

South African Destabilization .

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Until the mid-1960's, South Africa had sought the direct incorporation of the three High Commission territories administered by Britain: Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. For South Africa, the advantage, amongst others, of such a course of action would have been the legitimacy it gave the apartheid policy of 'bantustan / independence'. Incorporation, however, having failed at the political level, Dr. Vervoerd, then Prime Minister, attempted, and succeeded, to incorporate the BLS countries into an economic, South African-dominated customs union and into the rand monetary zone - thereby giving the Pretoria government enormous leverage over the affairs of the BLS which continues, with effect, to this day.

Until the mid-1970's, Pretoria continued capitalizing on its occupation of Namibia and the barrier of 'buffer' states that included the Portuguese colonies of Mozambique and Angola and the British rebel colony of Rhodesia, by concluding various economic and military alliances in order to thwart the growth and activities of liberation movements throughout Southern Africa. By 1971, however, John Vorster's 'outward-looking' policy of dialogue, launched in the late 1960's had, despite its few initial successes, been blocked by the newly formed Organization of African Unity.

The Lisbon coup of April, 1974 that toppled the Caetano government dramatically changed the face of southern Africa almost overnight. In the following year, after a long, hard and bloody liberation struggle, first Mozambique in June and then Angola in November gained their independence; followed by Zimbabwe in 1980. One of the costs of this bitter struggle were the surrogate armies of mercenaries and bandits created or co-opted by the Portuguese, the Rhodesians and, more recently, the South Africans: Unita in the west, for example and, in the east, the MNR. Authentic documents to hand reveal that even when Unita was supposedly fighting Portuguese colonialism, it was in reality an adjunct of the Portuguese armed forces. As the last white bastion, South Africa continues to give logistical support to Unita and to recruit, train and fund the MNR, - whose initial funders, administrators and trainers, it is common cause, had been the Rhodesians.

With the collapse of Portuguese colonialism, the Pretoria regime had to reformulate its regional strategy, expanding its military capacity while launching a diplomatic 'detente' initiative which Vorster vaguely defined as a constellation of independent states presenting a united front against common enemies. The invasion of Angola in 1975 and the eventual expulsion of the South African forces by the Angolan and Cuban troops early the following year, however, put an end to this initiative. Whilst the brutal repression of the Soweto uprising in June '76 terminated any hint of collaboration with a regime that slaughtered defenceless black school children.

In 1977 a Defence White Paper laid out the economic, political and military implications of a policy of 'total strategy' that had been proposed as early as 1973 by top military strategists including the then Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha. With Botha's assumption to power in 1978, and the subsequent reorganization of state structures, 'total strategy' came to be officially adopted as state policy.

Notwithstanding, a further attempt at a regional grouping dominated by South Africa was made with the proposal, elaborated by Botha shortly after taking office, of a Constellation of Southern African States (CONSAS). The result of the Zimbabwe independence election and the formation, less than a month later, of SADCC, a regional grouping that excluded South Africa, finally put paid to any further 'constellation' notion on strictly South African 'dependency' terms.

With foresight, the late Botswana president, Sir Seretse Khama, warned, at the formative meeting of the SADCC in Lusaka, that: "The struggle for economic liberation will be as bitterly contested as has been the struggle for political liberation".

THE COLONIAL LEGACY:

With reference to Mozambique and Angola, a UNICEF study on "CHILDREN ON THE FRONT LINE" reports that: "Few countries have attained independence with such an appalling legacy of colonial neglect". As the study goes on to explain: "Mozambique inherited an illiteracy rate of 93%. At independence, over 70% of the population of 10 million lived out of the reach of any form of health care. In Angola illiteracy was somewhat lower - perhaps 85% - but the proportion without effective access to the health system was at least as high and probably higher."

More than 450,000 Portuguese and other expatriates, who were the main traders, importers and exporters, fled Angola at independence, leaving few Angolans skilled in those and other areas. In Mozambique only 15,000 of 250,000 expatriates stayed on.

The post-independence policies of both Angola and Mozambique gave high priority to primary health care, placing emphasis on preventive rather than curative medicine. Networks of health posts and centres were created in the rural areas. Thousands of primary health workers, able to give rudimentary medical care, were trained. Mass vaccination campaigns were carried out.

By 1980 life expectancy at birth had increased to 41 years in Angola and 45 in Mozambique. The mortality rate among under-fives had been reduced to 260 and 270 per 1,000, respectively".

In attempting to quantify the 'excess' war and destabilization-related deaths since South Africa really turned on the destabilization 'screws' in 1980, the UNICEF report takes, as its unit of measure, a comparable study of the mortality rate of under-fives in the affected countries of Mozambique and Angola viz-a-viz Tanzania.

Given the aforementioned development of primary health care and preventive medicine systems and the resultant fall in mortality among under-fives in both Mozambique and Angola until 1980, their position today should therefore be comparable to that of Tanzania.

Instead, the mortality rate of under-fives in Tanzania is 185 per 1,000, whereas in Mozambique and Angola the under-five mortality had, in stark contrast, risen to an estimated 325-375 per 1,000 by 1985. And it is reckoned that this alarming figure could, today, have risen even higher, and that it is likely to continue doing so unless and until the South African war machine can be brought under control.

THE PRICE OF WAR

This undeclared war against its neighbours is an integral part of South Africa's 'total strategy' policy defined by the Pretoria regime as the mobilization of all forces - political, economic, diplomatic and military - in defence of apartheid. This important component of a 'total onslaught' policy has, as its objective, the creation of a network of relationships intended to persuade neighbouring states that their interests lie with the regional 'superpower': Pretoria; and with the maintenance, therefore, of a dependency that will remain, for apartheid ruled South Africa, economically lucrative and politically submissive, and that will furthermore act as a bulwark against the imposition of international sanctions.

The economic and social costs of this widespread and continuing war of destabilization - as it affects Mozambique and Angola in particular - is astronomical; in terms of human suffering, the price is unquantifiable.

The Economic Costs

The macro-economia costs can be estimated in various ways, as the UNICEF report points out: "destruction of assets, enforced military expenditure, higher transport costs, lost output, or the need for relief and survival support to large numbers of refugees and displaced persons. Serious estimates differ substantially, but what is significant is the agreement on how massive the costs are. An official SADCC estimate of the 1980-1984 costs - including war damage, specific output losses, additional defence expenditure and lost economic growth - totals \$10.14 billion for the region. If 1985 and 1986 costs are included, to reflect the rising scale of aggression and inflation and the cumulative impact of output losses, the estimated total of the nine countries' economic losses from the war, measured on the basis of lost GDP, comes to \$25-\$28 billion for 1980-1986.

An estimate of physical damage and its consequences, prepared by the Angolan government in conjunction with the United Nations, totals \$17 billion for that country alone over 1975-1985. Mozambique has estimated its losses over 1980-1985 at \$5.5 billion.

The losses of the other seven states of southern Africa have been smaller, though Zambia's and Zimbabwe's have been quite significant (largely as a result of higher transport costs, production losses caused by transport difficulties, and the reduction of productive investment forced by the size of the defence budgets).....". "These", the UNICEF goes on to point out: "are the economic levels of major conflicts, not of marginal destabilization, civil disorder, or border-area conflict".

The Human Costs

These, the UNICEF report continues: "are equally severe. By the end of 1985, 25% of health facilities in Mozambique had been destroyed and hundreds of medical personnel wounded or maimed; 40% of primary schools had been destroyed or abandoned and 20% of the pupils forced out of school.

The figures for Angola are far from complete, but at least 10,000 people were mutilated in 1985, and the delivery and use of health services declined by 30% throughout the country. About 20 vaccination posts were destroyed in 1985, and overall immunization coverage is very low. Supervisory visits to rural health units and schools are virtually impossible. So is the distribution of essential supplies, which is often hampered by the destruction of vehicles, especially in landmine explosions.

The exact number of deaths among civilians and health ministry staff due to the war is not known. But what is known is that health workers, as well as clinics and other health posts, schools, teachers and pupils, foreign aid personnel and vehicles transporting health and relief supplies, are all deliberately chosen as targets of the war for the purpose of causing a breakdown in civil administration and making large areas ungovernable.

In Angola, 600,000 of the most severely affected peasants displaced by war are totally dependent on government assistance for survival. In Mozambique, 3.8 million are currently estimated to be at risk of famine, largely because of the destruction of food crops and transport capacity, and the loss of export earnings to pay for replacement food imports".

Military Destabilization

This more overt form of destabilization has affected all the contingent countries in the southern African region, with direct and much publicised raids into Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe, for example. Considerable economic pressure too is practiced on all these countries.

Less publicised is the use of sabotage units which, since 1981, has increased rapidly. UNICEF's survey has found that: "The region's transport and power infrastructures are the main targets; but other targets include major production units, especially those earning foreign exchange such as tea estates, mines and cement plants in Mozambique and mines and petroleum installations in Angola. The economic costs are evident, but less so at first glance is the reason for the deliberate concentration on destroying regional transport routes. This increases the dependence of landlocked states on routes through South Africa, and forces them to pay additional transport costs amounting to at least \$300 million per year.

The share of the national budget that goes to recurrent defence costs in Mozambique is 42%, one of the highest in the world.". (For what is reputedly one of the poorest, if not the poorest country in the world). "Angola's defence budget is much larger than Mozambique's in absolute terms, and may absorb a comparable percentage of total spending. Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe also have large armed forces, and Zimbabwe is spending in the order of \$3 million a week to defend its own and the region's trade routes through Mozambique. The effect of such spending on the availability of funds for health, education, water and food security in such poor countries is self-evident".

And the UNICEF study concludes with a terrible indictment of the war and its perpetrators and their use of one of the "deadliest weapons": "the mass terrorism carried out by forces which have burned crops and farmhouses, pillaged and destroyed schools, clinics, churches, mosques, stores and villages, poisoned wells by throwing bodies down them, and attacked the transport system which is a vital part of rural life. Members of religious orders, mainly Catholics, have been murdered and kidnapped. So too have foreign aid workers from both the West and the East. In Angola and Mozambique teachers, nurses, agricultural technicians, engineers, and geologists have also been killed and kidnapped, maimed and mutilated.

The carnage has been indiscriminate, with infants and children not exempted. The results are clear and tragic: death for many, and for the survivors fear and flight, destruction and displacement. About 8.5 million Angolans and Mozambicans - roughly half the rural population of the two countries - have been displaced or are internal refugees in their own countries".

The costs of their warfare are cumulative and have been escalating, without remission, since 1981. It is UNICEF's assumption that this is likely to continue.

CONCLUSION

The drama unfolding in Southern Africa is a human tragedy of proportionally huge dimensions. How else to describe a situation where, in Mozambique and Angola for example, 140,000 children under the age of five die, in one year alone, as a consequence of destabilization - of a conflict that sets out to cripple and to castrate in defense of an inhuman and degrading system.

Ann Colvin
Chairperson
BLACK SASH, NATAL COASTAL REGION

NATIONAL CONFERENCE - 1987