SOME CONCEPTUAL CONCERNS FOR POLICY MAKERS[1]

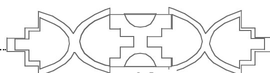
PETER VALE
PROFESSOR OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Implicit in the seemingly benign title of South African Policy on Global Peace Support Efforts are profound philosophical questions which need to be explored. Yet, opening deep-seated lines of enquiry is increasingly unpopular in a world desperately in search of answers. Witness Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia: the long-haul of philosophy and the search for meaning have less and less appeal. This is fed by the communications revolution which hungers for instant gratification. The rapid rise of the sound-bite has sidelined the exploration of underlying structural and philosophical issues which must be grappled with in order to avoid mistakes of the past.

It is obvious that we are at a historical moment of profound undoing. The collapse of the Berlin Wall was the harbinger of a moment in which unravelling - rather than reconstruction - has been the norm. Despite the ascendancy of market approaches to both local and global problems, it is clear that no single thread of argument can explain everything. This is not the 19th Century when Liberalism and Marxism were juxtaposed as the coming universal truths. New ways of explaining the sources and courses of international affairs are increasingly of interest as previously sacrosanct boundaries collapse. Many of these seek to unmake accepted orthodoxies by criticising the ideals of representation, truth, rationality, system, foundation, certainty and coherence which are typical of modern theory or, if preferred, modern explanations. This culture of unmaking is driven by key principles: disintegration, deconstruction, decentralisation, displacement, difference, discontinuity, decomposition, detotalisation, delegitimation.

Traditional international relations is underpinned by important understandings of the nature of man in society. But - and this is the point - it is also underscored by some pretty fundamental values. Chief amongst these was the myth that the most important forces in the world were states. This - the myth of Realism - was perfected into a sterile discourse in strategic studies from the late 1940s until the late 1980s. And it was during that period that a second myth arose - that the notion of security was linked - before all else - to states and that these were somehow as benign as the title of this paper. The state was romanticised - order was privileged over justice through an obsession with strategy above security.

The fact that it was a state which dropped the ultimate weapon - the Atomic Bomb - in the name of peace, does more than shatter two dominant Realist myths. It begins to reveal deeper flaws in the explanations of this world, which



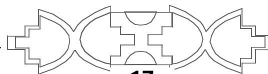
were embedded in a set of values which was at serious odds with the 'facts' of the situation.

Understanding international relations is only possible by looking beyond the narrow world of the soldier and the diplomat. Their world is only one small element in a complex array of relations which are deeply entrenched across the planet. This wider array only surfaces as issues of globalism - as opposed to statism - have been drawn to the fore. Conventional international relations was a top-down exercise which was dominated by white male values in a world in which the majority were black and female. As we try to measure the course of events we must ask more questions than seek answers. Who controls the 'facts' of international relations? Why are some voices - women, blacks, the poor - silenced? Why are we more concerned with 'national interest' than 'human interest', or in this particular context: why is South Africa so keen to support global peace support efforts?

All this is very difficult in contemporary South Africa. Sensation and celebration have - quite rightly - dominated thinking and writing on South Africa for more than a year. And this triumphalism has made it very difficult to understand that embedded deep within the complex psyche of the country is a strategic culture which has not changed. As the state reaches into its collective memory it discovers that routine responses to challenges are more likely than even acknowledgement of the necessity to think long and hard about creative responses. The best - and the worst example - of this is offered by the debate on migration where set bureaucratic responses have failed to generate a coherent policy direction.

Other profound contradictions emerge, including disarmament *versus* the export of arms. These issues - and the emerging concern for them - are testing the ground of what kind of state South Africa is or, more importantly, wants to become. We can become a state like the old Soviet Union. In this guise we will threaten our neighbourhood and, generally speaking, make a nuisance of ourselves in Southern Africa and elsewhere. As we do this, we can - as the Soviet Union did - conduct much of our business in the name of our national interest, even through pious-sounding resolutions at the United Nations. However, we now know that the Soviet Union was a 'weak' state but a strong power. There are other states - Denmark is a good example - which are 'weak' powers but 'strong' states. The test of strong statehood is one of social, political and economic cohesion.

The battleground for South Africa on this matter will be Southern Africa. Certainly, the country's past behaviour suggests that the only way it understands its international relations is in terms of power. In this role, the country will become the regional *hegemon*. This course will be easiest to follow because it will build on the realist assumptions which have driven South African regional policy in the past, and it will draw upon the country's desire to build a nation out of the ashes of apartheid. In the process of reconstruction and development, the military are locating themselves at influential corners of the processes of transformation within the country. Through this, the 'rainbow nation' is equating the military with security and building a new society. Altering this will be difficult because it will rely on changing the paradigms by which we view the world.



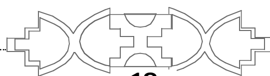
South Africa's neighbours see all this differently. For them South Africa's search for nationhood and security is not necessarily in their interests. Additionally, the instruments which South Africa is using to build its new personality are essentially no different to those which were previously used. So South Africa's security is not synonymous with that of its neighbours. Indeed, as in the past, South Africa's security might well be the insecurity of its neighbours. Again, the debate on migration is one of the best examples. But there are others: does South Africa really believe that exporting arms to the region - in return for hard currency - will make the region any more secure?

South Africa can, alternatively, seek to build the region by foregoing the option of advancing its strategic interests and looking, instead, at the security concerns of the entire neighbourhood. This is infinitely more difficult of course, because it means sharing with neighbours the gains of its struggle as well as its accomplishments. In this guise, South Africa will become the *hope* for the region.

Breaking out of the hegemon/hope dilemma seems impossible until we recognise that the debate itself has to shift from being posed as one of 'state security' to one of 'human security'. This accepts that states may not be the answer to the perennial security conundrum; in contrast, they may be the very essence of the problem. To understand this, the focus must switch from narrow strategic concerns to ones of security. This is easier said than done. But it is possible. Consider for example, how the South African Navy has shifted the underlying arguments which are driving its current interest in Corvettes. The naval strategic argument is waning in favour of an ascending argument which is looking at the environment and food security in the regional context.

All this has a great relevance for this collection of essays. As we look at South Africa's intended policy on global peace support efforts, we must recognise that we cannot come to it 'objectively'. It is for something and for somebody. This is not a particularly revolutionary thought. More than those in any other country, South Africans should acknowledge that we are doing this to serve certain specific interests. Perhaps the most important of these is to test our capacity to deliver on our international promises; because - above all else - we want to honour our global obligations. So, we are doing it for ourselves. Additionally, we should not be shy of admitting that this may or may not - depending on one's viewpoints - be undertaken to secure the retention of military budgets. But there is more: if we are going to be frank about this, we need to understand that what we are doing means something to the lives of people.

It is a small jump from here to recognising that every international action acutely affects the lives of all. It is as much for soldiers and diplomats as it is for peasants and proletarians. But the voices of the latter have been silenced in the dominant narrative which drives thinking about the world. Understanding this frees us to admit that, yes, we ought to try to influence the outcome of events. The idea of studying the world cannot end on library shelves; however, the challenge of studying the world is to change it: to make it a better place for all. What is a better world? Not just more comfortable for politicians or soldiers or diplomats - whatever their hue - but for all. We will not do this if we continue to believe that the future should always mirror the past. South Africans should



understand that the ways of the past must be challenged and unlearned; that alternative futures can be envisaged and forged.

This compels us to focus again on Southern Africa and ask the question: 'What are the limits to engagement?'. Southern Africa has been profoundly touched by what has happened across the world in recent years. No event, however, has affected the region more than the changes which have occurred in South Africa. The conventional way of looking at this change was to argue that the new South Africa had altered only the contours of orthodox state-to-state relations. True, that region was now very different but that the nature and scope of strategic interactions were not. But is this true?

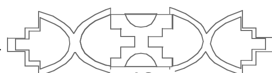
The answer, it seems, is no. The deep-rooted causes of conflict in South Africa have increasingly little to do with the inter-state level and more to do with the pathologies of states themselves. Will they collapse? As they do, what does this mean for the overall health of the region?

Of course, there is an inter-state dimension to regional conflict. But the measure of this is not what we regularly understand in international relations. Indeed, the very opposite is taking place. In this 'new' genre of conflict, a new kind of 'sovereignty' is arising and the absence of sovereignty as we know it is becoming the contested ground. So weapons, contraband and narcotics are leaking between countries. And - far, far more importantly - people are no longer obeying the accepted rules of international conduct. They are simply moving between the sacred borders of the past or, more probably, they treat these borders as though they no longer exist. States are responding to these in generally accepted ways: turn on the electric fences, deport, establish a myriad of protocols. But it seems from the evidence that people are ignoring them. Southern Africa's people are on the march, like never before.

The framing of the regional security debate in the 1990s has been almost exclusively within the 'realist' paradigm. Shifting conventional truths is not easy because, as we have seen, they are deeply lodged within the institutional memory of the state. They are as much part of the state as the furniture of a government office or the khaki which adorns military vehicles. But quite obviously, things have changed at the macro-strategic level - the orthodox strategic rationale of the South African state collapsed along with the Soviet Union. Where do militaries turn now for sustenance? And what do politicians do as they look around for answers?

This is where the issues of 'peacekeeping' and 'preventive diplomacy' have entered the scheme of things. They are the response - new and now very technical answers - to the deep-seated crisis in strategic studies in particular and international relations in general. Their utility is premised on the assumption that states are, and will continue to be, the primary structures of the international system. The fact that most of the evidence points in the opposite direction makes no impact on this new article of diplomatic faith in the late-20th Century.

In the region, South Africa will have to mix intervention and non-intervention; leadership and followership. These are not easy traits for late-Victorian near-authoritarian states to learn. Their approach to questions of law and order



- implicit in all squabbles over sovereignty - are to be found in rigidity rather than flexibility. Their reaction to what E.H. Carr called "i*nternational trouble-makers*" - *viz.* those who do not agree with them - was conflict and war. This is what destabilisation of Southern Africa was all about. But we do not face an ordinary situation in the region: Lesotho ad Zaire are two sides of the same devaluing coin. We can bring peacekeeping and preventive diplomacy to both but we will not solve the existential crises which they face together and separately.

So here is the tactical point of all this. Engaging the debates around these issues is, at once, futile (as I have tried to suggest) and fertile. The latter derives from the space created by the opening of the debate: room for alternative proponents to manoeuvre. These are the first policy responses by governments to the ending of the Cold War, and as such, they are new footholds for debates to engage questions of human destiny in an increasingly complex international society on the eve of the 21st Century. This is not subversive, revolutionary of radical: it accepts that - if nay real - answers have been provided to perennial questions in times of great crisis. The inventions which we discuss should aim to change political outcomes; this should also be the aim of critical social science.

1This essay was rewritten by Sulona Reddy from notes presented at the 17/18 May seminar on South African Policy on Global Peace Support Efforts, Cape Town.

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