

Political development and international relations in Southern Africa

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Thank you very much for the opportunity to address you on a subject of such high saliency as political developments and international relations in Southern Africa. I must confess, it is always very difficult to decide in advance what to say about these matters. As you all know, lifespans are extremely short in Africa and, therefore, prediction is downright daring. But, as the saying goes, "Africa needs soothsayers, rather than visionaries . . ." and may be, you are all right now in a mood rather to listen to soothing words than scaremongering. Nonetheless, I do not want to underplay the general concern prevailing in South Africa, Rhodesia and South West Africa about the future of this region. All of you, I think, share this concern because, apart from your other commitments, material interest such as business and commerce can only flourish in a stable political environment. The modern risks of investment in Third World Countries particularly are not economic risks, but much more political risks. Hence it is imperative that political situations in these areas should be subjected to close scrutiny, the central question being, will the changes that are bound to take place be orderly ones?

Mr Chairman the future is foremost on our minds as we gather here today. C. P. Snow spoke wise words when he said that: "The world's greatest need is an appetite for the future . . . All healthy societies are ready to sacrifice the existential moment for their children's future . . . The sense of the future is behind all good policies, unless we have it we can give nothing either wise or decent to the world." Today we must, therefore, think of the society of tomorrow. It is certain that tomorrow will come, whether or not we attempt to prepare for it. A responsibility for the present implies a responsibility for the future. To investigate the future, to want to predict the course of events, can be described as an attempt by contemporary man to employ his heightened sense of responsibility to the fullest sense. The future should be viewed as a field of choice and it stands to reason that the clearer view we have of it the more decisively and responsibly we will be able to act.

Unfortunately, due to the deep cultural and ideological cleavages in the South African society, we seldom stood united and resolute in the past as to what the directions of change in this country should be or what common course for the future we all should be serving. For most of our history selfish, fragmented and particularly material interests have prevailed. For centuries now the white elite have exploited the rich resources the country offered, constructed a highly efficient infrastructure, developed agriculture and industry to its present high level of sophistication, built big and modern cities and devoted the style and standard of living of a

section of the population to one of the highest in the world. For most of this time the pressing problems of social engineering were swept under the carpet, and now we must try to put right in a few decades what went wrong over many generations.

The point which I want to emphasize here is that due to procrastination, pre-occupation with trivial party political issues, and above all lack of intelligent foresight as to the velocity and impact of the forces of change in the post-war world, this present generation of South Africans are saddled with an awesome burden which we will have to solve expeditiously if we want to secure our present society. Why is it that we have only discovered now or very recently what could be regarded as self-evident truths e.g. that we are part of Africa, that discrimination based on skin colour is immoral and indefensible by any standards, that some of the policies we pursue internally have a profound impact on our international relations, and that non-whites cannot for ever be excluded from the national reward system? Is it simply a matter of ignorance, perhaps callousness or lack of concern, or the easy life of affluence that lead so many of us to believe that the status quo could be perpetuated for ever? Whatever the answer to all these questions might be, it is clear that the prominence socio-political questions enjoy at the moment was precipitated by the atmosphere of crisis, culminating in the Portuguese coup, the delicate positions of Rhodesia and South West Africa, and above all, the Angolan situation, leaving in our midst a Pandora's box of effects.

The situation in which we find ourselves in South Africa today calls for farsightedness and brinkmanship. Fortunately, with reference to the Prime Minister's efforts in recent months, a willingness seems to have surfaced to purchase creativity at the cost of the false certainty of the status quo. Unfortunately, the Angola situation with the menacing presence of the Russians and Cubans there changed virtually everything to upset the détente appellation, and now South Africa's peace image is somewhat impaired.

At this point, it is perhaps necessary to take a look at South Africa's foreign policy as well as prevailing conditions and perhaps make out a case for some future strategy.

For many years the basic principles on which we based our foreign policy were the following:

1. A strong pro-Western attitude.
2. A strong anti-Communist attitude.
3. The maintenance of the status quo in Africa.
4. South Africa's strategic importance and its value as a trading partner.
5. Strict compliance with the basic principles of international law.

6. Rigid observance of the principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states.

While pursuing these policies, National Party spokesmen constantly denied the fact that the country's internal policies had anything to do with its foreign relations. The contention was that the world should accept South Africa in spite of apartheid. We could never really come to terms with the fact that in the post-war world internal policies which were at variance with certain moral principles were increasingly internationalized. For many years the hope was kindled that this was just a temporary phase the world, especially the West, was going through and that a return to 'conservatism' or old values and practices was inevitable. However, as it became clear that the changes in Africa and the rest of the world were long-term ones and that the hostilities against South Africa's internal policies would not subside, the following additional policies and strategies were devised:

1. The propagation of peaceful co-existence and regional co-operation in Southern Africa.
2. Emphasis on the fact that the whites of South Africa were also Africans and that South Africa was in fact a permanent part of Africa.
3. Efforts to come to an understanding with black Africa by means of the dialogue efforts and the outwards policy of the late 60's and early 70's.
4. The drastic extension of the Republic's military striking power.
5. The acceleration of the tempo of implementation of the policy of separate development in an endeavour to phase out certain obvious moral discrepancies in the South African political system.
6. An active information campaign aimed at the neutralization of the stereotyped negative image of the Republic abroad.

By applying these strategies, the South African policy makers at least succeeded in realising basic aims, such as ensuring material prosperity, maintaining the country's territorial integrity and self-preservation.

The dramatic changes brought about in Angola and Mozambique by the *coup d'état* in Portugal necessitated a far-reaching re-appraisal of South Africa's position in Africa. In a very persuasive manner this event, coupled with the uncertainties in Rhodesia and South West Africa, forced the South African policy-makers to take urgent and constructive steps to protect the country's national interests. The policy of détente emerged, and for once it seemed as if a willingness had surfaced on the part of our foreign policy decision-makers to operate more imaginatively despite factors in the country's domestic situation discouraging to change.

No doubt, Mr Vorster made an excellent start. His visits to Liberia and the Ivory Coast and especially his talks with President Kaunda were great strides in the direction of his goal, which he expounded in the South African Senate on 23 October 1974 in the following terms:

"I believe that Southern Africa has come to the crossroads. I believe that Southern Africa has to make a choice. I think that the choice lies between peace on one hand and an escalation of strife on the other.

The consequences of an escalation are easily foreseeable. The toll of a major confrontation will be high. I would go so far as to say that it would be too high for Southern Africa to pay . . . But there is an alternative way. That way is the way of peace. The way of normalizing of relations, the way of sound understanding and normal association. I believe that Southern Africa can take that way. I have reason to believe that it is prepared to take that way. And I believe that it will do so in the end." These words confirmed very clearly that South Africa wanted to re-inforce its peace image in Africa.

Unfortunately, as so dramatically demonstrated by the events in Angola, the two basic policy aims of détente, viz the normalization of inter-state relations in Southern Africa and the settlement by peaceful means of the international problems of the region are still far from being realized. Add to this the shot in the arm received by the ANC and SWAPO as a result of the Russian and Cuban presence and successes in the conflict zone and the realistic possibility that there could be an escalation of terrorist activities in both Rhodesia and South West Africa, the immediate prospects of détente in Southern Africa do not look encouraging at all. These events have put to an unprecedented test the existing political order in Southern Africa, particularly Rhodesia and South West Africa. It is, therefore, evident that the conflict potential in Southern Africa has increased alarmingly since the Portuguese withdrawal and the introduction of a new revolutionary element by the Soviets and Cubans. Undoubtedly the Government's détente initiative will be put to severe tests in the weeks and months ahead.

One thing we can be sure of since the Angola débacle, and that is that we are on our own. The rather timid reaction of the West to the Russian and Cuban intervention in the Angolan conflict leaves little doubt as to the type of support South Africa can expect should a spill-over of the conflict occur to adjacent territories. Dr Kissinger's assurance that America will not allow a repetition of communist imperialism such as demonstrated in Angola, should be viewed against the changing perspectives and policies in the American body politic, and as we learned in the past, it would be imprudent for South Africa to bargain on this. The fact is that influential factions in America see South Africa as expendable. As somebody pointed out, nothing short of handing the government over to Robert Sobukwe would satisfy the American government. The best we can hope for under the circumstances is that the Russian and Cuban presence in Angola will last up to the point where internal tranquillity is achieved. Once big power involvement has been eliminated, African problems will again be in the hands of the African states.

One should note here that when the OAU was founded in 1963, the "liberation" of Southern Africa was proclaimed a task for Africa itself, to be achieved without intervention from outside the continent. As we all know, this strategy was never successful in the military sector, because the OAU could not provide the necessary arms needed by the various terrorist movements. However, in the political sector, the strategy proved a success: Western and Communist countries had little effect on the freedom of manoeuvre of the so-called "liberation" movements, and with the exception of Angola, they found it possible to adhere

to their policy of "non-alignment". The events in Angola, therefore, signalled the first failure by the OAU to keep Africa out of the big-power conflict. Now it seems as if Angola has at least temporarily become the prisoner of communist imperialism in Africa. And while the Russians and Cubans have encountered only token resistance on the part of the West against their bloody adventures in Angola, they must feel strongly tempted to capitalize further on the deep-seated hate and enmity in the ranks of many black states against the white south and give overt assistance also to SWAPO and the ANC. In the prevailing climate they may regard it as expedient to export their brand of revolution and expand their ideological influence boldly into new areas of political instability in the South. It is, therefore, imperative that the processes of change in South West Africa and Rhodesia should be peaceful in spite of the urgency of these changes. We cannot afford to allow the Soviets and Cubans a second opportunity in Southern Africa. What they did in Angola, they will be tempted to do again if they find a situation they think they can exploit. The unpalatable truth we must accept, is that in the eyes of many blacks, the Cubans and the Russians are potential liberators and their presence is viewed as a lesser evil than the continuation of the status quo in South Africa, Rhodesia and South West Africa. For the moment many of them fail to realize the fact that the Russians and Cubans are really the enemies of Africa. The scenario is therefore clear.

Furthermore it now seems as if also America and Britain are using the new communist threat in Southern Africa to blackmail the white regimes into hasty concessions. As pointed out earlier, total white capitulation and the introduction of black majority rule are not being regarded as "solutions" too radical, judging from the mood prevailing in the administrations of these countries at present. But as you all know, there are vast differences in the political histories and policies of Rhodesia, South Africa and South West Africa respectively, and to promote such a sweeping solution for the entire Southern African region is of course a gross oversimplification. As I see it, however, the options open particularly for Rhodesia are very narrow. Mr Smith has been buying time for the last ten years without using it in any meaningful manner, and whether or not he reaches an agreement with Mr Nkomo, the final hour seems to have struck for white Rhodesia. Time for peace by pieces, incrementalism or working out long-term configurations is up. Finally Mr Smith will have to depart from the Rhodes doctrine of political rights to all civilized men, and accept the alternative common denominator of black majority rule immediately. However, it is a sorry situation, because even with moderate Mr Nkomo on the scene, Rhodesians have no guarantee whatsoever that the transfer of power will be peaceful and smooth. Obviously an abrupt transfer of power will be a very dangerous affair and with the Russians and Cubans within easy striking distance and the uncompromising Muzorewa waiting in the wings, we have a recipe for intrigue and conflict if there ever were one.

With the events in Angola still raging on and the aftermath of uhuru still fresh in our memories, the Rhodesian dilemma is a very serious and difficult one. Mr Smith knows the consequences, hence his intransigence all these years. We in South Africa would hate to see Rhodesia and all its achievements to be thrown to the

dogs and under the circumstances it would be immoral of any party to expect Mr Smith to capitulate without firm guarantees that civilized standards will be protected during and after the change-over. Mr Smith's fears are the fears of all white men in Africa, for too often have they been substantiated by the outcome of events. If Britain and Rhodesia could for instance come to an agreement concerning the presence of a British peace-keeping force in Rhodesia during the transitory period — after all, Rhodesia is still Britain's responsibility in terms of international law — at least some of these fears could be allayed. This will of course also keep the Soviets and Cubans at bay. However, if it is not the case, we can prepare ourselves for more instability, escalation and communist adventurism, this time much closer to our heartland than Angola.

It is therefore clear that the processes of transformation in Africa have reached a very crucial stage. Events in Rhodesia and South West Africa in the days and months to come will have a direct effect on our future here. So the question is: how should we in South Africa prepare ourselves for the future? Reconciling the desirability of the possible with the possibility of the desirable is extremely problematical in South Africa's case. Therefore, one may expect a divergence of opinions as to which action programme to follow. All of us know that when domestic policies are based on particularistic conceptions of what is just, the settlement of international differences becomes extremely problematical. However, while it is so that the value hierarchy our domestic policies spring from could and should never be ignored, one cannot turn a blind eye to the debilitating effect they have on our diplomacy. So if I say that we should get our house in order if we do not want to go down the deep end, it is quite a mouthful. I will not even try to present an inventory of all that needs rectification in our society, because apart from other considerations, I think most of you know what should be done. One point is perhaps more important than all the others, namely: the situation we find ourselves in today requires the loyalty and support of all South Africans, irrespective of race and colour. The question, however, is, do the whites and non-whites of this country have a similar conception of the national interest? If this is not the case, and I believe it is not, should we not as a matter of great urgency do everything we can to secure the support and loyalty of the entire population? It is clear that if the reasons why certain sections of the population are withholding their support are not erased, the fighting of the enemy at our borders will not be sufficient for the protection of our society and its values. If I may add, the time has come that the pace of change in the directions the Government has chosen should be determined by other factors than the consent of the lowest common denominator in the caucus and the cabinet. For us, stability lies in change; and people objecting to this are not serving the national interest.

A second point I want to touch upon concerns the foreign policy decision-making process in South Africa. As you probably know, foreign policy making and execution are a complicated business today. In fact it is not conducted by diplomacy alone; it relies heavily on the military forces and on the scientists who supply them with up-to-date weapons, on the economic potential, and especially today, also on

intelligence and propaganda services. Furthermore, the well-being of all citizens is potentially affected by the type of decisions the foreign policy makers embark upon. In view of the high risk factor, foreign policy should be framed with perhaps more circumspection than any other dimension of the national policy. After Angola and the mistakes in judgement there which are generally acknowledged, I am more convinced than ever before that our foreign policy mechanisms should be augmented and enriched. What we seem to be in need of is a foreign policy advisory panel selected from men of experience and innovating ability. The field of foreign policy is highly complicated, and to rely on bureaucratic advisors only very often precludes the identification and imaginative consideration of policy alternatives and courses of action previously unimagined or imagined impossible. In any case, the use of such panelists is standard practice in many western countries and given the complicated situation our country has to face in international policies, I think it is imperative that we should improve our foreign policy infra-structure particularly at head office level. As you know, our foreign policy since the second world war does really read like a success story. We have made umpteen good opening moves, but in most cases things seemed to peter out because of lack of follow-up action at the crucial stages. Angola is the latest example. I cannot suggest ready-made solutions, but we have a Prime Minister capable of making brilliant initiatory moves; which I feel can lead to more sub-

stantial gains if policy engineering and follow-up further down is of the highest order. This is not an effort to discredit our professional diplomats. Despite the odds, these people deserve our highest praise for the excellent job they are doing and I think they will be the first to welcome an auxiliary think-tank, as has been suggested above.

Mr Chairman, I covered a wide field in a short time today. Perhaps the overall picture I have left in your minds is not entirely optimistic. Fortunately, as products of the Western culture, alienation from the present and optimism about the future are part of our lifestyle. Personally I feel that South Africa is in no immediate danger. After all, we are a strong power not to be equated at all with other countries in our region. Our enemies know this. The commodity we perhaps need most at the present juncture is confidence in our inherent capability to handle the problems of the future. Anon: "... governments that want results must oft-times share their secrets with adults". Secrecy and beating about the bush which seemed to have been the dominant style in the Angola situation do not breed the type of mutual confidence we need in a democracy. A synthetic public opinion can leave us in the lurch when the real crisis comes. So I think in the time that lies ahead government and people should trust each other, because it is only then that a national morale capable of resisting any outside onslaught can be ensured.