Vulnerability and viability of small states in Southern Africa in a post-apartheid era: is South Africa still "Big Brother?"

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The dramatic political changes in South Africa since the 1994 general election coupled with the global changes that have swept the world political economy with the collapse of the socialist bloc countries compel us to re-think and redefine regional relations in Southern Africa. The old inter-state relations were marked by heavy influences of both Cold War and Apartheid and were consequently confrontational. The gun-boat diplomacy and distabilsation of the time effectively turned regional relations into a zero-sum game. The emerging new regionalism seems to be characterised by a positive-sum economic cooperation and a mutually beneficial diplomatic engagement among states of the region. This notwithstanding, hierarchical power relations still drive the process of inter-state cooperation and this attests to South Africa's continued hegemony over its neighbours: a phenomenon which is more glaring in South Africa's multi-faceted relations with Lesotho and Swaziland.

Introduction

A lively debate around the likely scenarios of South–Southern Africa relations in the post-apartheid era emerged during the late 1980s. Although unfortunately the momentum of this debate seems to have steadily fizzled off, the content of that discourse still remains useful to our understanding of South–Southern African relations three years after a major political change in South Africa. It is imperative, therefore, to map out various scenarios of regional relations which formed the linchpin of that debate and try to assess the relationship of those scenarios to the current pattern of South–Southern Africa relations. This will be the first task of this paper. It will introduce four scenarios that scholars had projected would shape post-apartheid South-Southern Africa relations: (a) a neo-mercantilist approach to regional cooperation; (b) hegemonic bilateralism; (c) state-driven, but market-friendly, multilateral arrangements based on cooperative regionalism and; (c) South Africa adopting an isolationist attitude towards the region and stregthening its vertical integration with the industrialised countries of the North.

It will be argued that the current situation manifests a curious admixture of all these scenarios and as a result South Africa continues to send mixed signals to its neighbours regarding its regional policy. South Africa sends contradictory messgages towards Southern Africa due to lack of unanimity on regional policy among various players such as South African business, labour, political parties, Departments of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs, Trade and Industry, Defense etc. The confusion is even more glaring with respect to South Africa's relations with its smaller and poorer neighbours: notably Lesotho and Swaziland.

Small states are usually vulnerable to the actions, policies and strategic interests of powerful actors in international relations. This has been the pervasive trend of interstate relations during the Cold War; and still is the dominant norm of the current post-Cold War world system. One writer argues that the logic of orthodox international relations is that the "powerful do what they want while the weak do what they can" (Sejanamane, 1991:16). Small states in Southern Africa have not escaped this domination-subordination syndrome in both their dealings with the outside world as well as their

interactions with South Africa—which has played a patronising and partenalistic role of a "big brother" in the region for decades. This has clearly affected the economic viability of these states. It influences the content, context and pattern of their foreign policies. It has a bearing on the security architecture of the region. More importantly, it exposes the vulnerability of these states; reduces their viability as autonomous sovereign states; thus leading to a deep-seated existantial crisis that most of them are now brutally confronted with (Vale and Matlosa, 1995).

The second task of this essay is to explore these vexed, and indeed daunting, challenges facing small states in Southern Africa. It seeks to address two simple questions: (a) Is South Africa still "Big Brother"? and (b) what are the possible futures of these states in the context of rapid changes in both the regional political landscape and world politics? In order to provide the necessary details and avoid sweeping generalisations, the paper focuses on the experiences of Lesotho and Swaziland: the smallest states in the region.

Scenarios on regional relations in a post-apartheid era

The heated debate around post-apartheid regional relations in Southern Africa produced four broad scenarios which informed the likely attitude of South Africa, as a dominant power, towards its neighbours. All the scenarios revolved around whether or not South Africa would become part of the region and attempt to redress the past imabalances or would maintain existing inequities and exploit them to its advantage. This debate further probed into the possibility of South Africa turning its back against the region and attempting, instead, to carve a new niche by strengthening its relations with the industrialised countires of the North. A sketchy review of each of these scenarios is provided in the next section.

Neo-mercantilism.

This option which was/is espoused by South African capital, some officials within the Departments of Trade and Industry, Foreign Affairs and Defence and conservative politicians advocates that South Africa's foreign policy towards the region should be driven by its self-serving business and security interests. The present inequalities between South Africa and the region wrought by the historical pattern of capitalist penetration and the legacy of apartheid would remain the order of the day since it benefits the former. This option, according to some analysts:

> would involve South Africa acting to promote its own partisan and immediately evident interests, while remaining resistant to the needs and demands of the rest of the region, and indifferent to longer term implications of reproducing or exacerbating existing imbalances or inequities (Davies et al, 1993:72).

South Africa's commitment towards regional organisations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and regionalism based on mutual interdependence would be more formal than real. A narrow chauvanistic approach would characterise South Africa's attitude towards regional trade, transport and telecommunication networks, energy supply and demand, security issues and migrant labour. This inward-looking regional policy would mean that South Africa's foreign relations are propelled by pure business and security concerns rather than broader regional interests. This so-called `new diplomacy' holds that the South African flag should follow business and security interests of that country. This raises a fundamental question whether South Africa will develop as an integral part of or apart from Africa. As South Africa expands its economic reach in Africa, it is argued, bilateral, rather than multilateral, arrangements that perpetuate and reproduce its regional hegemony would be an appropriate approach that would maximise expected gains. This

quantitative approach towards South Africa's regional policy also prefers a market-driven scheme of regional interaction. This is a well-known global neo-liberal project which propounds the supremacy of market forces over state management of national and regional resouces as well as in areas of regional cooperation. The neo-mercantilist approach, therefore, neatly dovetails with the neo-liberal project hatched for the Southern Africa region by both the bilateral donors and multilateral financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (see Tsie, 1996 for details). Whether consciously or unwittingly, some aspects of this option have become part of the current stock-in-trade of South Africa's regional policy since the inception of a new government in 1994, despite their obvious deleterious consequences for mutual interdependent regionalism (see Davies *et al.*, 1993:72-73). The recent study of the African Development Bank on regional integration in Southern Africa unequivocally advocates the hegemonic neo-mercantilist route for South-Southern African interactions (African Development Bank, 1993).

Hegemonic bilateralism.
This approach is not qualitatively at variance with the first one above. Its proponents advocate maintenance and reproduction of existing patterns of regional relations that are generally skewed in favour of South Africa. However, this second route would, in contrast to the first, entail "a greater degree of sensitivity of immediate needs and demands of the rest of the region, but would tend to be rather lukewarm about making commitments to a regional programme or regional organisations" (Davies *et al.*, 1993:73). Bilateral deals that strengthen South Africa's hegemonic hold over the region would serve more the commercial interests of South African capital than a broad regional reconstruction and development which is the primary task of post-apartheid Southern Africa. It is no wonder therefore that the main proponents of this path are business organisations in South Africa. Such an approach would clearly undermine multilateral arrangements such as SADC and SACU as regional issues are tackled through bilateral talks and agreements. It would also undermine the cohesion of the poorer states as they deal with the powerful and dominant South African economy. This approach will amount to exploitative or malign regionalism whereby

> the primary objective of South Africa is to siphon surplus from the regional periphery [..] to itself as the regional centre. South Africa as an exploitative hegemon will relate to its fellow partners on an individual basis, leading to the relations within the region mainly being multiple bilaterals (Oden et al, 1995:7)/

Such a path will largely serve South Africa's mercantile and strategic interests above all else and would surely fail to address the teething social problems of the region. It could, in fact, increase regional disparities and inequities. As Oden et al argue, "[t]he political economy perspective of this scenario has significant similarities with the CONSAS-project launched by the apartheid government in the late 1970s, albeit without the apartheid content" (Oden et al, 1995:7).

State-driven multilateral interdependence.
In this approach, South Africa would develop as an integral part of and not apart from Southern Africa. It would become a benevolent hegemon actively involve with the rest of its neighbours in tackling a panoply of obstacles towards regional development and reconstruction after apartheid. In this manner, South Africa would use its regional hegemony and domination not against, but to the benefit of its neighbours. This scenario is summed up by Oden et al in the following words:

.South Africa as a benign hegemon would be prepared to provide a regime that is aiming at a more balanced regional development. The short term interests of South African economic forces are tempered in favour of a regionalisation strategy which takes all interdependent—albeit asymmetric—relations into consideration. Although the South African dominance inevitably creates a hegemonic position, the relations between the countries will have a more genuine multilateral character than in the exploitative regionalisation scenario. As the benevolent hegemonic regime is of mutual benefit for all countries in the region, the other states are also prepared to accept South African hegemony (1995:7-8).

This perspective is cognizant of the fact that South Africa cannot prosper in a Southern Africa still plagued by disease, hunger, poverty, and political instability. Leistner raises a cogent argument that "unsettled conditions in nearby countries directly affect South Africa through streams of refugees, the spreading of diseases, the smuggling of arms and narcotics" (1995:55). Kibble supports this observation and argues, in his own words, that "it would be difficult... to have a stable Southern Africa in which a ring of poverty-stricken states surround a prosperous South Africa" (1996:17). A mutually beneficial effort towards redressing regional inequities among Southern African states in which South Africa plays a role is clearly in the interest of both South and Southern Africa.

This option, therefore, advocates a state-driven qualitative transformation of the domination-subordination syndrome that remains a central feature of the region's underdevelopment. It was propounded by, inter alia, the South African liberation movements, labour unions and the Southern African Development Community. This approach recognises that South Africa cannot be a locomotive for economic growth in the region, yet at the same time cannot passively watch as econimic malaise and political decay threaten the very social fabric of its neighbours with dire consequences for its own domestic situation. Deliberate state policies which are market-friendly should inform and shape regional intgration if mutual interdependence is to be ensured and imbalances redressed. In rejecting the dichotomy drawn by the neo-liberals between state and markets, Tsie argues persuasively that the two mechanisms could be used in a complementary fashion to build sustainable regional integration. He concludes that "selective and coordinated state intervention is a necessary condition for economic growth and social development in the SADC region" (1996:75). Other critics of the neo-liberal school have dismissed the utility of the market versus state approach in the analysis of and policy intervention on Africa's development problems. Mengisteab and Logan advocate an appropriate mix of state and markets in socio-economic development and propose as follows:

> ... the distortions of African economies by past policies are not correctable by the market sysytem alone. As long as large segments of the population are marginalised, allocation of resources via the market remains essentially elitist, serving the interests of the better-off minority and relegating the transformation of the subsistence sector to the trickle-down process. Contrary to the prescriptions of the liberalization school, the market mechanism is therefore unlikely to be a panacea for Africa's economic crisis (1995:175).

The qualitative transformation of regional relations, therefore, is a direct anti-thesis of the neo-liberal project in Southern Africa. It is not surprising that the new government in South Africa has adopted some features of this approach in its relations with the neighbouring states. In adopting some elements of this approach, South Africa attempts to avoid any perception that it "has become the regional bully or `big brother'" (Heitman, 1996:135). In its own White Paper on Reconstruction and Development Programme, the South African government declares that

We cannot build the South African economy in isolation from its Southern African neighbours. Such a path would benefit nobody in the long run. If South Africa attempted to dominate its neighbours, it would restrict their growth, reducing their potential as markets, worsening their unemployment and causing increasing migration to South Africa (cited in Oden et al, 1995:11).

The isolationist path.

In this scenario, South Africa would be less inclined towards solving regional problems, but would aggressively pursue an economic path that deepens its links with the industrialised countries of the North, especially Europe and North America. In this way, South Africa would only treat Africa as a commercial backyard without any commitment towards a regional programme of reconstruction and development because it would see its destiny far beyond the confines of Southern Africa. Some argue that the on-going negotiations between South Africa and the European Union on the trade agreement may be reflective of the 'isolationist' thinking within the South African government. The South African trade and tariff laws that are deliberately disciminatory towards products from its neighbours, which have in fact pitted it in an embarrasing tussle with Zimbabwe, may also be reminescent of the "isolationist" tendency. Recently, South Africa, through its Home Affairs Department, passed a new policy to control entry of foreigners into its borders which was put into effect on the 1st July 1996. This new policy makes it extremely difficult for peoples from the neighbouring countries to enter that country who are now made to purchase visas if they intend to visit for over 30 days. This visa system is imposed on South Africa's neighbours despite the fact that most of them are members of the Commonwealth together with South Africa. In contrast European visistors, tourists and business people are completely exempted from the visa restrictions. This is another case that points towards 'isolationist' tendency that is blended with xenophobia in a new South Africa. In the meantime, South Africa remains reluctant to accept and sign the SADC Protocol on Free Movement of Persons across borders through-out the region. Part of the explanation for this has to do with hightened xenophobia and the isolationist tendency in that country.

Part of the confusion that marks inter-state relations in Southern Africa today is explicable by the fact that South Africa sends signals that are drawn from all the scenarios outlined above. In other words South Africa does not have a unified single vision of how it hopes to contribute to a regional programme of reconstruction and development. The rest of other states in the region also do not have a common perspective and programme which would bind South Africa to a multilateral development programme. They seem inclined to strike bilateral deals with the region's hegemon and South Africa is able to exploit this competing interests by SADC members for preferential treatment. The next section demonstrates the dilemma confronting South Africa in terms of its new role in the region. It argues that although South Africa still remains a "big brother", it ought to exercise its regional power in a benign rather than malign fashion to ensure mutual interdependence.

South-Southern Africa relations in perspective

Two critical phenomena that influenced South-Southern African relations at least until the 1990s were the Cold War and apartheid. There is no gainsaying that major inter- and intra-state conflicts of that time had a Cold War dimension. Vivid examples here include the protracted and costly wars in Angola and Mozambique. Superpowers on both sides of the ideological divide had their [un]fair share of the conflict in these countries (Chaliand, 1982; Crocker, 1992). The liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa and the South African response to them were also cast in a Cold War mold to a considerable degree. Of course, this was part of the campaign by the belligerent

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parties (i.e. the liberation movements on the one hand and the apartheid state on the other) to win international allies on their sides. At the regional level, South African destabilisation wreaked havoc on those of its neigbours who opposed apartheid and supported the liberation struggle. The immense costs of South Africa's regional war of aggression in terms of foregone economic advancement and human suffering by the affected states is well-known.

Not all Southern African states were subjected to South Africa's military and economic aggression. Those perceived as 'soft targets' were given incentives to win them over and dissuade them from supporting the liberation movements which were dubbed proxies of the communist expansion. These included Swaziland and Malawi. These were the conservative states which South Africa perceived as potential allies in its total war against the "communist-inspired" total onslaught. The "moderate states" (Botswana, Lesotho and Zambia) were subjected to a curious mixture of South Africa's carrot and stick tactics, i.e. accommodation and aggression. The marxist inclined states—"the hard targets"—were considered the prime enemy and were spared the larger share of South Africa's "total national strategy". These included Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe (Hanlon, 1986a; Hanlon, 1986b; Jaster, 1985; Johnson and Martin, 1986; Chan, 1992). These trends of regional interaction, no doubt, adversely affected the economic advancement/cooperation and political stability/cooperation among states. Furthermore, South Africa constituted a dominant economic power and a principal security threat in the region. This explains why during the heyday of apartheid South Africa was commonly referred to as the "Big Brother" who had the audacity and capacity to throw his weight against his "tiny neighbours" with impunity.

The above observations suggest that the South-Southern Africa relations during the era of apartheid and Cold War were more conflictual than cooperative. This was a wide-ranging conflict that pitted South Africa against its neighbours until dramatic changes globally and inside South Africa itself transformed the political and security complex of Southern Africa away from confrontation towards engagement and reconciliation (Ohlson and Stedman, 1994). Now that the Cold War and apartheid have disappeared, regional relations have changed for the better: cooperation has replaced confrontation, diplomacy has taken the place of aggression and suspicion among states has been replaced by mutual trust. The critical question, though, is whether South Africa still remains the "Big Brother" despite the widely acclaimed sea change that led to the demise of the Cold War and apartheid. There is no gainsaying that the image of South Africa *vis-à-vis* the region has changed tremendously. Once considered the primary warmonger in the region, South Africa "is now a potential peacemaker and peacekeeper" (Rotberg, 1995:8).

But South Africa still remains a regional superpower in economic and military terms. First and foremost, basic economic indicators, development index, standard of living, infrastructual/ resource endowment and provision of social services place South Africa far ahead of all its neighbours. Ohlson and Stedman aptly observe that "South Africa dwarfs the region economically and will continue to do so even when the ANC leads the government"(1994:265). The total combined Gross National Product (GNP) of the members of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) in 1992, excluding South Africa, was US$28 billion; far below that of South Africa which was US$106 billion (Cilliers, 1996:19). Second, South Africa's military strength and capability also surpasses that of its neighbours. In contrast to its neighbours, South Africa has a large army (regular troops, air force and navy), high-tech ammunition and "a sizable and sophisticated arms industry" (Ohlson and Stedman, 1994:268). South Africa's remarkable arms industry grew under conditions of arms embargo during the apartheid era and is currently "one of the very few outside the major industrial powers with capability to develop complex defence equipment and systems from concept to service" (Heitman, 1996:136).

So while the demise of the Cold War and apartheid has removed the ideological justification for inter-state conflict in Southern Africa, what Ohlson and Stedman refer to as economic and military asymetries may propel new types of conflict in the region. Recently, Venter projected the following scenario:

> A South Africa that exhibits even minimal calm and continuity is likely to remain the dominant force and the major economic, financial, technical and military power in the region, contributing decisively to the sub-continent's security but perpetuiting the existing fears of neighbouring states about its regional preeminence(1996:139).

This points to the difficulty of answering the question whether or not South Africa is still Big Brother. This question cannot be answered definitively either in the affirmative or the negative. What is important to note is that South Africa may remain either a benign or malign "big brother" depending on the balance of political forces (upstairs and downstairs to borrow Peter Vale's concepts) inside that country. Conversely, global and regional politics may also influence South Africa's behaviour towards its neighbours. So we are not dealing here with a simple question of what the South African government desires to do, but rather what endogenous and exogenous circumstances compel it to do. It is also possible, however, that South Africa will shed its Big Brother image of the yesteryear and interact with its neighbours on an equal footing; thus striving towards redressing the present asymetries and building mutual trust and confidence (Chipeta and Davies, 1993). Instead of becoming an equal partner in its interactions with its neighbours, it looks like South Africa is poised to become a benign Big Brother. In order to assure its neighbours that it is committed to developing mutually interdependent regional relations, South Africa ought to act like a benign, rather than an exploitative, hegemon towards its weaker partners. Oden *et al.* argue that "an exploitative hegemon seeks to create a regime that serves its own myopic short run national interests, through the exploitation of fellow partners, while a benign hegemon facilitates the emergence of mutually beneficial relationships" (1995:7). The benevolence of the hegemon, however, does not undermine or contradict its national interest. "On the contrary", these authors contend, "the two may be mutually supportive" (Oden *et al.*, 1995:6). Where does the nature of the inter-relationship between South Africa and its neighbours place the smaller and vulnerable states like Lesotho and Swaziland?

The place of small states in a post-apartheid context
In no other countries has the new South Africa played a role of Big Brother" so succinctly and publicly as in its dealings with the two kingdoms of Southern Africa: Lesotho and Swaziland. This is made possible by a variety of geo-political factors. These two countries, firstly, are almost totally integrated into the South African economy as labour reserves and markets for South African manufactured goods and services. About a decade ago, John Daniel correctly observed that "Lesotho and Swaziland are structurally integrated as dependencies into the South African economy and their survival is heavily dependent upon the `goodwill' of the South African government" (1984:229). This observation remains valid today. Secondly, they lack a self-sustaining domesttic economic base, particularly in the case of Lesotho which depends heavily on external sources of capital formation such as foreign aid, dividents from the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and migrant remittances from the Basotho miners in South Africa. Economic dependency on South Africa, combined with their geo-political location *vis-à-vis* that country, has exposed these countries to extreme susceptibility to the actions of their big neighbour. Thirdly, South Africa views political instability in these countries as a menace to its own stability and thus has been more than ready to intervene diplomatically to resolve their domestic conflicts. Although, this could be interpreted as benign intervention, it has undermined the sovereignty of these countries so severely that even their viability as autonomous states is questioned.

The above points will be demonstrated through a brief discussion of the current relations between South Africa on the one hand and Lesotho and Swaziland on the other at two levels: (a) economic relations; and (b) political/ security relations.

Economic relations: "Big Brother" still calls the shots
The economies of these three countries are inextricably tied together with South Africa being the pivotal centre. The formal institutional arrangements that have kept this system in place and continue to sustain/reproduce it over time are the Southern African Customs Union (SACU) and the Common Monetary Area Agreement (CMA). The former is the longest established regional integration scheme in Africa which was initiated in 1910 by the British colonial power on behalf its three High Commission Territories (now Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland). It effectively linked the economies of the BLS countries and Namibia with South Africa. It has been widely criticised for having distorted economic relations between the BLNS countries on the one hand and that of South Africa on the other. For instance, Kibble *et al.* argue persuasively that SACU has

> contributed to the polarisation of accumulation within Southern Africa due to tough competition from Pretoria in the BLS domestic markets, as having protected inefficient South African industries from cheaper goods outside, deepened the economic and political dependence of the BLS countries on their neighbour and provided a convinient sanction-busting platform. Policy was largely made unilaterally by Pretoria (1995:45).

The Common Monetary Area Agreement (CMA) of 1974 also links the currencies of the Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland to the South African Rand on a one-to-one use and exchange value. Botswana pulled out of CMA in 1976 when it established its independent currency—the Pula. The CMA arrangement tremendously inhibits fiscal discretion and autonomous action on monetary policy on the part of Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia, as weaker partners in league with South Africa.

These two regional cooperation schemes, therefore, have deepened, instead of redressing, regional economic imbalances between South Africa and its weaker neighbours. South Africa's trade constitutes the lion's share of the customs union's

external trade. Besides, "the country's exports to its customs union partners amounted to more than R15 billion in 1993...while imports from these countries totalled 2.7 billion" (Esterhuysen and Lass, 1995:76). Through the CMA, the South African currency, the Rand, dominates the markets of Lesotho and Swaziland, since the latter's currencies are pegged to the Rand. Although the Rand circulates freely in this two countries, the Loti (Lesotho) and Lilangeni (Swaziland) are not considered legal tender in South Africa. Besides, South Africa has entered into bilateral agreements that regulate and control flows of unskilled migrant labour from these countries into its mining industry. It is worth noting, however, that illegal migration continues outside these agreements; and this could spark serious conflicts in the region if not properly tackled. Migration of professional labour to South Africa—"brain drain"—has increased tremendously in the past years. This phenomenon translates into resource drain on the part of Lesotho and Swaziland and resource gain for South Africa. The importance of cross-border migration lies not so much in underlining the degree of economic dependency of Lesotho and Swaziland (and indeed the the entire region) on South Africa. It clearly points to the stark reality that the Southern Africa region is bound together by one single economy delineated by porous borders and weak states. We have developed this argument elsewhere; and a small caption of that is in order:

> As they tried to build nation-states, post-independence governments throughout Africa used coercion to meld together disperate forces within their very haphazard boundaries. The analytic point is as simple as it is brutal: throughout Southern Africa strong methods were used to build weak states (Vale & Matlosa, 1995:36).

Finally, South Africa is undertaking a multi-billion dollar water scheme jointly with Lesotho—the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). The costs and benefits of the project to Lesotho are cloaked in controversy. Some researchers and commentators contend that royalties, electricity, irrigation, tourism and physical infrastructure generated by the LHWP substantially boost the net benefits of Lesotho from the project (Senaoana, 1994). While not necessarily disputing some of the benefits (which are generally considered to be mere palliatives) of the project for Lesotho, others argue that the project deepens Lesotho's hyper-dependency on South Africa which in turn further whitles political sovereignty of the weaker partner (Tsikoane, 1990). The project has a tainted image, argue the critics, given the authoritarian nature of the regimes that concluded its treaty (apartheid in South Africa and military rule in Lesotho). On these grounds, the project suffers a legitimacy crisis. The suggested solution is that the treaty has to be renegotiated to resolve substantive matters such as the tariffs, control over water, excess supply, security etc (Chipeta and Davies, 1993:57).

Since the installation of its "new" government, South Africa has changed some of the above patterns of economic relations. In October 1995, the South African government granted about 90 000 foreign mine migrants residency permits. This was done without prior consultations with the affected countries; and the Lesotho government, more than Swaziland, is in a worse situation in this regard given its heavy reliance on migrant remittances. These migrants will be accorded permanent residence status and will enjoy all rights like any other South African. They also have an option of applying for full citizenship five years after acquiring permanent residence status. That South Africa did not consult its weaker neighbours on this sensitive matter confirms that old habits die hard, as the English aphorism goes; South Africa still acts like a Big Brother towards its weaker neighbours. But the crucial issue is whether such acts, unilateral as they may be, are premised on good faith (benign intent) or bad faith (malign intent). The central thesis of this paper is that while the outrightly malign behaviour characterised inter-state relations during the heyday of apartheid, the current pattern of relations is generally marked by benign actions and behaviour.

The Southern African Customs Union—started in 1910 and subsequently renegotiated in 1969—is on the verge of drastic restructuring. Negotiation aimed at democratising SACU started in November 1994 involving all member countries represented in the Customs Union Task Team (CUTT). The mandate of the CUTT is to review the 1969 Agreement with a view to democratise SACU at three main levels: (a) institutional framework; (b) revenue sharing arrangements and (c) policy. So far South Africa still dominates its weaker partners at all three layers of SACU operations.

The major proposals for restructuring SACU's institutional framework revolve around establichment of a Council of Ministers as the supreme organ of SACU and representative of all members; a Commission comprising Permanent Secretaries/Director-Generals; a Secretariat which will be the executive organ of SACU headed by the Secretary General; and Technical Liaison Committees and a special Technical Committee for Agriculture.

The most controversial aspect of the SACU renegotiations is the revenue sharing formula. The weaker partners argue for the improvement of the revenue sharing arrangements to better compensate them for polarisation. As a way of rectifying the defects of the present compensation formula, a consensus has emerged among the negotiating parties for the establishment of a regional development fund which will aim at

• assisting the countires and their regions in some cases lagging behind in development and/ or experiencing a decline in economic activities as a direct effect of the common economic policies;
• reducing the regional imbalances in terms of economic activities, income, unemployment and education and health services (GOL and ODA, 1996:88).

This fund would be financed through the following sources: (a) a lump sum provided by South Africa to compensate for adverse polarisation effect; (b) subscription by member countries; (c) donor assistance; and (d) soft loans from international development banks (GOL and ODA, 1996:88). The success of this regional fund would form a critical pillar of a regional reconstruction and development programme, so badly needed to turn the economies of the BLNS around. Another pillar could be the establishment of a common labour market or free labour mobility which has been proposed by the Lesotho delegation. Although South Africa agrees with the idea of a regional development fund, it rejects a proposal for free labour mobility on the grounds that the other partners should develop their own economies first and foremost to avoid labour exodus into its economy which has unquestioned comparative advantage.

Negotiations aimed at harmonising members' development policies revolve around industry, agriculature, customs tarrif and competition policies. Part of the harmonisation of industrial policy would be standardisation of labour laws; a single customs tariff for industrial products; and protection of infant industries. As regards agricultural policy, the negotiating parties have agreed that there is a need for a single customs tariff although the uniqueness of each agricultural setting would have to be considered. SACU members have agreed that there is need for a low and uniform external tariff policy, but this will have to take into account the World Trade Organisation rules. On the competition policy, some members argue for selective and flexible state intervention to correct imperfections of the free market system in driving regional integration. In order to address this concern, it has been proposed that a supra-national competition authority, whose rules would apply in respect of SACU market and trading, be established. This authority will also administer disputes between members.

South Africa is also seeking closer economic cooperation with the European Union (EU) which will undoubtedly affect its regional relations within both SACU and SADC. Towards 1994, South Africa announced to both the ACP Council of Ministers and the

Joint ACP-EU Council of Ministers its desire to acquire full Lome membership (Kibble et al, 1995:53). South Africa's application was supported by other ACP members as is the requirement. Kibble et al observe that

> the ACP warmly welcomed South Africa's application, with the Ivorian Minister for raw materials publicly declaring his support for its full membership. ACP support for the application stems from a recognition that it could strengthen the ACP's hand in their current difficult and far-reaching negotiations with the EU. It also reflects the fact that the ACP sees little or no direct trade competition emerging from improved South African access to the EU market (1995:53).

However, the EU rejected South Africa's bid for Lome membership on the grounds that its economic advancement disqualifies equal preferential treatment with other poor ACP countries. South Africa then switched its strategy and engaged the EU in negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The other SACU members are very much aware that whether based on reciprocity or non-reciprocity, a EU-South Africa free trade agreement would shake their current customs and trade regime. The FTA negotiations are also likely to delay the SACU renegotiations. Although the other SACU members wished to become full participants in the EU-South Africa negotiations in order to protect their own interests, this did not come to fruition. They, together with SADC, only participate as observers. The BLNS have suggested that impact analysis studies need to be undertaken in order to fully understand the ramifications of such a free trade agreement on their economies.

Political and security relations: brandishing the stick and dangling the carrot

During the apartheid era, the South African state used political, military and economic coercion ("the stick") to exhort compliance from those neighbours opposed to apartheid and allied to the liberation movements. This strategy was used effectively in Lesotho and ultimately led to a South African-backed military coup that ousted the anti-apartheid government of Leabua Jonathan's Basotho National Party (BNP). It was no wonder that the military junta that emerged collaborated closely with the apartheid regime. The South African state used another strategy to achieve the same result: it advanced economic incentives ("the carrot)" to conservative states to lure them into its camp. In its dealings with Swaziland, the apartheid regime chose this approach. The 1980s land deal and the signing of a security pact between South Africa and Swaziland in 1982 are a clear testimony to this. With the new government now in place, the pattern of political and security relations in Southern Africa has changed.

The South African government no longer uses gun-boat diplomacy which perceives regional politics in zero-sum terms. The furthest it has gone towards applying gun-boat diplomacy was when it threatened to impose economic sanctions against the Lesotho government after the King had toppled a democratically elected government in 1994 (see Matlosa, 1994a; Matlosa, 1994b; Sekatle, 1994; Swatuk, 1995; Gumbi, 1995; Southall and Petlane, 1995). During that political crisis, South Africa also staged military manouevres around its borders with Lesotho. In this manner, it brandished its stick in order to send a clear message to the Lesotho authorities that they better clean their house, lest South Africa got tempted to clean it for them. Domestic resolution of the Lesotho conflict became problematic, thus leading to the direct involvement of regional powers: Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Through their mediation, combined with political agitation by organs of civil society, a settlement was reached and the elected government of Ntsu Mokhehle's Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) was reinstated. Since the signing of that agreement in September 1994, these three states, referred to as the guarantor states in the agreement, still remain the key overseers of peace

and security in Lesotho. This has, no doubt, whittled the country's sovereignty and has, in part, reinforced the calls by various commentators for formal political integration of Lesotho with South Africa. How practicable and viable this option is still remains a moot point. Even more controversial is the suggestion by Ali Mazrui recently that South Africa, as a viable regional power, could intervene by way of recolonising some 'unviable' states purely on humanitarian grounds. He refers to this as benign colonisation to which all dysfunctional and collapsing African states should be subjected to achieve some "kind of Pax Africana based on regional integration or unification of smaller states. Some African countries will simply need to be temporarily controlled by others" (CODESRIA Bulletin, 1995:22). Mazrui's new proposal has been subjected to wide-ranging criticism. The latest of his critics advances a rather cynical, albeit robust, argument in the following words:

> Africa lacks the requisite moral and material resources for its 'recolonisation'. Several millions of her sons have sacrificed their lives to put an end to colonialism and apartheid. Accepting 'recolonisation' would be tantamount to desecrating the tombs of the martyrs (Mangu, 1996:28).

Swaziland, which has been under the grip of authoritarian absolute monarchy since 1973, is currently undergoing changes towards political liberalisation. In January 1996, the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions organised mass demonstrations and strike actions which paralysed the Swazi economy for about two weeks. As was the case with Lesotho earlier, South Africa perceived political turmoil in Swaziland as a threat to its (South Africa) own stability and new-found democracy. The South African government, through President Nelson Mandela, intervened in the Swazi conflict by pursuading King Mswati III to open up the political space for democratic competition. The Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) also applied pressure on King Mswati, as it did with Lesotho's King Letsie III earlier, by threatening that unless the King acceded to democratic demands of civil society, the Union would not handle goods to and from Swaziland. The other major menace was the threat by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank that they would suspend their financial support to the Kingdom if clear measures towards political liberalisation were not put in place. The King held numerous secret and public meetings with President Mandela. In addition other open consultations were held with Mandela, Masire (Botswana) and Mugabe (Zimbabwe) aimed at reaching a viable and durable resolution of the Swazi conflict. Ultimately the King has agreed to lift a ban on political parties and this has resulted in the formation of the Swaziland Democratic Party recently. The King has also set up a constitutional commission to suggest necessary amendments to the constitution which will create room for a multi-party system.

The earlier political conflicts in Lesotho (1994) and Swaziland (1996) re-emerged with equal force in 1997. About 400 members of the Royal Lesotho Mounted Police (RLMP) undertook a mutiny in defiance of a government order to have some of their colleques detained for alleged murder of other police officers in 1995. As was the case with earlier conflict situations, the government went about to seek external assistance especially after the mutineers had dismissed senior officers of the Police Force and siezed the Police headquarters towards by mid February. South Africa had indicated its preparedness to send a police force to quell this disturbance. As a South African news tabloid puts it "crack South African police units specialising in hostage situations were reportedly on standby... to help end the mutiny" (*The Citizen*, Friday 14 February, 1997). However, the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) ended the mutiny just in time to avoid the ambarassment of an intervention by an external force.

In Swaziland, King Mswati III was, once more, put under intense political pressure by the Swaziland Federation of Trade Unions (SFTU) for political reforms during the

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early 1997. The SFTU organised a national strike since February 4 which was suspended on March 2. The demands of the SFTU were the repeal of the 1973 royal decree which banned political parties and the holding of political and trade union meetings; the formation of an interim government of national unity to oversee a transition to democracy; and the drawing up of a new constitution by a democratically elected assembly (*Sunday Times*, March 2, 1997). At the level of inter-state relations, President Mandela continued to implore King Mswati 111 to accede to the demands of the pro-democracy forces. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), also joined hands with SFTU to increase pressure on King Mswati. On March 3, 1997, COSATU mounted a blockade on South Africa-Swaziland borders as part of an economic squeeze on the King to extract favourable political concessions.

Without underestimating the crucial role of internal and other external forces in the resolution of the conflicts in both Lesotho and Swaziland, it can be safely argued that South Africa, given its weight vis-a-vis these Kingdoms, continues to play a pivotal role. The principles of sacrosanctity of territorial integrity, respect for national sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs are fast disappearing from the conduct of the post Cold War international relations. Southern Africa is not an exception to this trend and as such there is no doubt that the powerful forces will intervene in any of the smaller states if such a move guarantees their own stability and economic prosperity. The view that poverty and political instability in Lesotho and Swaziland can potentially derail South Africa's new-found democracy is prevalent in Southern Africa. From this view point it is easy to infer that South Africa's intervention in domestic crises in these countries is not premised on some altruism, but on well calculated national strategic interests. Even the Director-General of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs, Rusty Evans admits that the Lesotho crisis "would have had repercussions for South Africa. The country, therefore, had a specific interest in restoring, or in assisting the Lesotho people to restore, stability" (1995:191). Unlike in the 1980s when South Africa advanced its regional strategic interests through aggression and gun-boat diplomacy, it now pursues them through benign intervention premised on negotiations, consultation and dialogue. Collaboration has replaced confrontation; reconciliation has replaced destabilisation; mutual trust has increasingly dispelled mutual suspicions; and economic cooperation, through the newly formed Southern African Development Community (SADC), has taken the place of economic warfare that has ravaged the region.

Conclusion

The ending of the Cold War and the demise of apartheid have brought about profound transformations of the region's political economy. A sea change occasioned by these developments also affects regional inter-state relations. Although inter-state relations have changed considerably, South Africa still remains a Big Brother, but different from the one that the region lived with in the 1980s. The days of "total national strategy" are over. South Africa's regional distabilisation has been replaced by regional cooperation and diplomatic engagement. Although South Africa still remains a Big Brother, its regional role is driven more by benign intent rather than malign intent of the apartheid era. The benign intent of South Africa's new regional strategy notwithstanding, it is worthnoting that South Africa's foreign policy is informed, first and foremost, by its own strategic interest. The interactions of South Africa with Lesotho and Swaziland in the recent past vindicate the above observation. South Africa's intervention in the internal conflicts of these states has exposed their vulnerability, and most importantly questions their viability as autonomous political entities. While Mazrui, a renowned professor of African Studies, recommends that South Africa should exercise "benign colonisation" of these countries, others think that a negotiated political union of these countries, especially Lesotho and South Africa, could be more desirable than colonisation, however benign.

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