

THINKING ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA FROM AFAR

Newell M Stultz

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PROFESSOR NEWELL M STULTZ is currently Professor of Political Science at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, USA, where he teaches international politics. A recognised authority on Southern Africa, Prof Stultz received his higher education at Dartmouth College and Boston University. He also spent a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Pretoria, and has subsequently visited South Africa on several occasions, including periods of teaching and research at Rhodes University and UNISA.

His published works include Afrikaner Politics in South Africa; Who Goes to Parliament? and Transkei's Half Loaf : racial separation in South Africa.

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It should be noted that any opinions expressed in this Paper are the responsibility of the author and not of the Institute.

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This past spring in the United States, my own university has shared in the on-going national debate over the substance of US foreign policy towards South Africa which as you know has been in full flood for many months. Though this is not the first time this topic has been broached either in the country or at Brown, it is clearly the most intense and public consideration of it to date in either setting.

The timing is interesting. The first demonstrations at the South African embassy in Washington occurred on November 21, 1984, less than three weeks after the Reagan electoral 'landslide' of last fall, and this timing, coupled with the individuals who have prominently identified themselves with these and other related protests, suggests to me at least that considerations of American domestic politics are no less present than sincere concern about apartheid in South Africa.

But what is so unexpectedly new about these protests is that they have seemed to tap a deep well-spring of American revulsion of continued enforced racial discrimination in South Africa, and it seems clear that this revulsion is, at its core, genuine on the part of most Americans and not at all related to jockeying for individual or corporate political advantage. I should also add mention of the role of Bishop Tutu, whose winning of the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize seems to have done much to rekindle and focus this debate, and of course of the shootings in the Eastern Cape Province last March 21 which did likewise.

At Brown the issue has turned into a debate on whether the university ought to divest itself of its holdings in all American companies doing business in South Africa, a policy that would mandate the sale of about 10% of the current Brown endowment, or alternately stick to its present policy. This forbids Brown investments in firms doing business in South Africa that fail to adhere to fair employment practices there, known in the trade as the 'Sullivan principles'. The core issue here is whether the mere presence in South Africa of IBM, Coca Cola or General Motors (to take just three examples) acts, as some say it does, to 'prop up' apartheid, in which the case for leaving is taken as cinched, or whether in some sense the reverse may be true, in which event there is arguably some non-economic, anti-apartheid point to American firms remaining.

This is a public argument which in a general sense is at least a quarter century old. In the early 1960s, the newly admitted African states argued at the UN General Assembly that South Africa would abandon apartheid only when faced with the certain prospect of universal and comprehensive economic sanctions, and in November 1962 a majority in the General Assembly did for the first time in fact endorse this position. The United States and South Africa's other major trading partners dissented from the majority on this occasion, and much of the history of this issue in the UN since has been the efforts of the majority to erode the resolve of the minority. This campaign has been especially focused on the three members of the

minority who possess the veto in the Security Council - Britain, France and the USA.

Indeed, in one particular instance the majority has succeeded, for in 1977 the US did vote in the Security Council for a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa which is in force to this day. But the United States has steadfastly resisted arguments for more general economic (or indeed cultural and diplomatic) isolation of the Republic, despite widespread criticism of its position in the UN and elsewhere.

Nonetheless, units of American local government - cities and states, including recently my own State of Rhode Island - have in increasing numbers been persuaded to do what they can to advance this form of isolation, and as you will know, there are a number of bills presently before the US Congress which aspire to mandate some sort of economic pressure against South Africa at the national level. I gather that Washington 'insiders' expect some of these bills actually to pass the Congress this session, but whether President Reagan will assent to those that do is at this time of writing still unclear.

Parallel to the 'speechifying' and platform oratory that this debate has inevitably prompted, there have been a number of significant publishing milestones - seminal articles in important national magazines, such as Foreign Affairs, hearings on several occasions before Congressional committees (later published), books by scholarly experts, and in 1981 the report of a Rockefeller Foundation funded special study commission on "US Foreign Policy Towards Southern Africa". This literature I take to be the 'considered thinking' of Americans on this topic, in contrast with the 15-second TV news statements of this or that public figure which, while important in a public relations sense, are not the 'stuff' of serious analysis.

Looked at analytically, what is especially interesting to me in all this discussion is how little is said concerning what would likely happen in South Africa if we in this country were to adopt policy 'x' rather than policy 'y'. The point is similar to an observation of Ford Foundation president Franklin Thomas, who served as the chairman of the aforementioned study commission, in his preface to its report. Thomas noted that often when specific proposals have emerged for bringing pressure on South Africa to end apartheid, "little effort has been made to think through how they would produce the desired changes". What I would like to do now is to share some thoughts with you which have been directed at ordering the current debate on US foreign policy in terms of what I will suggest are the implicit means-ends relationships implied by this discussion.

First, however, it is necessary to note that while the unstated premise of all public discourse on sanctions against South Africa is that sanctions are a purposive act of one state - the 'sender' - to influence another

state - the 'target' - to change its behaviour in some particular way or another, there are other plausible reasons for advancing sanctions having nothing to do with the expected consequences for the target. Consider the following. It may be rational to adopt a strategy of sanctions:

1. Where the mere expression of disapproval of the target is gratifying to the sender (so-called 'expressive gratification').
2. Where the sense of punishing the target is similarly gratifying.
3. In order to reduce culpability, or future economic or political vulnerability.
4. Because an important 'third party' demands it.
5. Because sanctions have been called for under a system of international law the sender feels obliged to uphold.
6. Because the decision resolves through compromise an important domestic political dispute for the sender.
7. Finally, because sanctions 'educate' the public in the sense of providing an important psychological threshold directed towards future action. Even if sanctions fail, the effort to apply them amounts to an important public commitment 'to do something' eventually that will prove effective.

Returning now to my central argument, I want to suggest three 'dimensions' of thinking about the South African case that seems to me to explain, or predict, much in current American behaviour on this issue, though in fact I will develop only the second and third of these. Each of these is suggested by a question:

1. What kind of society does one hope to see finally emerge in South Africa - liberal-democratic, or radical socialist? The point is that the more abrupt and violent the inevitable changeover to the post-apartheid state, the less likely is it that the outcome will be liberally democratic, or at least most analysts think this. Thus if one is committed to a liberal 'outcome' for South Africa, one is almost inevitably driven to advancing gradualist 'solutions', whereas a radicalized future for South Africa seems more likely if the changeover is both quick and bloody. But this gets us into the realm of the analyst's own social values, and while I have no trouble identifying my own preference for gradual change in the South African case, I am loath to evaluate the thinking of others who differ fundamentally with this prescription. So I leave this matter here.

2. How does one define the stakes of the South African contest from the standpoint of those who will have to give up, or at least share, political power? Are these stakes from this point of view negotiable, or non-negotiable?
3. In defending their position, how powerful, or (better) autonomous are those in power in South Africa now and for the foreseeable future?

Now of course these last two variables are continuous in nature, and I would expect that most observers would place themselves somewhere in the middle ranges of each. But if we dichotomize these variables instead in order to construct the following 2 by 2 table, four 'ideal type' perspectives on the situation emerge which, while admittedly somewhat artificial, usefully characterize, I believe, several of the well staked-out positions in the current South African debate in the US which I shall examine below.

How Americans Expect Apartheid to End in South Africa

Power of current rulers:	<u>Contingent</u>	<u>Autonomous</u>
Stakes: <u>Non-negotiable</u>	Revolution	Reformmongering
<u>Negotiable</u>	External pressure	Evolutionary change

Reformmongering. One of our ideal type 'solutions' to apartheid in South Africa is in fact little spoken of in America at the present time, namely, what has been referred to as 'reformmongering'. If one sees South Africa's present rulers as relatively invulnerable to pressure either from home or abroad, and the stakes of the dispute as they see them as tending towards the non-negotiable, then either one ought to expect no change at all in the short term or near term, or if change occurs, it should be expected to arise from the initiatives of members of the current elite, the 'reformmongers'. But in fact no influential observers in America expect that 'fundamental change' can be indefinitely stalled in South Africa or that an Afrikaans Ataturk or de Gaulle will emerge to guide the Republic out of the wilderness of apartheid into which it has wandered. So in fact this perspective, while interesting in its novelty, is in fact irrelevant to the present American debate on 'what to do about apartheid'.

Revolution. The revolutionary 'option' is however a different matter, having as it does an important if limited American following. Here the view is that the South African political system as presently constituted is incapable of fundamentally changing its own core characteristics, so if change is to come about at all, it will be in consequence of the violent overthrow of the current regime. The sense here is that white South Africans are hopelessly committed to racism and that they will die, or at least go to very great lengths, trying to continue their way of life rather than change it. The role of international sanctions is thus to weaken the economic capacity of the regime to resist the 'liberation forces' that are even now in the field against it, although it is expected that the

knowledge that sanctions are being applied internationally will bolster the morale of the domestic opponents of the regime as well.

The critical point from this perspective is that it is not necessary for sanctions to have any particular effect on the thinking of white South African rulers. The object is not to reform the regime, but to remove it. Sanctions clearly are one of a number of tools to be used in this effort, and no particular level of efficacy for these sanctions is required (assuming some) for them to be useful. It is also assumed that the power of the South African state is not so great, after sanctions have been applied, as to make revolution unthinkable. Interestingly, on this last point I have found many liberal whites in South Africa of a different mind, that is, less sanguine, compared with their counterparts overseas. The reason for this - can I say - 'optimism' overseas has two sources: a tendency to focus exclusively on demographic numbers - the size of the African majority - rather than power, and a vague, even romantic sense that there is a 'tide of history' at work in this instance which is inevitably moving against apartheid. In saying this I don't really want to dispute the latter belief, for in a way I share it myself, but only to remark that it seems more easily held by those who do not have to deal with the reality of official South African power on a daily basis.

Foreign pressure: the 'thumb-screw' approach. Here the central idea is that the South African whites derive a great deal of instrumental benefit from apartheid - mainly power and privilege, and indeed that this benefit is the policy's major justification. In a word, apartheid 'pays'. Eliminate this benefit and replace it with negative costs, and the whites of the country can be expected to abandon apartheid, so the argument goes. This is then classic conception of how sanctions ought to work, and in the case of American thinking about South Africa its best formulation was probably that provided by Clyde Ferguson and William Cotter in their well known January 1978 Foreign Affairs article entitled "South Africa: What is to be done?" In that piece they recommend 'turning the screw' on South Africa from which reference the title of this particular sub-section is adapted.

The problem with the classical sanctions approach is that there is a considerable social science literature that suggests that sanctions almost never work the way their advocates expect. This literature suggests, on the contrary, that:

1. Sanctions are inordinately hard to apply effectively.
2. The leverage they give on an economically advanced and diversified economy is not great.
3. The burden of imposed sanctions can frequently fall on the 'wrong' individuals, actually benefitting some of those who are in power.

4. Sanctions can actually increase domestic support for a target regime, especially in the short run.
5. Sanctions are notably weakened in their effects if they are applied incrementally, or if the target is given ample time to adjust.

In fairness, there is another side to the sanctions argument in the South African case, one that focuses upon the unique isolation of the country in international politics, the considerable dependence of its economy on imported oil, and what one expert has referred to as the 'catastrophic' consequences for Pretoria that would follow from a reasonably comprehensive and effective international embargo on trade with the Republic. My own view is that the thumb-screw approach underestimates the ability of official South Africa to resist sanctions and dangerously simplifies the motivations of those who are now in power, so that the final working out of this model in practice, should it come to that, might be little different from what is anticipated under the revolutionary approach.

The proponents of the thumb-screw approach foresee a different unfolding however. After sanctions have eroded the will of the outgoing regime to resist, they typically expect what I have referred to elsewhere as a 'national convention' course of reform, that is, a sort of Lancaster House conference for South Africa. In this perspective, then, sanctions produce a 'crisis threshold' after which 'meaningful' reform can emerge both fairly rapidly and surely comprehensively.

The evolutionary model. Like the thumb-screw approach, the evolutionary model of change assumes that the current rulers will participate, though not exclusively as at present, in the restructuring of their society, but it differs from this approach in the following ways:

1. The thumb-screw approach foresees a process of gradually accumulating pressures which upon reaching some critical threshold in the tolerance of the regime brings forth fairly rapidly the desired transformation of society. In contrast, the evolutionary model is more process oriented. It assumes a combination of both carrots and sticks will effect a variety of specific changes which will then work through the target's social and political structures to bring about (granted, in time) an overall change in the target's offensive behaviour. From the world of geology, this is the imagery of erosion rather than of earthquakes as the mechanism of significant social transformation.
2. Accordingly, under the evolutionary approach international pressures ought to be focused on achieving limited, concrete and short-term results in a variety of areas which are somehow proportionate to the weight of those pressures. Thus while South Africa is not likely to agree to bring blacks into its central parliament in order to retain landing rights for its national airline in New York City, it is not to

me inconceivable that it might agree to integrate its SAA flight crews (including pilots) for this purpose. The idea then is to marshal the resources available to the outside world not in (as the thumb-screw approach would have it) a general assault on the South African social system, for that effort, it is assumed, would fail, but rather to use them in a more carefully designed effort to change specific institutions within South Africa where the likelihood of success, given the resources that are available, is far greater.

Both of these approaches assume that the target regime is flexible given the right inducements. The difference between them lies in the assessment of (i) what inducements are available, (ii) how best to use them, and of course (iii) the time available. Obviously, sanctions in the evolutionary model perspective are only part of the inducements tried - carrots are also contemplated, whereas in the thumb-screw approach, sanctions are the inducements.

I do not mean to suggest that there can be no role for generalized sanctions at all under the evolutionary model. On the contrary, generalized sanctions in the South African case can:

- i. express forcefully international opposition to apartheid,
- ii. give courage and support to opponents of apartheid - persons who are working for peaceful change, and
- iii. open the door to more serious international steps in the future, thereby keeping the regime's 'feet to the fire'.

On the other hand, generalized sanctions can be dysfunctional in that they do not invite an immediate 'yes-able response', to use Roger Fisher's memorable construct, that is, they do not suggest a specific short-term step which, if taken, would relieve the sanction. And because such generalized pressures exclude the principle of short-term rewards, no pattern of change is encouraged. Official stubbornness, not official flexibility, may result, with many within the target's ruling circles concluding that what is at large is really a revolutionary wolf in an evolutionary sheep's clothing.

I now turn to American policy towards South Africa, especially American policy in the future - the topic this summer of Congressional hearings on no fewer than twenty so-called 'anti-apartheid' bills that have been before the US Congress, not to mention editorials beyond counting in the American daily press. Let me begin with a little history. American policy towards South Africa has vacillated for about fifteen years between what I am terming the evolutionary model and the thumb-screw approach. From 1968 until 1976, the Nixon-Ford years, American policy was not much different to what it is today. The famous (or infamous) 'Option 2' of National Security Council Memorandum 39, which came to define policy, argued that "the whites are [in southern Africa] to stay and the only way that constructive change

can come about is through them. There is no hope for the blacks to gain the political rights they seek through violence." President Carter, prominently assisted by Andrew Young, reversed this attitude in favour of public denunciations of Pretoria and various demonstrations of solidarity, or at least overt sympathy, with black South Africans, though perhaps few tangible decisions. President Reagan and Chester Crocker have through 'constructive engagement' openly embraced what I see as the evolutionary change model. Should (as now seems likely) Congress pass anti-apartheid legislation in 1985, the pendulum in American politics would clearly be moving back to the thumb-screw approach, though this time with more of a public constituency behind it than before.

How would such a 'tilt' in policy interact with each of the four perspectives mentioned?

1. It ought to make reformmongering in South Africa marginally more difficult, opening the reformmonger to criticism from his right wing that he is 'caving in' to international pressures. However, as there is little inclination in America at present to see President Botha and his immediate advisors in the role of reformmongers, that is, as instigators of reform on their own account, such 'cost' to the current reform process in South Africa is not taken very seriously in the United States.
2. From the revolutionary point of view, the steps being currently suggested in the United States - prohibition of new loans to South Africa and the sale of Krugerrands in the United States, embargo of transfers of computer technology, etc - can have meaning only as a way-station to more stringent measures still in the future. Even the suspension of new American investments in South Africa (and this clearly will not be legislated in 1985, though it could be several years from now) would not cripple the South African economy. What would be the suspension of all trade to and from South Africa, or even 50% of current trade, but this as yet is nowhere near the Congress' agenda.

What we are dealing with here then is symbolic politics, but in some cases symbols can be important. My impression is that Africans in the urban townships of South Africa are in some fashion aware of what has been going on this spring on the steps of Columbia University and in front of the South African embassy in Washington, and that these protests do give heart to demonstrators in Langa, etc. But more important that this is likely to be the actual public American commitment to help end apartheid that is contained in all of the pending bills before Congress.

I agree with most observers who doubt that the US could ever be brought to endorse an openly revolutionary strategy against South

Africa. However, in the name of 'sending Pretoria a message', that is, the thumb-screw approach, the US might be enticed (as it clearly is not yet) to apply consequential economic pressures, and from the revolutionary perspective this could only be 'for the good', the motivations of the sanctioners being altogether beside the point. The current debate I see, then, as an important way-station to that destination, which from the standpoint of the ANC and other proponents of 'armed struggle' against South Africa cannot be a bad return on what has to have been a fairly limited investment of time and resources over the past twelve months.

3. These 'anti-apartheid' bills, should they become law, would, it seems to be, confound the administration's policy of 'constructive engagement', though again more symbolically than in hard, tangible ways. Indeed, the campaign on behalf of these bills has probably achieved this end already, and, it must be said, fairly easily. 'Constructive engagement' has proved a liability in American politics this season for two reasons primarily. On the one hand, it was fairly easy to characterize it in the public mind as amounting to complicity in apartheid. On the other, lacking the hoped-for international settlement in Namibia, it has been hard for its proponents to argue that the policy has achieved much of anything at all.

The root failure of the policy, at least from my point of view, is that it seemed to suggest that American diplomacy could make a fundamental difference to how things go in southern Africa, including events within South Africa itself. Our recent Vietnam experience notwithstanding, the American public does seem to want to believe naively that American power is sufficient to reshape the world if only we have the political will to use it. In short, 'constructive engagement' has failed because it seemed to promise more than any American administration is likely to be able to deliver in southern Africa, and the American public eagerly accepted that promise. For millions of Americans do today want to contribute to ending apartheid.

4. This brings us back, then, to the thumb-screw approach which is clearly the first beneficiary of the recent agitation on South Africa in the United States, though at this time of writing it is hard to see how the Reagan administration could reconcile itself to a new policy forced upon it by Congress that differs so much from the President's clearly articulated and essentially personal predilections. In fact, the southern African policy of the US government may well be in limbo until January 1989.

The point is that in terms of raw political appeal, the Congressional perspective in this emerging executive-legislative struggle has in the short-term two decided advantages over the other available option (reformmongering falling away in this discussion). First, it is far more

palatable to American public opinion than the deliberately revolutionary strategy, and second, it is relatively free of the charge of 'propping up apartheid' which has dogged - largely unfairly, I believe - the 'constructive engagement' approach since Chester Crocker first articulated it in Foreign Affairs in the winter of 1980-81.

The problem of the thumb-screw approach is that the weight of social science evidence is also heavily against it ever working, at least in the fashion its liberal proponents expect. For like 'constructive engagement', it also most assuredly promises too much. Thus in the end, the 'big gainers' in this dispute are likely to be, it seems to me, the advocates of the revolutionary strategy and of weakening the South African economy, though it may take years for this to become clear.

In sum, then, I evaluate the anti-apartheid proposals that are now emerging from the US Congress, which are in some measure a warmed-over (if diluted) version of the 1980 Rockefeller recommendations mentioned earlier, as:

1. appealing to an increased American need to express opposition to apartheid, a need that has been greatly enhanced by the international press coverage of the riots in South Africa in 1984-85, and which 'constructive engagement' has seemed to many to deny;
2. representing in some degree a compromise solution to the disagreement between proponents of a revolutionary approach to South Africa and advocates of 'constructive engagement'; and
3. (deliberately or not) a psychological step towards more comprehensive sanctions against South Africa in the future, assuming as I do that the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, though surely inevitable, will proceed far more slowly than the vast number of the country's critics overseas would wish.

In short, the current American Congressional initiatives on the apartheid question probably say more about the state of American public opinion in 1985, and the state of American politics, than they do about the momentary balance of political forces at the southern end of the African continent. Reflecting upon this, I suppose I doubt that it could be otherwise. South Africa is, after all, very far away, and we in America surely have enough political imperatives of our own to consider. The consequences of this debate for South Africa itself in time could be quite real, however.