

Opening a new window on world

SOUTH AFRICA AND THE WORLD: A NEW VISION. Report on a conference organised by the SA Institute of International Affairs and the Centre for Southern African Studies. August 1992, 54 pages, published by SAIIA, Johannesburg.

THE CHANGING WORLD AND PROFESSIONAL DIPLOMACY. A report of a workshop organised by the Centre for Southern African Studies and the International Studies Unit (Rhodes University). February 1993, 77 pages, published by CSAS, Bellville.

SOUTH Africa's transition to a new democratic order is not a process limited to the domestic arena. Politicians and the public increasingly recognise the continuing vital role of the international community in the process of transforming South African society – a role that recently became prominent with the deployment of various teams of international observers and monitors throughout the country. Most South Africans now accept the necessity of the international community acting as mid-wife in the painful process of giving birth to a new order in South Africa.

However, there is not always a clear understanding of the parameters of world interest and involvement in our transition. Although it is not a popular argument it is necessary to repeat that the global interest and goodwill generated since 1990 will be of limited duration.

Given the fragile state of global politics and economics, interest is already shifting – away from Africa, towards new and potentially more damaging flashpoints (damaging to the industrialised West, that is). The future of the Russian Federation and Bosnia are cases in point. Equally ominous for South Africa are recent global economic developments. The end of the Cold War introduced accelerated trade bloc forming with concomitant protectionist tendencies, and the spectre of a coming trade war not far behind. This brings the further marginalisation of Africa and the only remaining global divide into sharper focus: that of North versus South.

Given these global developments, it would be naive and simplistic to expect post-apartheid South Africa to conduct its international affairs with more ease than in the past. A rude awakening awaits those

who believe (or hope) that South Africa will easily assume an uncontroversial and comfortable role in global affairs. A new government will inevitably be forced to make complex and even unpopular choices in the formulation of its foreign, economic and political policy. All the more reason, therefore, for South Africans to urgently concentrate their minds on South Africa's future international stance. I can gladly report that such thinking has already started. The two publications under review reflect a sense of urgency among academics, the ANC, and the Department of Foreign Affairs, for us to develop a better understanding of the momentous changes abroad and their implications for this country. This is coupled to a call for appropriate responses at home.

The two publications under discussion essentially ask whether South Africa can produce a new vision of its place in the changing world order and whether it has the capacity to make and carry out an effective foreign policy.

By ANTHONI VAN NIEUWKERK

South Africa and the World: A New Vision deals with the first question. It is probably unfair to expect a disparate group of 70-odd foreign policy specialists to come up with 'a new vision' after three days of workshopping. Instead, the group adoted a 'broad-canvas' approach, focusing on four issue areas – South Africa and the world; political and diplomatic; South Africa in the world economy; South Africa in Africa; and the making of foreign policy. The publication also carries two excellent essays by well-known academics Jack Spence and Sam Nolutshungu. This working approach produced not a new vision (the title does seem slightly misleading) but rather made clear what South Africa will face when preparing for a new relationship with the international community. It also highlighted a number of foreign policy options that might become available to the new government when making policy.

A remarkable feature of the publication was the measure of consensus reached. As a member of the workshop commented, instead of vast areas of disagreement, '... common goals emerged, a common reality was perceived and agreement was reached on methods of achieving the desired goals. Ideological differences appeared to be almost completely absent' (p 3).

What became clear throughout the pro-

ceedings was a realisation of the growing importance of economic affairs in foreign policy ('Geo-economics would come to replace geo-politics' or 'the primacy of economics', as participants put it). This means that states in their relations with one another would come to be guided by economic considerations above all else, and the comment was made that the direction of South African foreign policy in future would have to be determined by careful economic calculation.

Alas, the context for South African policy-making created by the current state of the domestic economy and international economic conditions in the 1990s does not look favourable at all:

- South Africa faces a harsh international trading environment because it is still dependent on primary and semi-processed exports;

- Most of its manufactured products are uncompetitive on international markets;

- Trading will be still more difficult with the development of somewhat inward-looking trading blocs;

- The continuing marginalisation of the South and Africa in particular will make it more difficult to find alternative markets;

- It would be almost impossible to attract new foreign investment before achieving a measure of political stability at home – not to mention economic growth; and

- South Africa might be offered significant quantities of aid for a short period during the establishment of a democratic state, but it is unlikely that concessionary finance will be extended for long.

Given these conditions, the workshop argued that a democratic South Africa should pursue economic opportunities wherever they arose, in the new markets of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, in the recovering markets of Latin America and in the growing Caribbean. But the most vital issue was relations with Asian countries, which are growing more rapidly than any other part of the world.

Sam Nolutshungu perhaps captured the essence of the task of South Africa's future foreign policy-makers when he asserted that 'for South Africa, as for every other country, foreign policy will be about negotiating a path between necessity and preference, between domestic needs and external constraints; and about bargaining with other actors, few of whom will submit passively to

From Page 29

late or the dictates of the "market" or the "new world order", against the background of the overriding challenges of the domestic task of state consolidation and legitimisation'.

The Changing World and Professional Diplomacy deals with whether South Africa has the diplomatic capacity to make and carry out an effective foreign policy. The publication reports on a discussion on decoupling diplomacy from party-political interests and the necessity for a professional diplomatic corps which serves the entire South African nation. Its conclusion, in essence, says that it is important to recognise South Africa's diplomatic legacy: the 'upstairs' of state diplomacy, claiming skills

or competency, and the 'downstairs' of the diplomacy of the liberation movements, claiming legitimacy. Peter Vale, who summarised the proceedings, stated that if South Africa wanted a vibrant foreign policy, which reflected this society, it was necessary 'to discover the rich tapestry of our African-ness - both white and black African-ness'.

In discussions on how to transform the Department of Foreign Affairs, there were four suggestions - integration, amalgamation, absorption and restructuring. The world-wide trend, however, is towards restructuring departments of foreign affairs to take into account global change, and Peter Vale suggested that South Africa should consider it as well. The workshop

subsequently spent considerable time on the issue of transforming the foreign service, debating issues such as the skills diplomats need and entry requirements.

What the two publications make quite clear is that there is a pressing need for educating and training young people for the Department of Foreign Affairs. The question, however, is whether the South African academic community can rise to the challenge. Frequent suggestions were made - at these workshops, but also elsewhere - for the establishment of an academy or institution for diplomats. This has not happened as yet, and the fear is that we might miss the boat - can South Africa afford to?

Anthoni van Nieuwkerk is a researcher with the SA Institute of International Affairs.

AIDS: Slick photo-comic set to be hit with youth

ROXY: LIFE, LOVE AND SEX IN THE NINETIES produced by The Story Circle with the Medical Research Council's National AIDS Research Programme and the Progressive Primary Health Care Network.

THIS 'picture thriller', aimed at educating young people about how to avoid AIDS, elevates the photo-comic genre previously typified by titles like 'True Love' to serious (and seriously slick) heights. It is superbly photographed, gallops along in the monosyllables beloved of youth, and delivers its message with precision and panache.

Teenagers are the group most at risk from AIDS in South Africa: the fastest rate of infection occurs among people aged between 15 and 19 years old, and the most heavily infected population is aged between 20 and 24 years old. This is the group 'Roxy' aims to reach.

The comic is the stylish result of extended collaboration between artists, researchers

and the target group - the youth. It is a story woven together from high school students' facilitated explorations of their own lives, relationships, needs, concerns, fears and misconceptions about AIDS.

By SHAUNA WESTCOTT

Embedded in the story are little pockets of vital information - kissing is safe, anal sex is not, 'the best thing is always to have safer sex with a condom', and so on. The story was tested at various stages of its development and changes were made - mainly to dialogue - to make it more authentic.

Preliminary research has vindicated this approach, with young people of all sorts relating to and identifying with characters and situations in the comic. This was evident at a press conference about 'Roxy' attended by some of the students who



helped create it.

'Most of my friends are interested in this book,' said one student. 'There's pressure on us to be sexually active. We need to be informed before we make mistakes. Roxy's in our language, not boring grown-up stuff,' said another.

'My parents never spoke to me about this stuff - most of us had the same prob-

lem,' was another comment, and 'We never used to talk about this stuff but we found it's not bad to speak about it. We started being open and honest and compassionate with each other'.

Predictably, however, 'Roxy' has upset many parents and teachers, who find it too explicit or 'not educational'. An illustration at the back of the comic showing how a condom should be used is one of the things that has offended these adults, as have references to anal and oral sex, to drugs and to teenagers smoking.

The creators of 'Roxy' are thinking about producing media for parents that would address these concerns and help them on how to speak to their children about sex and AIDS. This would be an addition to the educational package about AIDS of which 'Roxy' is a part. The package includes a video, a classroom-based curriculum, and a teacher's training manual.

'Roxy' - the one component of this package that can go directly to teenagers without adult mediation - will be an insert in the June issue of 'Upbeat'. It will also be carried by provincial libraries and, the producers hope, by corner shops and youth organisation resource centres.

Shauna Westcott is a freelance journalist and editor based in Cape Town.

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