



international UPDATE

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REFLECTIONS ON THE NIGERIAN-SOUTH AFRICAN DIALOGUE

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This Update reflects the author's personal observations of the Dialogue held between the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) and SAIIA at Jan Smuts House, from 21-23 June 1994.

The first session of the Dialogue was closed to the outside public. In this, much was learnt about the history, nature, role and resource-bases of the respective institutions. Our Nigerian colleagues expressed a strong wish for close ties between the Institutes, both in order to learn from each other and to enable us to put our heads together in order to solve the myriad of problems that face Africans today. Indeed, as one member of the Nigerian delegation put it, 'the future of Africa will in part depend on the future contribution of important African countries such as Nigeria and South Africa', thus illustrating the need for a flowering of mutually-beneficial relations.

Like SAIIA, the NIIA was founded by private individuals as far back as 1945. Unlike Jan Smuts House it has not totally depended on the private sector for financial assistance and is in part funded by the Nigerian government. As a result, the staff of the NIIA is considerably larger than that of SAIIA, with a total staff of 200 vs. 18, and a research staff of 22 vs. 3. The manner in which the Nigerian Institute interacts and interfaces with government provides a possible model for the future. As the NIIA Director-General Dr. Obiozor noted, the NIIA are today in their relationship with their government where Jan Smuts House will possibly be with Pretoria tomorrow.

The second day of the Dialogue covered the political outlook and the foreign policies of Nigeria and South

Africa. In the session on politics in Nigeria, the contributors looked at the history of political developments, and specifically focused on the prospects for peaceful and fundamental reform by the current military regime. In this it was encouraging to hear that the operation of elements of Nigerian civil society (the Trade Unions, professional medical, legal and banking associations, Non-Government Organisations, as well as church and market associations) is still healthy despite the existence of the military government. These institutions, in the opinion of Prof. Osita Eze of Abia State University, have laid the necessary foundation for the establishment of true democracy in Nigeria. The question about democratic reform in Nigeria, is thus not so much of 'if' but rather of 'when' and 'how'.

It was predicted that a transformation to democracy would, however, have to proceed alongside a revolution in the nature of the socio-economic system. This would mean a fundamental transformation in the access of the common people to the means of production, this being especially important as Nigeria currently finds itself with tremendous economic problems. These stem mainly from the fall in the oil price, a dependency upon which was heightened by the oil boom and a simultaneous decline of the agricultural sector. In 1960, the oil sector made up only 1.9% of total GDP and oil revenue some 3.1% of total Nigerian Government revenue. By 1993 this had risen to 19.9% and 78.3% respectively.

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From a South African perspective a number of interesting issues were raised:

- (i) Questions were asked about the manner in which democracy would come about in Nigeria. In South Africa, there had been a strong wish (indeed, a demand) to make the transition and negotiation process democratic and not only the outcome. Put simply, it was questionable whether Nigeria could hope for a democratic solution if the process towards establishing that democracy was itself not representative and all-inclusive. In this regard, there were also questions about why the June 1993 elections were aborted. Some felt that no suitable explanation for the 'deafening silence' that followed the General's actions was forthcoming.
- (ii) It was, somewhat perversely perhaps, enquired whether Nigeria should now expect the same pressure for democratisation as South Africa and other African states have experienced or are experiencing. If so, what form could or should indeed this pressure take, and what effect would such pressure have in Nigeria? One manner in which the outside world has pressured African states, in particular, towards democracy has been through the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) as laid down by the World Bank and the IMF. These SAPs are seen to have highlighted many of the inequalities and structural problems present in the Nigerian economy, and have hit hard the middle- and lower-income classes with a 300% devaluation in the Nigerian currency, the Naira. As a result SAPs have often become the 'fall-guy' for many of Africa's current problems. Yet while the jury is perhaps still out on their efficacy, the dangers of casting value judgements on their operation should be noted.
- (iii) Clearly, one of the most important lessons for South Africa from Nigeria is that in a highly pluralistic society, the building of democracy involves a great deal more than simply staging a free-and-fair election. It requires a simultaneous process of nation-building and economic transformation in order to sustain the democratic experiment.

In the session on South African political developments, the Senior Researcher of SAILA Anthoni van Nieuwkerk and Chris Landsberg of the Centre for Policy Studies covered three areas:

- (i) Political developments in South Africa over the past few months.
- (ii) The challenges facing the government in the short- to medium-term.
- (iii) The likelihood of these challenges being met.

Here the need to establish a consolidated democracy was identified as the most important and difficult challenge for the new government. This is going to be no easy task for a government which has inherited an estimated R170-200bn debt and where in 1993 interest payments alone on outstanding debts amounted to 17% of government expenditure (R22bn). The need to reconstruct and develop both in order to fulfil promises and importantly improve the lot of the average South Africa will thus have to be tempered against the need to pay back and not to overspend.

With the above in mind, the following challenges for the new South African government were highlighted:

- (a) Firstly, it was concluded that there was a great potential for a clash of interests between the former opponents currently cohabiting in the Government of National Unity (GNU). This, it was concluded, could affect its workability.
- (b) In the same way the operation of a truth commission could also affect the workability of the GNU. For if the operation of such a commission applied equally to the National Party and the ANC it was estimated that at least 16 members of the current cabinet could find themselves undermined by this process. It was suggested in this regard that the commission should perhaps focus its energies rather on crimes than individuals.
- (c) The wish of President Nelson Mandela, in particular, to create a 'people centred society' was seen as a further problematic for the GNU. Public participation in a decision-making process will be a difficult, if not impossible, task.
- (d) The content, costing and, importantly, the management of the much discussed and maligned Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) also came under scrutiny. It was debated which of the 'costs' or the 'implementation' of this programme would be the more difficult. It was suggested, interestingly, that while the RDP currently follows the budget, in the future, the budget might well follow the RDP. As Nick Vink

pointed out also: from the recent budget it is apparent that the RDP is more than just the focus of the GNU - it is the programme of the GNU, driven by the needs of the people in its design and implementation.

To digress briefly, the subject of the RDP not surprisingly was the central focus also of the later session which looked at the South African economy. Here we were treated to a thorough exposition of both the content of the RDP in terms of its objectives and methods, but also of the potential pitfalls for this approach. The most fundamental problem with the RDP was perhaps, as Gary van Staden indicated, that the current government could 'drown in democracy', that arguably the current government structures were too democratic. Democracy, in this sense, could be a theoretically sound principle but could be a practical impossibility. The importance of management in the devising and implementation of the RDP raises also potential problems in terms of a lack of private and public sector institutional capacity, a lack of middle managerial skills, as well as the dangers of an *Icarus*-type populism in this approach.

That the political success which South Africa has enjoyed thus far is critically dependent on economic reform in the form of the RDP, was not challenged. Yet the approach of building *houses before factories*, contrary to the Asian-tiger success recipe could certainly be a fundamental weakness of a government trapped into meeting basic needs in the short-term in order to ensure political survival.

At the level of African trade, the ability of the RDP and more generally the South African economy to provide for all South Africans adequately was dependent also upon the ability not only of non-state (mainly 'horizontal') domestic sectors to grow and provide, but for these sectors to inter-connect and be expanded on a continental basis. As Bob Tucker pointed out, there is a great need to find mechanisms through which to co-operate to produce and market goods for the stimulation of this horizontal African relationship. The fear here is, of course, that such collaborative relationships produce unnecessary and expensive duplication.

- (e) The various provisions of the Bill of Rights also came under scrutiny in the discussion on South African politics. It was suggested that changes to relating to provisions for abortion, the right to life, and property would be re-examined. At a different level it was suggested that the manner in which the Constitutional Court was elected would also change, and that in the future it would be elected directly by parliament. In addition, provincial legislation, it was mooted, would

be written by the provinces themselves, although this would obviously remain within the clauses as set out by the Bill of Rights.

Questions about the foreign policies of Nigeria and South Africa formed also a major part of the Dialogue. From a Nigerian perspective, the end of the Cold War was seen to have given the world an opportunity to restructure the international order, an opportunity which could not be passed up. For it was argued persuasively that the current international order could not be a basis for enduring world peace and prosperity.

In particular, this was concerned with the structure of the United Nations and the international economic regimes. Here the question of a future permanent African seat on the UN Security Council (UNSC) and the question of who would fill this permanent seat (either on a permanent or on a rotational basis) created considerable interest. If Africa is to receive such a seat in the UNSC, this issue could prove to be a major irritation for Nigerian/South African relations in the future. For one, the criteria for the award of this seat will have to be decided. Will it be, for example, by population size or by GDP per capita? Perhaps, because of these potential controversies, it was suggested that Africa should, if it is offered a seat at all, take this up only on a rotational or, to invoke the old League of Nations terminology, a 'semi-permanent' basis.

Although Africa contributes nearly one-third of the nations in the UN General Assembly, there is much debate about whether a permanent seat would be offered. There are a number of countries and areas (Germany, Japan, and the Middle East for example) which arguably have a stronger claim than Africa. Also, the value of an expanded Security Council was questioned, because it was felt that Western nations might in the future disregard the UNSC as a world forum if it went beyond the current clique.

The history of Nigeria's foreign policy illustrates the importance given to support both for Africa and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), and for the Southern African liberation struggle. Through the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement, the UN Special Committee on Apartheid, the Frontline States grouping, as well as through a number of uniquely Nigerian institutions such as the Southern African Relief Fund, much assistance and diplomatic support was rendered to the liberation struggle in South Africa.

Nigeria currently contributes around one-third of the OAU's financial needs. It has always taken the position that the solutions to Africa's problems have to be pursued through the mechanisms and good

offices of the OAU. The commitment of Nigeria to greater economic co-operation and collaboration in Africa was also highlighted. The Lagos Plan, and the later Abuja Treaty signed in July 1991 both directly and indirectly call for the establishment of an African economic community.

Questions were asked about the political cohesion both of African states and of the OAU now that the central issue of South African democratisation has passed. Like the Spartans who asked when the Greeks (for which read South Africa) were no longer at the gates, what would keep them together, what would now keep Africa and the OAU together? The answer to this, it was put, lay in the mutual interests of African states for self-preservation, prosperity, prestige, security and a quest for peace. In this regard it was important that South Africa and Nigeria should arrive at a *modicum* of policy-harmonisation. As there will always be nations *primus inter pares*, it was argued, this role should not be avoided by the regional leaders in Africa.

However, it was made clear that the continent should not expect too much from South Africa. Pretoria's efforts and energies would have to be devoted towards meeting internal needs first, regional needs second and continental needs after that. In South Africa, between 41%-46% of the economically active population are unemployed, and it is with such concerns that South Africa will seek to find its *niche* as a participant in the international order. These demands and the limits on the time and ability of South African leaders, mean that in the future South Africa will attempt to provide for Africa by way of example both to the West and to Africa and not by way of dominance or through massive material provision. It was suggested that South Africa's foreign role was now tempered by a newfound sensitivity by Pretoria mindful of its past record. Others argued that South Africa's current reluctance to commit itself fully to Africa stemmed from a false (mainly white Euro-centric) consciousness and this would have to be overcome, before South Africa could play out its rightful role in African affairs.

There was little doubt, however, that South Africa can as a start make a considerable contribution to the functions of the OAU and other uniquely African bodies. This could be done through *inter alia*, the provision of computed financial contributions and, more importantly, through the encouragement of much stricter fiscal control in the operations and running of these organisations.

Areas of collaboration between South Africa and Nigeria were explored. From a Nigerian perspective, economic opportunities were present in the agricultural, industrial, mining and manufacturing

sectors. Political collaboration, it was argued, would have to take place given the regional importance of Nigeria and South Africa. However, some South African participants cautioned against high expectations regarding South African-Nigerian relations in the future. This related, *inter alia*, to the general ignorance of Nigerian society by South Africans, limitations for business opportunities given South Africa's structural economic constraints, and both the cost and morality attached to joint military ventures. Yet it was felt that South Africans *could* learn from the rich history of Nigeria's experience with federalism; Nigerians from the inclusiveness of the South African constitutional negotiation process.

A number of suggestions were made for possible areas of co-operation between the respective Institutes. It is hoped that there will be a reciprocal visit by Jan Smuts House to Nigeria in 1995, which will be tied to a conference on the subject of a joint research project. This will examine the potential for close relations between the so-called giants, or 'growth-poles', of Africa: South Africa, Kenya, Egypt and Nigeria. Certainly Nigeria and South Africa - along with Egypt, Libya and Algeria - will provide the largest slice of the OAU budget in the future. Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt (the so-called *Cairo-Abuja-Pretoria axis*) are also three of the 11 members of the OAU Central Organ of the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution. This body could arguably form the basis of a future OAU Security Council, and illustrates the importance of ties and linkages between these African states.

The second area of potential co-operation involves the respective libraries, and an exchange of publications. Finally, the possible exchange of research fellows from the Institutes for short-stay visits is being explored, although this will obviously depend on outside funding.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The South African Institute of International Affairs is an independent organisation which aims to promote a wider and more informed understanding of international issues among South Africans.

It seeks also to educate, inform and facilitate contact between people concerned with South Africa's place in an interdependent world, and to contribute to the public debate on foreign policy.