
Post-Apartheid South Africa and Its Regional Role

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An Interview by Andrew B. Loewenstein

Journal: Developments in South Africa seem to indicate that the ANC has been able to transform itself from a militant, outlawed organization into a viable political party. Are similar transitions from military forces to political parties likely to occur elsewhere in southern Africa, such as in Mozambique or Angola? What can be done to facilitate the transition?

Crocker: I think it is still too early to render judgment on any of this. On the South African front, the new government has been in place since April and the transition has been very impressive. It has been a soft landing after all the violence and all the fears right up to the election. One has to give a lot of credit to the new leadership and to the various parties for pulling together, but the transformation of the ANC is still being planned; it hasn't yet happened. So I think we need a bit more time before making that kind of judgment.

What has changed is that the ANC has become the majority party in government; they have made that transition smoother than many people had thought. One has to recognize that South Africa is a special place. The strength of its civil society—its religious institutions, business community, universities, media, and trade unions—distinguishes South Africa in the African region as a place that has a particularly strong basis for pluralism, for tolerance, and for reconciliation. That is the reason why South Africa was able to have the soft landing I referred to earlier; it was

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able to seek common ground and to really work to define it.

It's very clear that neither Mozambique nor Angola have the same kind of civil society that I described. What they do have, in the case of Mozambique, is a government that has been in power for some time and has won by a narrow margin. Now the real

question is whether it will have the wisdom to reach out to RENAMO, the parliamentary opposition as it now is, and to assure that that opposition remains parliamentary. They must give the opposition a piece of the action, a piece of the pie.

Whether they will, we don't know yet. So far they have been moving slowly down that road. I think it is of crucial importance that the possibility for any return to polarized violence be ended once and for all. In Angola, it is still very early to make any judgment, but the parties have signed the Lusaka Protocol. They have not yet implemented it, and the situation is still very delicate indeed. The UN is watching with a sense of guarded optimism, and is not committing additional UN people on the ground until they see the ceasefire taking hold and Angolans behaving themselves.

We have a chicken and egg problem in Angola—if everybody waits for Angolans to behave themselves they could be waiting for a long time. Angolans have a long and rich history of not missing any opportunity to miss opportunities. So in that sense, it would be a shame if we all sat around waiting for the Angolans. We need to keep on pushing them towards the right road.

Journal: What strategies should we pursue?

Crocker: I think we need active diplomatic leadership by both ourselves and those who share our views if we are to get the government and UNITA to rigorously respect the commitments that have been made.

Journal: The transition to democracy has witnessed the development of so-called "governments of national unity." For instance, long time rivals Nelson Mandela and Mangosuthu Buthelezi are in the same government. Recently, there has even been talk that Jonas Savimbi may be named Vice President of Angola. Are these governments of national unity viable? Will once diehard opponents be able to work together in the same government?

Crocker: They are not just potentially viable, they are absolutely essential. In whichever case we talk about, we are dealing with countries with very little history of the kind of tolerance that leads people to feel safe if they lose an election. When you lose in a culture where there is no tradition of democracy, you could lose everything. You don't just lose the chance to form a majority in the Senate like we have here, you lose the chance to survive, economically and even physically.

What that has meant is placing a real premium on the need to think in terms of what you might call transitional arrangements, interim arrangements, or governments of national unity for at least the transitional period. The South Africans have charted the way, and they have been very wise to do so.

It is very interesting that both the ANC, the South African Communist Party, and the National Party of F.W. de Klerk came together on this and really saw the light—that what they had to do was find common ground. They had to find a win-win situation for everybody, and they had to find a way both to put in place a democratic constitution and to make a political deal that would have something in it for everyone. One wishes that the Angolans had done that the first time around when they had their agreement of 1991 leading to the elections of 1992, but that wasn't the way the Angolan parties played it. Neither of them trusted the other, and with good reason. The MPLA government, I think, treated UNITA very poorly after the election victory, and UNITA responded in kind by going back to war. We can all debate whose fault it was, but the fact remains that the government could have reached out to UNITA after winning by a rather modest majority, and could have given UNITA a chance to be part of the new structure. It totally failed to do so. Savimbi then played his cards very badly and tried to grab everything. Now we have another chance. The Lusaka Protocol calls for power sharing, but there has to be power sharing in spirit as well as by the letter of the agreement.

Journal: Inkatha has argued vigorously in favor of adopting a federal system of government in South Africa with at least some degree of autonomy for KwaZulu. Should such a system be adopted? Is it a viable arrangement given the current political climate?

Crocker: What has been taking place in South Africa since the April election is very interesting. You have the different regions setting themselves up politically, and working out what their local and regional powers are in practice in terms of everything from budget revenue sharing to autonomy in policy in different areas. Having created these

regional governments, we are actually seeing federalism come about even though at the time the ANC said it rejected federalism. Now it is the ANC premiers and cabinet ministers who, more than anyone else, are pushing for delegation to local and regional authority. So I think you will see some federalism develop.

Of course Inkatha runs one of South Africa's provinces—one of the nine—and the National Party, F.W. de Klerk's party runs another. The other seven are run by the ANC and its allies. So the real question is what more needs to be done to strengthen the possibilities for local autonomy and some degree of decentralization of initiative.

Journal: So you see at least some degree of *de facto* federalism regardless of the actual constitutional arrangements?

Crocker: Yes, I do. I think it wasn't fully appreciated at the time, but when you start handing over all sorts of government roles and relationships to nine separate regional authorities which were carved out of the old homelands and previous provincial authorities of the old South Africa, what you are doing is creating vested interests and empowering people who have lots of energy, lots of ambition, lots of ideas, lots of talent, and who clearly would like to make use of whatever authority they are given. So right now we are seeing a very active dialogue—if you can call it that—going on between the center and the regions in South Africa.

This process is happening not just at the regional level, but even at the local government level. The Constitution said nothing about local government. Now it is being negotiated. There is a local government forum that has started work, and there will be local elections sometime next year which will empower a third level of authority. So South Africa will be a place with quite a few governments. I think that is healthy to the degree that it represents genuine indigenous reality, and isn't some superimposed abstract model from somewhere else in the world. It makes much more sense if it is a local process.

Journal: How divisive is this issue? If it is not embodied in the Constitution, do you think it could potentially split the government?

Crocker: No, I don't think it can. But what it does is lead to a lot of discussion and debate between different levels of authority, all of which might be, in some cases, ANC led. It is not just relations between the central government and those two regions that are controlled by other parties. I'm not sure if I would call it division, but what it leads to is healthy discussion and some degree of accountability as well.

Journal: Of course, Buthelezi has recently been making quite an issue of regional authority.

Crocker: Well, whenever he speaks he gets a lot of ink, and both the local and foreign press echo it. He is a person who has been at the center of controversy much of his life, and whatever he does or says will be looked at with a bit more scrutiny just because of his long history in South African politics. Everyone that I know of in the different regions are testing the limits—defining what is doable and seeing how much authority will be available locally. For example, if you are talking about the Reconstruction and Development Program which is the centerpiece of the ANC platform and of the new government as well, then the question arises, who gets what, and who decides who gets what? Those are pretty basic questions. So to me it's healthy that there is this kind of discussion going on.

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Journal: What effect have changes in South Africa had on the political climate and developments in the Southern African region as a whole?

Crocker: I think it's had a fundamental effect. This was the great question that was always hanging over everyone's heads throughout southern Africa and much of Sub-Saharan Africa as well. Could South Africa come out right, and if it did, what would it mean?

Well, it means that at a stroke the whole political and security equation facing neighboring governments has been transformed. They were all in a sense intimidated, cowed, or in some cases directly threatened by what was a regional superpower. Now what has changed is not that it is no longer a superpower—it still is—but that it is now under multiracial or non-racial government and is presumably no longer hostile.

The first reaction in the region was one of delight, of course, that the end of the era of polarization and conflict had arrived and that the South Africans were no longer a destabilizing military threat as they had been during the dark years. The second reaction was also one of delight that

South Africa will serve as kind of a pole of attraction to the rest of the world, and will lead the world's economic system to look with more interest on Africa. Some would go further and say that South Africa is the last hope Black Africa has to avoid marginalization. So there is some genuine excitement about the possibility. Third, there is a sense of suddenly having this great elephant emerge into legitimacy, making everyone else in the region seem like small-fry. So, I think there was a bit of a sharp intake of breath in some capitals like Harare, Zimbabwe for example. Suddenly seeing Mr. Mandela and his colleagues come to town as the heroes of the age may push them to one side a little bit in places such as Zimbabwe and Zambia.

Journal: So do you see any specific connection between developments in South Africa and multiparty elections elsewhere in southern Africa, for example in Zambia or Mozambique?

Crocker: Another very clear impact or reaction is to discredit authoritarian government and to end one of the excuses for it. For years people in neighboring countries said, well, we are in a state of war with South Africa, or we are in a state of confrontation so we have to be on a war footing, and that justifies maintaining authoritarian structures. That excuse is gone, and South Africa has set a very high standard indeed of democratization. If they can do it, why shouldn't neighboring countries without the legacy of apartheid be able to democratize? So it definitely has had that impact. It's had it in Zambia, it's had it in Malawi, it's having it in Mozambique. It's even had something of a pressure effect on the politics of Zimbabwe.

Of course South Africa is not the only democratic pressure point. Namibia is a very significant democratic success story and that came in 1989-90. Botswana has been democratic for years. So South Africa is not alone in serving as a kind of role model. That is why southern Africa is a region of hope—you have not just one fluke—you have a critical mass of relative success stories.

Journal: How much of a role do you see regional organizations such as the Organization of African Unity, the Southern African Development Community, or the Preferential Trade Area, playing in the future of southern African integration ?

Crocker: The answer to that question will be very interesting. What will be interesting to watch is the definition of regionalism that develops. Will it be a very abstract, continent-wide regionalism patterned on the OAU,

which may make sense for certain kinds of issues but not for others? Or, will it be a very grandiose trade scheme like the PTA [Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa] which is supposed to cover virtually all of central, eastern, and southern Africa? Or, will it be based on what you might call subregional approaches like the SADC [Southern African Development Community] which is really an economic grouping aimed at regional integration? Or, will it be based on the Southern African Customs Union which is even smaller, focused really on a trade pact?

It think that is an extremely important set of questions. It is not for outsiders to give the answers, but history would suggest that success starts small and then builds and builds. Look at the origins of the EU—six countries. Look at the success of the ASEAN countries in southeast Asia; a small number spread to something much grander. The same, I think, could be looked upon as a possible road for southern Africa.

Journal: To what extent should the US encourage these regional activities. Should it lend financial support? How should US policy manifest itself?

Crocker: We have encouraged the formation of some AID [Agency for International Development] funded as well as OPIC [Overseas Private Investment Corporation] sponsored venture capital funds that are southern African in scope and are aimed at getting people in the US to look at southern Africa as a region, and to think not just of South Africa, but of southern Africa. That is one concrete step that has taken place in just the last couple of years and seems to me to make sense. A lot of the money that will help fund it is in fact private money with OPIC guarantees and sponsorship.

I don't think our government can really do a whole lot to advance the process of development and integration. We can't do a whole lot by printing money. What we can do is say the right things, encourage the right thinking, and then continue to make clear that it is private sector investment which ultimately will be the engine of development, not government aid programs. We are already doing some of that, so I think it is off to a pretty decent start. As a matter of official US government policy, we should take the neighbors of South Africa seriously. I think we've done that to some degree at least, and I hope we continue to do so.

Journal: Do you think the OAU might be able to develop an effective conflict resolution capacity?

Crocker: It is very embryonic. The OAU's capacity for direct military action is very slim indeed. That leads one to conclude that maybe in the

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area of conflict resolution, involving early warning and preventative diplomacy, the OAU could do more. I think that is probably true. Getting monitors deployed, having senior officials and diplomats with OAU blessing come into a conflict-prone situation to try to defuse it before it reaches a

higher, violent phase. That is all very constructive, and the US government is providing financial support to strengthen the OAU Secretariat's capacity to do these kinds of things.

There are lots of things we can do. When there are contingencies that require peacekeepers in the African region, they should be primarily African. I think that makes the most sense. But we can help with training programs, we can help sometimes with equipment, and with logistics. That is one approach. Another is to provide support either directly or through the World Bank for demobilization in African conflict situations.

Journal: It has been argued that rather than confronting each other directly, the US and the USSR used proxies in southern Africa to confront each other indirectly. Now that the superpower rivalry is over, how much of a stake does the US have in southern Africa?

Crocker: I'm not sure that I accept the premise because it equates the two superpowers, and I've never seen my country as one that could be equated with the former Soviet Union in terms of its conduct or its diplomacy. The Soviets had a militarized foreign policy in Africa and the US did not. We always, whatever party was in office, worked on the conflict resolution and negotiating front to try and resolve conflicts which in many cases were being fueled by Soviet equipment.

That said, the Cold War is over. The rivalry, the competitive element, is clearly gone, and therefore the leverage that local players have to try and attract the support of one side or another in the East-West sense is gone. So I think the stakes are somewhat different. But our stakes in southern Africa were always multiple—to see the end of Communist exploitation of local tensions, yes, but also to see the end of apartheid and of colonialism, and the democratization of the region. Those were long-standing goals and they survive. I think we have a very strong interest, although it's seldom articulated in seeing African success stories get on their feet, consolidated, and expand.

No matter what we may say in these difficult budget times, when countries turn as hideous as Somalia or Rwanda did, we wind up paying

anyway for humanitarian assistance on a massive level. Because we are Americans we will not walk away when there are millions of people in camps. We don't walk away. We pay big dollars for those awful disasters. So to me, it is better to take a long term view and try to expand the number of success stories in Africa. Southern Africa represents the best hope for that. That to me is really our interest—to see the critical mass of countries that I mentioned get on their feet and attract the outside world's attention, support, investment, and trade. Hopefully we then will begin to reverse the impression that Africa I think has given all too many people in the outside world that it's just a zone of failure, a slum. The reality is that Africa is not a slum—some parts of it may be, but others are not. ❧