

My Vision for South Africa

By Mangosuthu G. Buthelezi

Sometimes it behooves one to pause and look at things in broad perspectives. On this present trip to the United States, I am very aware how history has swayed back and forth and how history has picked up and dropped that which men fought about so desperately.

In the broadest perspective, there was the colonial era, there was the occupation of regions of South Africa by Britain, there was the march into the interior by frontiersmen conquering and taking land wherever they went. Then there was the Act of Union which gave the invaders and the colonialists and the settlers and the new generation of South African-born and -bred whites, the sole right to rule.

All this was typical of what was happening in the rest of the world where colonialism conquered and established control over foreign places.

Then the world started to move and South Africa started to stand still. During the first half of this century there was a gathering momentum of anti-colonial forces working to rid countries of foreign control and minority white government.

The 1960s saw sweeping changes in Africa and there was Mr. Harold Macmillan making his Winds of Change speech in South Africa. And the world, which was beginning to support the decolonization process, started to react with stricken Western consciences leading the way in pouring scorn on South Africa continuing to do what the West was abandoning.

The internal struggle against racism and apartheid in South Africa began gathering momentum in sympathy with decolonization trends everywhere else. There was a taste of victory in the air; there was anticipation of liberation to come and as the years wore on, impatience turned to militancy.

The newly converted are always more ardent than those long since converted. Countries which abandoned colonialism were eager to support the fight against racism and minority government in South Africa. International platforms were opened up to all who protested against apartheid, and in the United Nations and other international forums, the West was forced to speak loudest amongst all against apartheid.

Decades of Opposition. And then there were the long decades of the growth of opposition to apartheid in South Africa in the sixties and seventies. All the world saw was increasing opposition to apartheid and increasing recalcitrance by successive National Party governments, which spurned world opinion and set about generating the forces of repression which made apartheid the most hideously systematic form of racist oppression in the world.

And there was great, great indignation. There was anger. There was a shaking of fingers, turning to the shaking of fists. And there was increasing sympathy for those who were seen to

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He spoke at The Heritage Foundation on June 19, 1991.

ISSN 0272-1155. © 1991 by The Heritage Foundation.

be brave and militant and reckless even in the fierceness with which they rejected apartheid and fought against it.

The world wanted action and praised every action simply because it was action against apartheid. In South Africa itself, action against apartheid, and the conflict it produced, began calling for more and more strident politics.

More Military. And then there was the idealization of confrontation and conflict and even violence. Ever since the mid-1970s, after those fateful events in Soweto on June 16, 1976, the cry was for more militancy, and confrontation ripened the circumstances in which black politics moved away from being constituency-bound to becoming celebrity-bound. Media began creating leaders by acclaiming strident action. Committees were formed to form committees to form committees yet again to elect and re-elect leaders.

And the government of South Africa fuelled the flames of conflict and escalated violence by crushing opposition with ever-increasing brutality to match rising militancy.

And the world – which started pointing fingers and which had moved to shaking fists – began to seek strangleholds over the South African government to force the life out of apartheid. And the people suffered. Scores, hundreds, and indeed thousands, of young black South Africans were used as cannon fodder. I will never forget a remark made by an African National Congress (ANC) leader in the mid-1970s who was taxed with using children as cannon fodder and bringing people out of South Africa, giving them some kind of rudimentary training and sending them back knowing that they were going to be arrested because they were attempting the impossible. The remark was that there are casualties in war and most of the casualties of war are always the innocent.

And in the world there was the view that apartheid could not be reformed, that democracy would have to be wrung out of Whites who would not relinquish their positions of privileged power. The total disbelief that reform would come from within was there in everything which everybody said at the United Nations, at UNESCO, at the World Health Organization, at the International Labor Organization and in every other U.N. agency.

Rhetoric sharpened in the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and there was an adding to the great international outcry by the OAU and non-aligned countries. There was a global condemnation of apartheid with a global disbelief that the end of apartheid would be brought about by the internal struggle.

Grass Roots Resistance. In all this there were the hundreds of thousands of black South Africans who were daily opposing apartheid fiercely, where they lived, where they worked. They were opposing apartheid in their twos and threes, in their tens and twenties – in their hundreds and in their thousands. They were opposing apartheid where it mattered most – on the ground in South Africa.

But they were out of the world limelight. The focus was not on that which the world believed could not happen. The focus was on the drama, the militancy, the anger and the preparation for revolution.

And to all this there was added European countries coming together to produce a harsh stand against South Africa. And there was the coming together of all the countries in the Commonwealth to produce harsh stands against South Africa.

It was just not understood that this harshness and the sanctions against South Africa which flowed from it, and the support for the politics of confrontation, added to the burden of the poorest of the poor in the country and immeasurably increased the difficulty with which these poorest of the poor were fighting apartheid where they were in their poverty-stricken lives.

And then, perhaps at the height of the disbelief that reform would come from within, and at the height of the clamor for international support against apartheid to take the form of supporting punitive measures and confrontationalism in politics, there was the height of confrontationalism inside South Africa. The United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions emerged and the world clapped and applauded and the South African government acted more harshly than ever.

Proving the World Wrong. And then on February 2, 1990, the whole world was proved wrong. Apartheid was going to be reformed from within. In a matter of weeks the world began to see dramatic developments taking place. Mr. Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners were released, banned organizations were unbanned, and suddenly South Africa was open and free to all political parties of all political persuasions.

The world was astounded to see Mr. Mandela and revolutionaries being given freedom and handed on a platter that which they told the world they would have to die for. Their suffering earned their release. They deserved their release, but the ANC did not free them from jail.

We are still in the shock waves of international reaction to the drama of what is taking place in South Africa. There is still a lot of sifting out to do. And I believe that there is a lot of re-analysis and re-thinking to do.

The radical changes taking place in South Africa now are not the fruits of revolutionary activity. They are not the fruits of confrontationalism. Everything of course in the end helped in one way or another. I am not saying that violence and the threat of violence played no role. I am not saying that sanctions and international anger played no role. All I am saying is that the magnitude of what is happening in South Africa cannot be accounted for simplistically.

That which the world did not see happening in South Africa produced a new South Africanism which is now coming to the fore. Institutionalized South Africa is shaking apartheid and laying the foundations for a post-apartheid democracy. It was not revolutionaries who turned all organized mining, commerce, banking and industry to withdraw support for apartheid and to begin employment practices and to evolve business philosophies which were practices and philosophies preparing them for a race-free, multi-party democracy to come.

Sports institutions across the length and breadth of South Africa began moving towards the condemnation of apartheid and step by step sports administrators removed apartheid from their games and their tournaments and their organizations.

Role of Religion. In the things that were happening, the world would not recognize, and did not recognize, that there was the development of religious institutions in South Africa moving against apartheid. It was not revolutionaries who made the man in the pew say "no" to apartheid. It was the suffering of Black people. It was Black people themselves and it was growing realization among Whites, Indians and Coloreds that the society we had was wrong.

And then, of course, there was Christianity at work in society at large. There was the witness of great Christians and their suffering as they were penalized for their beliefs. And then

there was the continued defense of the valued liberal traditions that there have always been in opposition to apartheid.

And the country's legal institutions turned to say "no" to apartheid. But they were not taught how to say "no" by revolutionaries, they were taught to say "no" by the ugliness of apartheid which they saw all around them. Lawyers saw the consequences of apartheid in terms of human suffering and they said no to it.

And in all the country's institutions of learning there was a growing intellectual revolt against apartheid and what it meant to man and society.

And then there was also the man in the street experience. Apartheid could not keep Blacks out of the economy. Apartheid could not keep Blacks out of the cities. Apartheid could not keep Blacks out of sports. Wherever Whites went, they watched Blacks arriving where they were alone before.

And they learned that the sky did not fall down on their heads when apartheid signs were removed from post offices and park benches. That which the economy was mixing was being assimilated by politics. South Africa is a scrambled egg which cannot be unscrambled and Whites saw this and knew that they had to react rationally.

Of course in the end there were vested interests playing their role. Whites saw total destruction ahead if apartheid continued. They saw that there would be nothing left if violence continued to escalate to the point where there would be a Black/White all-out war with both sides adopting scorched earth policies against the other.

There was a witnessing in South Africa to what happened elsewhere in Africa. And finally the perception grew that the Ian Smith option of fighting to the last would leave Whites with a Lancaster House option of negotiating about the handing over of power to Blacks.

Call of Patriotism. And then there was the more powerful – and perhaps even all-powerful – call of patriotism. White South Africans are indigenous Africans. They have nowhere to go. They have to make South Africa a place they can live in. To do so they have to destroy apartheid. White South Africans who want to live in South Africa – and they all do – will want to have a say in the government of the future even if they do not monopolize power in the future. And so the option of rejecting the Ian Smith choice of fighting to the last began to be more attractive.

And White South Africa has made the jump across the chasm which the whole world thought was impossible. There is White backing for Mr. F.W. de Klerk. Whites want now to negotiate a new deal for everybody. They want now to establish a government under which everybody will be prepared to live.

All the fighting can end and all the calls for revolution are dying down. There is now the licking of wounds, there is still the distrust and there are still the fears that things will go wrong. There is, however, now opportunity and hope. And courage can now turn hope to reality.

Politics in South Africa is not going to be the system versus the rest. Politics in South Africa is going to be all about the extent to which political parties can gather the institutional support that they will need and gather the support of ordinary South Africans that they will need to win elections.

That is, in broad perspective, another way of looking at South Africa, and I ask you all to look at South Africa in that way and re-think American foreign policy toward South Africa; re-examine American perceptions; tease out the implications of the fact that what now is happening in South Africa was regarded as impossible, and it was that perception of the impossibility of reform from within which determined American policy.

