
Southern Africa: Prospects for the Region

HARRY JOHNSTON

Member of the US House of Representatives

Since taking over as Chairman of the House Africa Subcommittee almost two years ago, significant developments have taken place on the African continent. Many events have been extraordinary and constructive, while others more distressing and quite negative. In the case of South Africa and the southern African region as a whole, the record of achievements is extremely impressive.

In particular, the triumphant victory of nonracial democracy in South Africa has come to symbolize the general trend towards democratization that has overtaken much of the region. When combined with events in Namibia, Zambia, and more recently in Malawi and Mozambique, the dismantling of apartheid and the establishment of a new nonracial democracy in South Africa represents significant hope and promise. Although there have been disappointments in the protracted resolution of the civil war in Angola, developments elsewhere in the region suggest positive prospects for the future.

Consequently, Congressional attention has by necessity moved away from addressing the destabilizing effects of apartheid. New initiatives have begun to focus on the process of establishing workable and durable democratic structures in South Africa and throughout the region. A counterpart to this emphasis has been the need to foster economic growth through trade, investment, and private enterprise development.

In this article, I would like to focus on prospects for the region of

southern Africa and the Congressional response. This discussion will involve the region's potential for political and economic development, improved regional integration, conflict resolution, and a review of US policy.

The Region's Potential

By all accounts, southern Africa, a region rich in natural and human resources, is seen as having tremendous potential. When the scenario also includes a vibrant movement to establish democratic governments and political stability, the positive prospects for the region are

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further multiplied. Among the most interesting developments in southern Africa are the resolution of some of the long-term civil wars and the breakup of authoritarian regimes. No longer will we hear the sarcastic refrain of critics who chide "one man, one vote, one time." Democracy and political liberalization are firmly taking root in the region.

Within the last five years, numerous positive developments have occurred: Namibia has achieved independence; Zambia and more recently, Malawi, have held successful democratic elections; the destructive civil war in Mozambique has ended, followed by free and fair elections; Angola has successfully completed peace talks, though some fighting is still occurring; and the jewel in the crown, South Africa, has at long last achieved nonracial democracy. When these accomplishments are added to the positive experiences of Zimbabwe and Botswana, the region's potential for political stability increases substantially.

Southern Africa's economic prospects, however, lag considerably behind its political development. Apartheid and its destabilizing effects, financial mismanagement, the aftermath of brutal civil wars, a failure to attract new capital investment, and a range of other factors have led to difficulties in building strong market economies in the region. However, with the demise of apartheid, many have begun to look towards South Africa and its capacity to become an "engine" for a region in need of a powerful catalyst for economic development. With political stability as a foundation, there is still room for optimism regarding southern Africa's economic prospects.

Regional Initiatives

The regional approach in the analysis of southern Africa's prospects has been very useful. For many of these countries, basic survival depended largely on fashioning a strong, concerted response to the region's difficulties. In fact, for many years, the "Front Line" states have collectively acted to counteract the debilitating effects of apartheid. Several organizations have been formed in order to address the region's economic and political realities.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC), headquartered in Botswana, has been a capable organization which has focused on creating sound and equitable regional development and mobilizing resources to promote the implementation of national, inter-state, and regional policies. Other groups, such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), formerly known as the PTA, and the Southern Africa Customs Union (SACU), have also made efforts to promote growth in intraregional trade and regional development.

In addition to their traditional focus on economic integration, however, the countries of southern Africa have recently begun to reexamine ways in which one or more of these groups can involve themselves in conflict resolution. In particular, SADC has outlined prospective plans to include conflict resolution goals into its mandate. The Organization for African Unity (OAU), under the leadership of Salim Salim, has also been visible in its efforts to reinvigorate conflict management within the OAU's larger policy goals.

Since the historic elections in South Africa, President Nelson Mandela has demonstrated a willingness to work with other regional heads of state to play a direct diplomatic role in the crises in Lesotho and Angola. These actions implicitly recognize the political and economic interconnectedness of the neighbor countries. Several other leaders, such as President Mugabe of Zimbabwe and President Chissano of Mozambique, are aware that sustained economic growth is virtually impossible without regional political stability. For this reason, it is especially fortuitous that important groups like the OAU and SADC have begun to enlarge their mandates to include mechanisms that will institutionalize conflict resolution in Africa.

US Policy Response

In an effort to provide financial assistance for the resolution of conflicts throughout Africa, the US Congress in 1994 passed critical legislation with strong bipartisan support. "The African Conflict Reso-

lution Act," was signed into law by President Clinton on October 19 of this year. This action signaled a recognition by the Administration and Congressional leaders that African capacity needs to be strengthened so that Africans themselves can begin to play a more active role in the resolution of conflicts before and after they occur. In particular, the legislation will help provide technical and financial support for organizations, such as the OAU and the SADC, which are active in the field of conflict prevention and management.

Specifically, the law authorizes assistance for the following purposes: first, to enhance the ability of the OAU to establish a new conflict resolution unit; second, to help build the conflict resolution capabilities of sub-regional organizations; third, to enhance the mediation capacity of non-governmental organizations; and fourth, to support the demobilization and retraining of Africa's militaries.

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(AID) has long recognized the catalytic effect a democratic, economically viable South Africa would have on its neighbors. On May 5, 1994, President Clinton announced a long-awaited South Africa Initiative, providing almost \$600 million over three years to assist South Africa in its transition from apartheid to a nonracial democracy.

Previous to this announcement, AID Administrator Brian Atwood stated his agency's renewed support for the southern Africa region. The Agency's rationale for its increased attention in southern Africa has been the substantial progress that has been made by the region's states in implementing national, political, and economic reforms. The purpose of the initiative is to "encourage the region to continue with growth-oriented reforms, to assist efforts already underway in the region, to expand economic and political cooperation among the nations there, and to support the re-integration of South Africa's industrial, financial and technical resources into the regional economy in a manner which stimulates mutually beneficial development." The total southern African initiative calls for \$300 million over the next five years to support these regional programs.

While these initiatives are commendable, several groups, in-

cluding the Congressional Black Caucus, have criticized the Administration for the use of "smoke and mirrors" to camouflage smaller actual budgetary outlays. They have compared the Administration's South Africa initiative with other "transition packages" that have been proposed for other parts of the world undergoing monumental change. Their conclusion is that foreign aid levels for areas such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union far outstrip the commitment that has been demonstrated for the southern African region.

Other critics of the Administration's package feel that the financial support offered to South Africa is actually too generous. They feel that South Africa's comparatively wealthy status does not warrant this special treatment at the expense of other, poorer countries. An additional criticism of the Administration's initiative for South Africa stems from the source of the funding. Virtually all of the additional money for the South Africa initiative will be drawn from the Development Fund for Africa, an account that provides development assistance to all African countries. Many believe that "new" sources of funding should have been sought to insure that funding levels for other parts of Africa would not be needlessly jeopardized.

Conclusion

The images of South Africa's victory over apartheid have been flashed around the world with great effectiveness. There is, in fact, great reason to be optimistic. But this country also faces many hurdles as it braces to confront the high expectations of its population. Unemployment levels are very high; housing, health, and education needs will continue to be major problems, especially for those previously disadvantaged by apartheid. In short, domestic concerns may very well prevent this nation from fulfilling the lofty goals set forth for it as a catalyst for economic recovery and peacekeeping in the region.

But southern Africa has other, often forgotten, success stories. Countries such as Namibia and Botswana deserve recognition and support. Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe have also made significant progress. These efforts should be acknowledged and rewarded as we prioritize our US foreign policy agenda. A generous regional approach that fosters economic integration and sustainable development is perhaps the best way to address the needs of these deserving countries. ❧