

SOUTH AFRICA: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WEST, AND POLICY OPTIONS

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Western Objectives

A distinction between the economic and strategic interests, perceived by the Western powers, that have led them to support the South African state, and the political and ideological interests that impel them to distance themselves from it (can be drawn).

The United States and Britain view South Africa as a country in which they have large investments, which is an important source of mineral resources, and which is a significant trading partner. In Britain, which commands much the greater share of South Africa's foreign investments, and in the international economic relations of which South Africa looms much larger, the consciousness of an economic interest in what is called the "stability" of South Africa is perhaps stronger. But in the United States, since the corporate investment boom of the 1960s and the anxieties about access to natural resources that developed in the 1970s, the consciousness has also been strong.

Along with these economic interests . . . there have also been strategic interests. The South African state has been intensely hostile to the Soviet Union and international communism, and a strong South Africa has served to deny a strategically important part of the world to the West's global rivals . . . There are powerful voices in the Western world contending that the governing consideration in the West's policy toward southern Africa is its strategic interest in securing the Cape sea routes and access to gold and vital industrial minerals, that this interest is now menaced as it never has been before by Soviet penetration of the subcontinent, and further that the protection of that interest requires co-operation with South Africa.

On the other hand, the Western countries (as nearly all other countries) have been impelled by political and ideological considerations to distance themselves from South Africa. South Africa has in the course of the last thirty years become a pariah, more clearly than any of the other so-called "pariah states." This change has come about not primarily because of changes in South Africa, although the policies of apartheid followed since 1948 have been an exacerbating factor, but because of changes in the rest of the world; the revolt of previously subject non-European peoples against European or Western domination; and the emergence of a consensus in international society against

racial discrimination by whites against blacks (a consensus which does not, unfortunately, embrace other forms of racial discrimination to an equal degree) and against the legitimacy of rule by whites over black majorities.

The Western countries have been impelled to join in the general ostracism of South Africa partly by internal pressures and partly by external ones. The political awakening of black peoples has included that of the black minorities within the Western countries themselves, which in response have embarked upon programs of racial integration and desegregation in flat contradiction of the policies that are being pursued in South Africa. The consequence of these programs — and especially of the triumph of the movement for civil rights in the United States, a development of truly world-historical significance — is that the Western societies to which South Africa looks for support and succor are very different societies from what they were thirty or twenty or even ten years ago . . . All the Western countries are impelled to reject intimacy with white South Africa for reasons of their own domestic peace and harmony.

EXTERNAL PRESSURES

External pressures have also played their part. The international political world in which the Western powers now find themselves is no longer that of 1945 in which, apart from the challenge presented to them by the Soviet Union, they enjoyed an easy ascendancy. The majority of states in the world are Asian, African or Latin American. Not only do they command majorities of votes in the UN General Assembly and other bodies, they also, in some cases, command bargaining power (oil as in the case of the OPEC states, ideological appeal as in the case of China) and military power (at least in the sense of power to resist Western intervention, as has been demonstrated by Vietnam). Deep though the divisions are within the so-called Third World, there are certain basic propositions on which they have maintained a remarkable degree of unity: the abolition of colonialism, a new international economic order, and an end to white supremacist government in southern Africa. The Western powers have had to take account of this basic change in the character of the international system to come to terms with it, especially by seeking to find common ground with the

Asian and African states the positions of which have become so prominent. In finding this common ground, nothing has proved so great a handicap to the Western countries as their inherited links with white South Africa.

Although Western policies have reflected a consciousness both of the economic and strategic interests drawing them toward white South Africa, and of the political and ideological interests requiring them to ostracize it, the former have so far prevailed. For many years the governments of the United States, Britain and the other Western countries have joined the chorus of ritual denunciation of apartheid, but they have done nothing actually to help undermine the dominant position of the whites in South Africa. They have maintained diplomatic relations with it, traded with it, invested in it, and allowed it to become the dominant military power in southern Africa. To varying degrees, the Western powers have extended South Africa support in the United Nations — the colonial powers among them, in particular, joining with South Africa in resisting UN pressure by appealing to rights of domestic jurisdiction.

(However). . . in my view, the factors (now) inclining the United States and the other Western countries to dissociate themselves from South Africa are likely to become stronger, and the factors making for retention of the present links are likely to become weaker.

The sense in the West of an economic stake in South Africa is declining as investors perceive that the country is headed for political strife and turmoil, and calculate that their capital will be safer elsewhere. The argument that Western access to South African raw materials depends upon preservation of the present political structure of South Africa does not accord with the experience of Western traders in post-colonial black Africa, where political change has not (necessarily) proved incompatible with the maintenance and development of close economic ties with the Western World.

Nor does it seem likely that the strategic interest perceived by the Western powers in checking the Soviet penetration of southern Africa will be thought attainable by association, overt or covert, with white South Africa. . . . To imagine that Western governments will seek to provide a response to the Soviets by association with an unreformed South Africa would be to treat them as more blind to the realities of African international politics than they actually are.

Nothing would seem more likely to enhance the role of the Soviet Union in Africa or to damage the prospects for Western influence in black African states than a policy of alliance with South Africa — even if that alliance were covert in nature, and the West were successful in making it a condition of such an alliance that South Africa be given a more acceptable public face by minor changes in race policy.

LIKELY TO GROW

The pressures, internal and external, on the Western countries to dissociate themselves from South Africa . . . are likely to grow. The internal pressures on Western governments to demonstrate that they have no truck with white supremacy will become stronger as a younger generation, emotionally more committed to racial integration than the present rulers of Western countries, increases its share of political power. The external pressures will grow also as a result of a continuing shift in the distribution of wealth,

and population away from the Western countries and toward the socialist countries and the so-called Third World.

In my view, the Western powers should treat their political and ideological interests in coming to terms with black Africa, and not their surviving links with white South Africa, as the paramount consideration in the policies toward this part of the world. They cannot follow abroad a policy of discrimination against blacks that contradicts the policies of racial integration to which, however imperfect these policies are in practice, they are rightly committed at home. They cannot continue to observe the convention that when the West talks to South Africa it is simply to the white rulers of this country that they are talking, without damaging the enterprise of constructing a global international order of which the black majority of the world's states and population feel that they have a stake. They cannot fail to recognize the gross injustices embedded in the present economic, social, and political structure of South Africa without being false to their own deepest moral principles, and so undermining their own integrity and belief in themselves and their role in the world.

I hesitate to deliver the kind of moral lecture from Western liberals that many white South Africans find so irritating because I am myself often irritated by the insensitivity of these lectures. It is true that Western liberals sometimes fail to recognize the uniqueness of the predicament in which white South Africans find themselves — the invalidity of analogies from the experience of European colonial powers, for whom the end of colonial rule did not mean that their metropolitan populations had to live under black majority rule, or from the experience of the United States, where the achievement of equality of political rights by the blacks did not entail black majorities even in the South, let alone the in country as a whole.

There is (. . . however . . .) a need also for Western liberals who speak of the rights of oppressed blacks, Asians, and Coloureds in South Africa, to recognize that white South Africans also have rights. White South Africans, including those responsible for the present oppressive policies, are also human with human rights, and no vision of the future that fails to recognize their rights can be worthy of being endorsed by the West. Their rights, moreover, are not only individual rights but also group rights. The feeling of the Afrikaners or the white South Africans as a whole that their rights as a group ought to count for something in any prescription for the future of South Africa is entitled to respect.

But this should not deflect us from grasping the main point — the obvious point — about the West's obligations in South Africa. They are not to the white minority but to the people of South Africa as a whole. At one time, the moral sympathies of political man in the West were concentrated on the white man in South Africa, and took account of Africans, Coloureds, or Asians only to a lesser degree. We have since experienced an extension of our moral sympathies and it is now our duty to take account of the rights of all men and women in South Africa to an equal degree. White South Africans face a predicament, but they are a minority, they are in a privileged position, and the oppressions that they face are possible, future ones. Black South Africans are a majority, they are economically, socially, and politically deprived, and the oppression that they experience is not only massive but actual and immediate.

CHANGE

We should recognize that if white South Africans abdicate their monopoly of power they will certainly lose many of their privileges, and may also risk being deprived of rights to which we think they are entitled. But the governing consideration in Western policy should be the recognition that the majority of the people of South Africa do not enjoy these rights now, and that this is the state of affairs that first should be changed.

There is a consensus against the oppression of blacks by whites, and especially against the claims of a minority by virtue of their white race to rule over a majority of blacks. What distinguishes the South African case from the others is not that it constitutes the greater injustice, but that this particular kind of injustice is one which international society as a whole is united in condemning. If there is to be a viable international order at all we have to build upon those elements of consensus in international society that exist, and today there is simply no prospect at all that the international order can remain viable without repudiating white supremacy.

We should recognize that white South Africans, and Afrikaners in particular, have not only individual human rights but also a legitimate desire to survive as a group, but this does not entitle them to maintain their group survival by denying the individual and group rights of others. The notion that whatever is necessary for the self-preservation of a particular group is justified is one which in the twentieth century we rightly reject even in the sphere of international or interstate relations; still less can it be accepted in the relationship between one group and others within a particular state.

If there is a need, then, for us to cultivate understanding for the predicament of the white South Africans, there is also a need not to view events out of proportion. It is the predicament of black South Africans that most deserves our attention.

THE WEST AND VIOLENT CHANGE

In the event that a struggle develops within South Africa to change the present system by violence, this struggle will be widely regarded as a just one within the world community. The black African states, other Third World states, and socialist states can be expected in varying degrees to extend support to it; so also can elements within the Western countries. The Western powers are deeply concerned at the prospect of a violent struggle in South Africa. Such a struggle would be likely to provide opportunities for the Soviet Union to extend its influence in the subcontinent. The United States and other Western societies would be internally divided in their attitudes to the struggle and would therefore have strong reasons to stand aloof from it. A protracted and bitter racial conflict in South Africa would intensify racial tensions within them. No doubt the sense of urgency with which the Western countries now call upon white South Africa to begin a peaceful and constitutional process of sharing of power derives in part from this fear that the process will otherwise soon become a violent one.

There is every reason to believe that a peaceful transition to full political participation by the non-white majority is to be preferred. We should recognize, however, that a peaceful transition, even if it is set in motion, is still likely

to meet with violent opposition from those for whom the objective is not simply to bring white domination to an end but to shape the new order that replaces it.

WESTERN MEANS

Given that the West is serious in wishing to see "an end to racial discrimination and full political participation for all South African citizens," there are three broad lines of policy that it can pursue in order to bring this about. It can seek to influence white South Africa so as to make the necessary reforms. It can seek to subvert white South Africa, adding its own weight to that of the socialist countries and the Third World in assisting the revolutionary forces at work among the non-white population. Or, it can seek simply to disengage from the situation, allowing indigenous and other external elements to bring about the inevitable changes in South Africa and minimizing the damage to itself that further involvement would bring.

The policy of seeking to influence white South Africa is the one that the West is already embarked upon. The West's policy is perhaps one of approaching South Africa with carrot and stick. The carrot is the implied promise of support if South Africa reforms itself. The stick is the threat to maintain existing pressures and increase them, if it does not. Such a policy is directed toward encouraging change that is peaceful and constitutional, and thus least likely to injure Western economic and strategic interests in the country. It is also the policy that offers the best hope of reconciling the divergent attitudes toward South Africa within the Western countries. A toughening of the policy might include threats to tighten the strategic embargo, to withdraw diplomatic relations, and — the issue most discussed at present — to encourage "disinvestment."

Within the white community in South Africa there is, of course, very strong feeling against disinvestment, by which I understand an official policy of promoting not merely a cessation of new investment but a withdrawal of existing investments. It is said that this would harm black South Africans more than white ones; that it would be counterproductive, inasmuch as it is the continued economic development of South Africa which — since it breaks down barriers between ethnic groups in economic life — offers the best hope of the ultimate social and political integration of the country; and that by creating unemployment and poverty it would bring about a revolutionary situation. It is also said that the effect of pressure such as this, or even of the threat of it, is not to cause the Nationalist government to alter its policies but only to cause them to turn inward on themselves.

The effects of disinvestment seem to me very uncertain and I am not sure enough of my ground to advocate its use as a lever to influence the government of South Africa. But I must confess that I do not feel persuaded by the arguments against it. If it is the black South African who has most to lose from disinvestment, this is because of the way in which the existing structure of South African society would impose the burdens of a depressed economy upon him. To accept this argument is to accept the legitimacy of that existing structure. I am impressed by the fact that black African states and, so far as I can judge, black political leaders who have no stake in the present system, appear to favor disinvestment. It is,

I think, presumptuous to assume that black South Africans are not prepared to face some economic hardship in order to obtain social and political rights. There is a basic conflict between the economic logic which says that racial barriers should be broken down so that the talents of the South African population can be fully utilized for the benefit of the economy and the political logic of apartheid. But in this conflict it is the political logic which so far has prevailed. It is true that disinvestment is likely to bring about a politically unstable and unsettled situation. This, indeed, is why those who are concerned to promote radical change in South Africa are in favor of it. The argument that South Africa should be changed, but that on no account should its "stability" be upset, is intellectually an unconvincing one. From the point of view of a black man in Soweto, a challenge to the stability of the existing system may be a source of hope.

SUBVERSION

The policy of promoting or facilitating the subversion of white South Africa is the one for which socialist and Third World countries call. It would imply not only severing all diplomatic, strategic, and economic relations with South Africa, but also extending material support to revolutionary forces within South Africa and neighbouring states. If the policy of seeking to influence white South

Africa is clearly having no effect, radical forces in the West may call for this policy. More conservative forces may come to see more merit in it as a means of heading off the influence of the Soviet Union, gaining credit with the black political elements in South Africa that seem likely in the end to be victorious.

The policy of disengaging from South Africa is one which the Western countries show no sign of adopting at present. They might, however, feel drawn to it if they concluded that the policy of trying to influence South Africa had become bankrupt and that a situation had developed in which a violent confrontation was inevitable. Given that Western public opinion would have divided sympathies towards such a conflict, the impulse of Western government, as toward the Spanish Civil War, would be to avoid becoming involved. Even in such an extremity, however, disengagement would be a difficult policy for the West to carry through. They could not ignore the possible involvement of the Soviet Union in the conflict, and its implications for the world balance of power. Large-scale violence might call for demands for humanitarian relief or intervention. Both the West and the Soviet Union would be drawn toward seeking to exert some ultimate control of the course of the conflict by South Africa's position as a potential nuclear power. □

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