was immediately given round-the-clock police protection (conveying ironically the kind of diplo-

matic standing the movement has only been able to achieve in the socialist and some African countries).

Nor was the gangsterism in the region ignored abroad. The capture of South African commandos and agents in Botswana and Zimbabwe was well reported, as was the attempted killing in April of ANC exile lawyer Albie Sachs in Maputo, who was seriously injured by a car bomb.

At the time there were even press reports in the US of FBI warnings against South African hit squads. In the popular consciousness South Africa was fast acquiring the reputation of a 'Papa Doc' state - and this could do no good at all for those of its diplomats seeking to assert respectability in those international forums still open to it.

It also made it more difficult for any Western politician wishing to be seen to do business with the regime - as Thatcher does.

The South African government's 'strike the enemy anywhere' strategy was presumably a considered response to what Defence Minister Magnus Malan saw as the ANC's bid to present itself abroad as a government in waiting. But Pretoria clearly had no idea of the extent of popular feeling in Europe and the US on the entire apartheid and racism issue - or of the pressure even right-wing governments are under.

So its diplomatic gains in Europe, such as they are, have been those registered in cloistered and secretive surroundings - at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation talks in Vienna in August, where they succeeded in not being expelled, or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks in Berlin in September, where they could at least bring the depth of their economic crisis to the attention of their banking friends.

In Vienna Pik Botha admitted what everyone knew - that South Africa had nuclear potential. He wanted full participation in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty with guaran-

tees that would cancel sanctions - that South Africa could sell and buy uranium without discrimination, and engage in international exchanges in nuclear technology. The negotiations continue.

It seemed the West and the Soviet Union decided to treat Pretoria with the respect accorded an unexploded bomb: unpredictable, possibly deadly. They were agreed that it should remain where it could be watched.

The same powerful anti-apartheid forces revealing themselves in Western Europe have also been visible in the USA. There the long-hidden political forces of the black and Hispanic communities, mobilised in the Rainbow Coalition after the last presidential election, were focused in an unprecedented fashion on apartheid.

These grassroots forces showed in the spread of anti-apartheid sanctions legislation - in March this year there were no fewer than 48 bills before the senate carrying some reference to South Africa. The Sullivan Code was recognised as futile and disinvestment became a steady stream; US companies were announcing their withdrawal from South Africa each week. Sanctions campaigners began working on 'non-equity ties' - the links maintained by the US multinationals who got out.

Massive falls in trade, especially relating to coal, steel and uranium, were already being registered and still-stricter anti-apartheid legislation was on the cards.

The US general accounting office reported in September that even the ten 'strategic minerals' excluded after right-wing pressure from the 1986 anti-apartheid law were not so strategic after all.

In March, Anglo American supremo Harry Oppenheimer said there was 'no early prospect of a turn in the sanctions tide', and he described SA-US relations as being at an all time low.

Nor was this deterioration restricted to the US. Pretoria's second tier of



*Gone: Chilean dictator
Augusto Pinochet*



*Gone: Bavarian prime minister
Franz Josef Strauss*

allies - Israel, Far Eastern and Latin American states - was also touched.

Israel, under US pressure, had already lowered its visible level of military collaboration with South Africa.

Japan was made aware - under US prodding - that it had overtaken the US as South Africa's main trading partner, and instructed its businessmen to draw back. But anti-apartheid pressures are not yet strong in Japan, and businessmen have not taken much heed of their government's

intrusion to back-off from South African links.

It was a blow to South Africa when its Chilean ally, dictator Augusto Pinochet, was rebuffed in a popular poll in October. Pik Botha had visited Chile in March with a stopover in Brazil and then Uruguay.

Elsewhere on the continent the military, as the determinants in their countries' politics, were slowly being forced back under democratic control.

The gangsterism which spilled over into Western Europe was more visible in the southern African region.

Botswana and Zimbabwe were both raided, and there were assassination attacks, but in the past year both countries have sharpened their security, and Pretoria's agents have been captured and put on trial - an important blow to the myth of military and racial invincibility.

The dual-track policy on Mozambique was continued - support for the Renamo bandit groups, together with official offers of economic assistance to Maputo. Mozambique's policy toward South Africa has been simply to demonstrate in the most visible possible way who the aggressor is, and finally to undercut Pretoria's support in the West.

In this President Joaquim Chissano had some success: when British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe visited Mozambique in September, he called on Pretoria to stop arming Renamo - the first time he has done so publicly.

These issues, however, became a sideshow alongside the war with Angola this past year. South Africa started off with - and may still have - the kind of hubris shown by Israel as it went into Lebanon. The generals and the politicians in an increasingly-military state could not but believe in their invincibility. They failed to take seriously enough the African army to their north, and they fell.

The victory of the combined Fapla-Cuban forces at Cuito Cuanavale was called historic by Cuban President



Paul Weinberg - Afrapix

PW Botha: Making friends with Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko
— but hardly anybody else

Fidel Castro. South African forces had sprung to the rescue of Unita last year (as they had done two years previously) and had inflicted a defeat on Fapla, which retreated up to Cuito Cuanavale. But Pretoria did not understand their resolve to defend Angola. Perhaps they even believed their own propaganda about the relative influence of the Soviet Union and its alleged loss of interest in the war.

Whatever their motives, they were unable to take Cuito Cuanavale, tried

to extend their and Unita's hold further north and failed, found they could not return, and found at the same time a reinforced Cuban-Fapla-Swapo army suddenly brought up to the very doorsteps of their northern Namibian bases. The days in which they had casually dominated the entire south of Angola were over.

The diplomatic consequences of thousands of their men being trapped in Angola are still being felt. It was the single largest factor in bringing

them into serious negotiations. South Africa may find itself for a time on the side of its old allies and protectors, the US Republicans, represented by Chester Crocker, as they try to negotiate, each with a view to its own interests, the rescue of Unita. But in the long run no-one is still interested in backing South Africa's hold on Namibia, or its destabilisation of Angola.

In the teeth of defeat, PW Botha talked to his main African ally, Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko, and announced large-scale diplomatic victories to come with unnamed African states. But in the one place a deal had been done - tiny Equatorial Guinea - Nigeria promptly instructed it to cut the links, which it did.

On the issues of Namibia, as on Angola, the US and South Africa were no longer on parallel tracks. The US has decided it can play its own game in Angola, using Unita but also using the IMF.

South Africa is once again on its own, in an isolation bound to increase if Michael Dukakis gets in as the next US president - but even if George Bush takes over. It had its best shots during Reagan's era.

Dukakis told a meeting in July: 'We're not going to sell arms to terrorists. We're going to crack down on terrorists, whether they live in Beirut, Tehran or Johannesburg'. He accused Pretoria of naked military aggression against its neighbours.

No doubt US political realities will modify his actions if he becomes president. But US opinion on the issue of apartheid is a good deal more to the left than ever before.

As the year end approached, Pretoria has seen its friends going out like candles - Franz-Josef Strauss, strongman of Bavaria; Augusto Pinochet, dictator of Chile; Reagan in the White House.

To crush domestic and regional opposition Pretoria will be forced to take further measures which will strictly limit chances of aid from the successors to Reagan, Strauss and their ilk.