

The Way We Live (and Die) Now: Change in International Relations 1945-2010

Never glad confident morning again (Robert Browning)

The poet's pessimistic warning all those years ago was echoed by many after the extraordinary events of 9/11. Overnight, the structure and process of international relations appear to have changed profoundly. Not all, however, were convinced. Some in academe – all well established authorities – claimed that nothing fundamental did change except the “belief that there has been a great change in the architecture of world politics... this is largely an illusion... shared by important elements in both the West and elsewhere, and has created... a very dangerous and unstable set of assumptions... generating far greater security...”

This is to give the game away. Surely, if perception changes, then, so can and does behaviour? What this paper attempts is an analysis of how far qualitative change has occurred in the structure and process of international relations, first since the end of the Cold War and, more significantly, since 9/11.

The Cold War: An era of ‘fiercesome certainties’

First, a brief disquisition on the Cold War phase characterised by:

- An increase in the sheer size of the international society of states following massive decolonisation. The majority of these new states elected to join that society, accept its norms, values and membership of both regional and international organisations.
- The emergence of two ideologically opposed superpower dominated blocs uneasily co-existing and sharing a precarious common interest in avoiding MAD (Mutually Assured Destruction). And fear of this outcome was buttressed by arms control arrangements – both formal (the Test Ban Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty) and informal (making weapon systems invulnerable to first strike attack) – designed to reinforce and refine deterrence theory and practice.
- Realism was the dominant paradigm both in academe and statecraft with its cardinal emphasis on international order even at the expense of justice for oppressed peoples both in the North and the South. Nevertheless, liberal ideology never entirely succumbed to realist calculation. How could it, given the lacerating memory of the Holocaust? Thus there emerged a growing concern with the protection and assertion of human rights supported by an intrusive if haphazard media and which in the West, at least, reflected liberal values in both tone and substance.
- Finally, the development of a new style of European political co-operation based on the principle of functional integration designed, in effect, to remove the prospect of war between European states once and forever. This bald summary of some key features of Cold War politics suggests that the protagonists had one great advantage – as we shall see – over their successors: both NATO and Warsaw Pact members knew who and where their rival was and what constituted the chief threat to the security of each; both could infer intentions from capabilities and their use in recognisable battle space – the great plains of central Europe.



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These superpowers were conservative creatures with a profound interest in self-preservation and to which ultimately ideology was subordinate – whether messianic or liberal. There was an implicit recognition of each other's spheres of interest which were inviolable despite periodic noises by, for example, NATO to intervene when Poles, Czechs and Hungarians revolted against communist rule. Thus despite periodic and mostly rhetorical complaints about human rights abuses, the Westphalian principles

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of sovereign jurisdiction and the allied doctrine of non-intervention held firm. True, the resulting international order was bleak especially in communist dominated Eastern Europe and even worse for super-power proxies in the third world condemned to fight so-called 'limited' wars. This doctrine was the brainchild of the high priests of nuclear theory, for example Henry Kissinger, Robert MacNamara, Thomas Schelling, etc and the 'defence intellectuals' of the Rand Corporation. Limited, yes, in terms of the rules of engagement and superpower crisis

management to prevent such wars from getting out of hand in terms of horizontal spread to neighbouring states and the non-use of nuclear weapons, whether tactical or strategic. But for those directly affected – be they Koreans, Angolans, Israelis, Arabs or Vietnamese – such wars were anything but limited in terms of the human damage, death and destruction inflicted on fragile polities.

The Post Cold War Condition: liberalism rampant

With the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and all that symbolised for the end of empire in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, expectations were high of a fundamental shift in the structure and process of international society. No longer, it seemed, would the world be threatened by nuclear holocaust. Real 'détente' was emerging between a triumphalist West extolling the global relevance and moral superiority of democracy and the free market. A chastened and chaotic Russia had little alternative but, at worst, to accept US predominance and, at best, a share in a great power US led condominium designed to keep the peace through an invigorated and at last united United Nations Security Council. This optimistic view of a global future was reinforced by the precedent set by the successful intervention by a UN sponsored coalition to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991.

This brief interlude of global harmony was summed up in Francis Fukuyama's phrase – 'The End of History' and a revival in the US of neo-conservative doctrine dormant during the Cold War, but deemed appropriate as the basis of a 'new world order'. This doctrine fused realist and liberal principles in neat symmetry: realist in that it stressed the need to project power in defence of US interests world wide; liberal in its emphasis on the promotion of democracy and the free market as the appropriate vehicles for the creation and maintenance of international peace and security. (After all, some claim democracies never fight each other!).

A more cynical view might be that neo-conservatism is simply American imperialism in moralistic vein. Thus, the immediate post Cold War phase appeared to usher in a global dispensation profoundly different from its Cold War manifestation: cold blooded Hobbesian realism had at last given way to liberal nirvana. These developments seemed to herald both a change in the structure of international relations, (for example, the end of Cold War balance of power politics) and process – a new diplomacy based on co-operation between former enemies and the application of collective security against threats from maverick states through the agency of the UN and a host of regional organisations.

But things fell apart. In the course of the 1990s ethnic divisions flared into violent bitter conflict as subject peoples in the Balkans and elsewhere made claims for self-determination against former imperial rulers. This was certainly a change in process, if not the one for which post Cold War liberals had fervently hoped. True, war between states seemed a thing of the past, but the persistence of intra-state war put enormous strains on the capacity of the great powers to manage these conflicts. In Bosnia and Kosovo, for example, this was for Western powers a new phenomenon. Thus General Sir Rupert Smith has argued:

‘We fight among the people... we fight in every living room in the world as well as on the streets and fields of a conflict zone... The sides are mostly non-state since we tend to conduct our conflicts and confrontations in some form of multinational grouping, whether it is an alliance or a coalition, and against some party or parties that are not states.’²

One element of continuity from the days of the Cold War, generated in part by the technological device of ‘real time’ media coverage, was a renewed and substantial emphasis in the West on the human rights issue. And this in turn had particular resonance in the context of failing or collapsed regimes – two new categories of statehood deemed to be worthy of humanitarian intervention, in itself a new concept in the lexicon of international relations. Interestingly, realist self interest and a liberal version of international morality both pointed in the same direction: the need to revive and rehabilitate states that, left to decay, could prove a threat to neighbours by enforced migration flows or as a haven for terrorists.

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The Post 9/11 World: an era of ‘fierce uncertainties’

The remainder of this paper is based on the argument that international relations – contrary to the sceptical views cited earlier – did change profoundly after 9/11. Space will not permit an exhaustive discussion of these changes but one critical area is the emergence of so-called ‘new’ threats to international security: international terrorism; environmental degradation and climate change; international crime; enforced migration and – as we have already noticed – failing and collapsed states. Of course, it could be argued that there is nothing particularly ‘new’ about these threats; that statesmen were well aware of them before 9/11.

True enough, yet we note their pronounced salience post 9/11 and the impact all have collectively made on state capacity to cope with their implications. Moreover, the pressing need for effective deterrence strategies – both military and political – does suggest that their overall significance in the calculation of governments amounts to a qualitative difference from their place on state agendas before 9/11.

Certainly, globalisation too, has had an influential role long predating the post 1945 world. What is different – in both degree if not in kind – is the scale and pace of globalisation in the post Cold War environment, a development accelerated by the extraordinary burst of information technology and the resulting change in the speed of communication between individuals; institutions of all kinds; multinational companies; financial markets; and, terrorist movements; money launderers; the international criminal fraternity. Indeed, one might argue that this international quantitative change verges on becoming a qualitative one.

And it is difficult enough for governments to cope with the benign effects of globalisation, to be agile in adapting to the demands and constraints of the international market place. Success will inevitably mean jettisoning archaic unproductive economic practices; accepting part privatisation of, hitherto sacred cows, for example, education and health provision. Indeed, we note the ever increasing concern with the notion of best practice in political and economic terms. We also note the emphasis on global governance and the structures required to give real substance, power and legitimacy to newly emerging global institutions however haphazardly: G20 summits, for example, and such well established functional bodies as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and

Agriculture Organisation (FAO). All this suggests that mature democratic states have had to become increasingly inter-dependent if they are to preserve their traditional role as the primary source of national identity, security and welfare for their citizenry.

But globalisation cuts both ways. Terrorism of the al-Qaida variety can and does take advantage of the process. Communication between scattered groups, the movement of personnel, weapons, and money has become correspondingly easier. Similarly, media expression via television networks such as Al Jazeera provides a capacity for mobilisation of the dissatisfied.

Strategic Conundrums

So what to do? Grand strategy now implies far more than making sure that a state has enough 'boots on the ground' to defend the homeland both within and without. There is, too, no obvious boundary to defend as in the Cold War when NATO's primary task was to deter the Russians from surging across the plains of Eastern Europe. Britain, for example, is currently engaged in a radical Strategic Defence Review designed to define and fund an appropriate military capability for dealing with new security threats

of which trans-national terrorism is seemingly the most serious, with no fixed abode comparable to Moscow and its satellites during the Cold War.

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But defence planning cannot be conducted in a political vacuum. What is required is some prior understanding of what a country's role in the world can and should be. Furthermore, what specific national interests have to be asserted and defended? Only then can a defence strategy be elaborated. This is currently underway not only in the

UK but throughout the major Western powers wherever international terrorism and its associated evils threaten. In the UK, for example, cliché-ridden notions that 'Britain should punch above its weight', that it is 'a force for good' in international affairs are too vague to act as a basis for devising the appropriate military capability.

Certainly Britain wants to contribute to multi-national arrangements for dealing with climate change. It is arguable, however, that diplomatic and scientific expertise is required rather than military capability. Yet however radical and innovative defence and foreign policy planners aspire to be, past commitments, historical experience and political culture set real constraints on what can be done. Thus no UK government has, so far, been willing to jettison the so-called 'special relationship' with the United States and commit itself wholeheartedly to the European enterprise. And this applies equally to the likelihood of Britain giving up its nuclear deterrent possession of which strengthens its position as a permanent, veto wielding member of the United Nations Security Council. Paradoxically, the diplomatic impact that Britain can make, to a large degree, depends upon other powers recognising the relevance of its military capability to back up coercive diplomacy whenever that may be needed. The trick, therefore, may be to find the balance between hard and soft power capabilities and to meld them into a coherent and strategic framework.

It is a strategic truism that governments invariably devise capabilities to fight the last conflict rather than to provide for the one to come. Thus it could be argued that the UK was woefully short of the kit to fight effectively in Iraq and Afghanistan, that the current Strategic Defence Review (SDR) is in part designed to make sure that such shortages are made good. But that assumes that the UK defence force will continue to be involved in expeditionary activity as part of its contribution to the war on terror. But

the sheer length of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns to date and the growth of public scepticism about their utility and morality suggest strongly that there will be little popular appetite for such interventions in the Third World in the future.

David Cameron, the UK Prime Minister, has implicitly acknowledged this constraint affecting not only the UK, but probably most of NATO as well. In two little reported speeches he stressed his unwillingness to engage in Blairite humanitarian adventures abroad. He has also acknowledged that the best that can be hoped for, for example in Afghanistan, is “some stability” as a condition for ultimate Coalition withdrawal in 2015. In other words, leaving behind a more or less stable government and a reasonably trained army and police force, supposedly capable of holding its own against resurgent Taliban violence. His preference is to concentrate on what he calls ‘homeland security’, keeping out undesirables and exercising close surveillance over local dissidents committed to violent activity wherever and whenever in the United Kingdom.

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This suggests that what is required is more than orthodox military capability which, according to recent press reports, is likely to be drastically slimmed down to produce leaner, more agile armed services. Certainly, the UK in its campaign against terrorism whether in the UK or elsewhere has had to conscript some unlikely candidates for assistance: not simply the police force, but also immigration officials, customs officers and bankers to cope with the downside of globalisation and the advantages – as we noted earlier – that this gives the would-be terrorist. This suggests that joined-up government and intense co-operation between all the major departments of state is bound to increase on a scale not seen since the days of the Second World War. In this context we also note the sheer necessity of intelligence sharing between states to combat trans-national terrorism. This suggests another example of the growing inter-dependence of states – part cause and part effect – of globalisation. It is also manifest in the collaboration of security services – MI5 and MI6 and the like. Indeed, Dame Elizabeth Manningham-

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Finally, in this context we note the impact of 9/11 on the structure and process of modern democratic institutions both in the UK and abroad in the Western world:

- The increase in surveillance of the population; some 5,000 cameras currently monitor the citizens of London;
- The inroads made into time honoured civil liberties, habeas corpus for example; in the UK, suspects can be detained for a maximum of 28 days while Control Orders have been devised for some suspects. There is, too, a significant degree of tension between the courts and the executive over the latter’s attempt, for example, to deport alleged political wrongdoers and the court’s refusal to sanction this outcome.
- Government in general is more centralised and parliament’s role in scrutinising anti-terrorist legislation has been significantly reduced.

Libertarians trying to counter what they perceive to be a steady erosion of the citizens rights have difficulty countering the state’s orthodox response of ‘better safe than sorry’ and ‘you have nothing to fear if you are innocent’ when, for example, there was talk of introducing identity cards. True, the Cameron administration has promised to revue the anti-terrorist measures introduced by the Labour government and has said that it will not introduce identity cards. But Cameron’s preference for a homeland security strategy will be difficult to maintain without an intrusive state and a weakening of the traditional firewall between civil society and government. What Western decision makers have recognised is that they are faced with “occasional emergencies”,³ not a ceaseless campaign of violence and counter-violence characteristic of orthodox conventional war in the past. Inevitably, deterring and defending against this phenomenon may well involve inroads into the traditional pattern of civil liberties. And perhaps publics in Western democracies will become immured to this stringent governance, content to enjoy the manifold benefits of a consumer culture and the ‘bread and circuses’ provided by international sport and garish, vulgar media entertainment.

Of course, there are moments of absurdity in policy making; consider, for example, a recent radio advertisement sponsored by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) suggesting,

“It might be prudent to inform the authorities when the man at the end of the street doesn’t talk to his neighbours much, because he likes to keep himself to himself. He pays with cash because he doesn’t have a bank card, and he keeps his curtains closed because his house is on a bus route.

This may mean nothing, but together it could all add up to you having suspicions. We all have a role to play in combating terrorism.”⁴

This advertisement was, in fact, withdrawn after public protest. There was also the incident involving two elderly cricket lovers who had two spoons confiscated by the authorities at a village match. These were intended for their strawberries and cream!

Intervention: Incentives and Constraints

Finally, the events of 9/11 have led to a fierce debate about the merits of intervention in countries suspected of harbouring terrorists or, alternatively, against governments engaging in genocide or other massive derelictions of human rights. Traditionally, Clausewitzian principles have been deemed appropriate as criteria for successful intervention in the affairs of other states. Thus, the prescription of a clear and precise objective; political

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will; appropriate capability for the task in hand; a viable strategic context; a clear exit strategy. Good examples in this context would be the 1959 deployment of a British force to deter Iraq from invading Kuwait; the swift ending of military mutinies in East Africa in the early 1960s again via the deployment of a British task force; the restoration of British rule over the Falkland Islands in the early 1980s.

These examples pale into insignificance as compared with the dramatic emphasis placed on intervention since the end of the Cold War. This development is best summed up in Tony Blair’s Doctrine of the International Community

enunciated in 1998, stressing that in certain dire circumstances, after all other means had been tried and found wanting, sovereignty could be brushed aside, force employed and if necessary commitment made to the rehabilitation of government (regime change if necessary) and reconstruction of the society in question. This was liberal intervention with a vengeance, although a significant and cautionary ‘realist’ condition was attached to the doctrine; in the last analysis the national interest of the intervening party had to be served. Hence the haphazard emergence of a new norm in international relations: ‘the responsibility to protect’, perhaps more honoured in the breach than the observance, but nevertheless perceived as an article of faith by those who seek to strengthen good international governance.

Of course, some disaster areas, for example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Darfur in the Sudan do not easily lend themselves to armed humanitarian intervention. Neither the UN nor regional organisations such as The African Union (AU) have the resources, the political will and commitment to the long haul of state reconstruction. What has occurred is a modest degree of peace-keeping rather than full scale peace enforcement. Even the former is difficult, given the nature of the actors involved: war lords; militia; armed gangs; guerilla movements, many of which are out for what they can get in terms of stealing resources – diamonds, precious metals, weaponry, etc. And there is still, of course, as far as Africa is concerned, the residual constraint of the principle of non-intervention which although no longer in the AU constitution

is nevertheless a principle to which many African governments still cling.

Liberal interventionists argue, for example,

that the costs – human and material – of removing the Taliban from Afghanistan and destroying Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq were worth bearing. But the sceptic might well answer that the loss of many thousands of lives since the invasion of Iraq in 2003 is a very high price to pay for Saddam's removal. Had his regime been left intact, would the loss of life have been greater or less than that suffered since his downfall? (Precise figures in this context are hard to come by, varying – as they do – between 500,000 and 50,000 deaths since the coalition's campaign began.) The sceptic might further argue that what the experience of both campaigns really teaches us is that Western ideologues are mistaken in their belief that defeated or failed states with very different political cultures can, in effect, be reconstructed as democratic, free market societies.

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This view is based on the assumption that the best the outside world can do is, first, to recognise that international crises provoked by human rights violations are not easily solved in the short run. Secondly, such crises are inevitably long drawn-out affairs often requiring external management rather than intervention. Thirdly, this strategy involves trying to ensure that a variety of external NGOs and regional and international organisations are encouraged to provide basic necessities such as food and primitive shelter to populations under threat of starvation and death. This would be to apply the 'duty to assist'⁵ principle in the expectation that eventually a 'tipping point' might be reached, weakening a persistent stalemate and opening the way to negotiation between the protagonists. This window

of opportunity might, for example, involve a contact group of interested parties intervening diplomatically – perhaps via a secret Oslo-type peace process – to help effect a transition from one regime to another.⁶

This paper has argued that three post-1945 phases: the Cold War; the brief post-Cold War honeymoon; and post 9/11 demonstrate significant change in international relations in several key respects: deterrence and defence remain key elements in the mature state's armoury but have had to be redefined to cope with new security threats and trans-national terrorism in particular; that the so-called 'war against terror', however spasmodic in its impact via 'occasional emergencies' has had both an internal and an external dimension requiring responses from an increasingly intrusive state and weakening the traditional bulwark of civil society and the structure of civil liberties in particular; liberal interventionism for humanitarian objectives or regime change has become a key feature of the lexicon of international relations. The question remains: how have all these changes affected the external relations of the new South Africa?

The South African Response

First a brief historical point: the 'new' South Africa emerged post 1994 as a state committed to the defence and assertion of human rights both at home and abroad. How could it be otherwise given the long and arduous struggle waged against apartheid, one of the defining sins of 20th century evil? There were high expectations both in South Africa and the West about the positive and creative role that the country might play – at the very least – in promoting the ideals (particularly those fostered in its successful transition) of good governance in the immediate region of Southern Africa and further afield.

Of course, affixing goals in foreign policy (as Nelson Mandela did in a famous *Foreign Affairs* article)⁷ to an ethical mast gives hostages to fortune when difficult choices have to be made. These, far from ensuring the general public good, often involve adverse consequences for some group or other; the choice is in fact between evils, the statesmanlike trick being to choose the lesser one.

This definitive axiom of realist theory in practice is difficult to defend, let alone assert publicly. By the same token admitting that some problems in the external realm are intractable, and that all one can do is to wait on time and circumstance (a Burkean principle), observe caution and behave pragmatically, may appear sound conservative

statecraft. But events post 1989 conspire against this aspiration. The euphoric defining moment represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall was reflected in liberal expectations of progressive change both in Western media outlets and the seeming victory of the American neo-conservative belief that the world could and would be made “safe for democracy”. These developments undermined more orthodox conservative principles as a basis for statecraft. Thus the option of basing policy on cautious ‘realist’ principles was simply not available to a South African government in 1994 and beyond. The latter, following a successful transition to Western style democracy under the tutelage of an exemplary globally recognised leader, seemed ideally placed to promote a version of human rights deemed universally applicable.

Certainly, South Africa could not escape the impact of the end of the Cold War. The demise of the former Soviet Union, and the recognition of a ‘debilitating stalemate’ between the ANC and the government, gave President F W de Klerk a window of opportunity for reversing decades of policy based on the defence of apartheid by whatever means both at home and abroad.

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to liberalise, privatise and deregulate. And South Africa could be no exception to the general trend; indeed, its government embarked on a steep learning curve involving jettisoning many of the time honoured and hitherto sacrosanct economic goals of the Freedom Charter.

And in the heady atmosphere of the immediate post Cold War years when global transformation into a ‘new world order’ seemed both possible and desirable South Africa seemed to be well placed to play a key role. This, following a successful transition to democracy under the tutelage of an extraordinary and universally admired leader, was perceived as a standard bearer for the promotion of those very human rights represented by the new South Africa’s painstakingly devised constitution.

But the Mandela administration’s commitment to human rights soon ran into severe difficulties. In 1995, for example, Mandela protested vociferously at the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues by the Nigerian government only to be met with indifference at best and hostility at worst by his fellow African leaders objecting to the breach of the Westphalian principle of non-intervention. Similarly, in 1998, the attempt to intervene forcibly in the Lesotho crisis went badly awry. There were other failures in the human rights arena, at least in the eyes of Western critics: for examples arms sales to states with poor human rights records such as Libya, Cuba and Algeria’. Some were justified on the grounds that their governments had been helpful in the anti-apartheid struggle. This aspect of policy certainly damaged South Africa’s reputation in the eyes of liberal critics both at home and abroad. Indeed, it does demonstrate how decisions arising from profoundly different moral narratives can arise. After all, gratitude (an ethical imperative) to those who helped (admittedly often for reasons of realpolitik) in the years of the ‘struggle’ was understandable especially when many Western governments (though not all) were decidedly unhelpful and hostile to the ANC, perceived to be a terrorist organisation.

The recognition of the Peoples' Republic of China was justified on straightforward realist grounds: the PRC was a superpower in the making and non-recognition would have meant a loss of valuable trade and investment advantages. And these were important given the need to foster growth in South Africa and improve the lot of the great majority of its people. This surely could be regarded as a perfectly respectable moral imperative in realist terms but again demonstrating how difficult it is to make neat straightforward ethical choices in foreign policy.

To date, South Africa has escaped terrorist attacks of the kind that has affected the UK, US, Indonesia, Kenya, etc. It has eschewed a role in the 'coalition of the willing' established a deal with regime change in Iraq and Afghanistan. In other words the Mbeki administration did not subscribe to the doctrine of liberal interventionism enunciated by Tony Blair and the American neo-conservative movement.

Yet this litany of contradictions between the ethically desirable in absolute terms and the realistically possible did not preclude a liberal posture on such issues as the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons reflected in South Africa's constructive role at the 1997 UN/NPT sponsored Review Conference. There was, too, a belief in Western chancelleries that the country would be a role model for conflict resolution in divided societies elsewhere in Africa. Equally, it could play a leading role – so it was argued – in UN sponsored peace-keeping and possibly even peace-enforcement operations. Thus to optimists in the US State Department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the UK, South Africa appeared well placed to take major responsibility for healing Africa's wounds while leaving Western governments to handle the detritus of the Cold War and the creation of a 'New World Order'.

The aftermath of 9/11

Western preoccupation with trans-national terrorism has – as we have seen – stimulated a fierce debate about the merits of intervention in distant places, the argument being fighting the Taliban in Helmand province in Afghanistan is preferable to having fight their terrorist offspring in Sheffield or Birmingham. To date, South Africa has escaped terrorist attacks of the kind that has affected the UK, US, Indonesia, Kenya, etc. It has eschewed a role in

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There are, I believe, two reasons for this fundamental change from the strategy adopted by the Mandela government – as we have noted – with unfortunate results. First, there has been a clear recognition that South Africa inhabits a rough neighbourhood. The conflict in various parts of the continent has been “nasty, brutish” and long. Enforcing or maintaining a peace in war-torn societies such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and promoting good governance in, for example, Zimbabwe, are, frankly, tasks beyond its individual competence in terms of resources and political will. The same constraint applies to the rehabilitation of failing states. Secondly, Mbeki, in effect, claimed in Africanist vein that doing the West's bidding on these issues involved accepting uncritically a definition of human rights and an interpretation of the structure and process of international relations that was not necessarily appropriate for African conditions; better – in his view – to commit to “African solutions for Africa's problems”. Moreover, on prudential grounds, military intervention to deal with the violent activities of non-state actors was likely to be prolonged and costly in an environment where many of the protagonists had an interest in prolonging conflict rather than accepting the compromises emerging from orthodox diplomacy.

Thus Mbeki concentrated on mediation, exercising good offices where the parties in a conflict could be induced to come to a conference table. Success was by no means guaranteed, but 'quiet diplomacy' does have its merits. This has certainly been the preferred strategy in Zimbabwe; indeed, there is an element of hypocrisy in Western criticism of the strategy, given that none of their governments have contemplated military intervention to supplant Mugabe. Why should South Africa, therefore, be expected to behave differently?

Of course, Mbeki and no doubt his successor, President Zuma, have recognised the constraint of African solidarity on the Zimbabwean issue, keeping in step with fellow African leaders. After all, their support was necessary to back up Mbeki's initiative for reform of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the establishment of NEPAD both regarded as manifestations of Mbeki's much cited African Renaissance and designed to promote specific African interests rather than meekly echoing Western prescriptions for the continent.

Finally, some observations on South Africa's attempts to play a role on a global stage. First, there is little doubt that the aftermath of the Mandela honeymoon with the West led to a growing belief that South Africa was becoming 'just another country' that would have to take its chances with respect to increasing foreign direct investment (FDI) and trade with the outside world. Secondly, there was disillusion at Mbeki's performance on the human rights issue and in particular the government's posture at the UN Security Council where it refused to support resolutions critical of Burma, the Sudan, Zimbabwe and Iran.

Thirdly, although a member of the G20, it has little to offer fellow summiteers on issues such as how best to cope with international terrorism, the current economic recession, and ways and means of coping with new security threats. This is not simply a matter of indifference to these issues, but rather a reflection of its standing as a middle range power the influence of which is dwarfed by the emergence of the so-called BRICs, (Brazil, Russia, India and China). South Africa cannot hope to match their capabilities – political, military or economic – as major actors in world politics. It could, of course, aspire (and has

to a degree already done so) to the role played, for example, by the Scandinavian countries which have successfully carved out niches in which to exercise influence as mediators, offering general good offices, aid and assistance to protagonists locked in combat and ideological hostility. Their advantage is a 'rectitude base' at home (a phrase made famous by Mary Baker Fox), a neat correspondence between reputation for good governance and a desire to be a 'force for good' in international relations.

By contrast, South Africa's rectitude base is relatively fragile; it can certainly claim democratic credentials of a kind not widely the case elsewhere on the continent, but its slow, uneven pace of development; the seemingly intractable problem of high unemployment; the possibility of curtailing press freedoms; evidence of corruption; and the nagging persistence of the Zimbabwean problem – all constrain the government from playing a constructive and dynamic role on the continent.

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state performance (especially the prospect of curtailing media comment and reporting via legislation) contrive to undermine the country's reputation abroad; but this is unsurprising because the post 1994 reputation was always bound – for a variety of reasons – to become a wasting asset. True, it aspires to a permanent seat on the Security Council but reform in that prospect is a distant prospect. Indeed, regional powers elsewhere for example Nigeria might well garner support in a contest for a seat.

Conclusion

The domestic agenda may well preoccupy domestic decision makers at the expense of foreign policy initiatives. And this constraint, notwithstanding the temporary euphoria induced by the World Cup, the impact of which on hard-headed would-be investors is likely to be marginal. Like many powers of similar size and capability there is a limit to what South Africa can do to help the great powers cope with the 'war on terror'. Indeed, what conceivable national interest would be secured by engaging significantly with the Western powers in this context? Sharing intelligence, perhaps, but from what sources and how reliable? And to what end since the threat is conceivably low risk? The country's current posture is therefore ambivalent: there is the crucial incentive to maintain good

economic relations with the rich north and at the same time act as an interlocutor for the poor south at the G20 and similar gatherings.

Small countries can shelter under a hegemonic umbrella able to protect their interests at the WTO and other regional and international organisations. In the post 9/11 world, block politics are increasingly important: witness EU efforts to be a major actor in its own right exploiting soft power initiatives involving constructive engagement with North Korea, and Iran. South Africa will, therefore, be judged by its capacity to enhance the standing, development prospects and the overall role of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). It will have to be cautious about exploiting the emerging norm of 'responsibility to protect' neighbouring states. Certainly, military intervention would entail considerable risk – overstretch; imprecise objectives; no clear exit strategy. Nevertheless, the relatively low key imperative – 'the duty to assist' – through both private and public initiatives whenever natural or human disaster threatens cannot be escaped if South Africa is to exercise a benign regional influence.

As for the long run, South Africa is not likely to repeat the upward projectory of the so-called Asian Tigers: Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia and Hong Kong. Their successful emergence from autocracy to democratic politics was in part based on a culture of self help and carefully planned education strategies. By contrast, South Africa might be described as a civet (a hare) running fast to catch up with rivals and competitors elsewhere and having to live in a world where the major powers are searching for new strategies – military and economic – to cope with threats which may seem remote to South Africa, but nonetheless absorb the attention of the great powers.

Increasingly coalitions of the willing will be required to deal with a variety of threats to internal and domestic order. The current multi-national naval task force in the Indian Ocean to deter and defend against piracy is a relevant example in this context. South Africa might well play a productive if limited role in such collective security enterprises. Failure to maximise such opportunities will leave the country isolated from the main stream of international relations unable to exploit its reserves of soft power – diplomatic skill; peacekeeping competence; reputation – if somewhat tarnished – for good governance. These may seem modest ambitions, but they reflect the country's capability and are certainly preferable to the inflated and ultimately unfulfilled expectations of the West in the Mandela era and beyond.

NOTES

- 1 Kennedy-Pipe, see and Rengger, N (2006) 'Apocalypse Now: continuity and disjunction in world politics since 9/11', *International Affairs*, vol. 82, no.3, p.540.
- 2 Smith, R (2005), *The Utility of Force – the art of war in the modern world* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin)
- 3 I am indebted to one of my post-graduate students at King's College for this phrase.
- 4 *The Daily Telegraph*, London, 14 August 2010.
- 5 See Todorov, T (2003) 'Right to Intervene or Duty to Assist' in Owen, N (ed.), *Human Rights and Human Wrongs* (Oxford University Press, pp. 26-48). This is an illuminating discussion of an important topic and I am indebted to the author.
- 6 This paragraph (2007) is an extract from my contribution to an Institute for Security Studies (Pretoria) project: *South African Army 20-20*.
- 7 Mandela, N, (1994) 'South Africa's Future Foreign Policy', *Foreign Affairs*, vol.72 no.5, p.86.
- 8 See (2010) Welsh, D and Spence, J E, *Ending Apartheid*, (London: Pearson-Longman) for a detailed discussion of South Africa's foreign policy in the 20th century and beyond.