

BOTHA'S BABYLON AND THE BIG BRAWL: REFLECTIONS ON THE WAY THAT THE REGIME OF PW BOTHA VIEWED THE INTERNATIONAL ANTI-APARTHEID CAMPAIGN

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the early 1980s violent political conflict erupted across South Africa. The violence soon developed a dynamism, which seemed irrevocable as it hammered on with unprecedented intensity. Centering mainly around those forces in favour of the political status quo and those against it, apartheid's violent crisis quickly caught the eyes and ears of the world. The international anti-apartheid movement lobbied across the globe in an attempt to end the carnage that was the apartheid crucible. Spurred on by the anti-apartheid movement the international community gave expression to their contempt for apartheid and that which it symbolized through a wide variety of anti-apartheid measures.

As the international anti-apartheid campaign reached one climax after the other during the 1980s, the minority regime of PW Botha tried desperately to ward off these growing pressures. The regime, while dependent on the global community, started to increasingly take on a laager attitude and regarded the anti-apartheid movement with utter contempt. Declaring in August 1985 that the outside world should not "push us too far" the regime regarded foreign critics and anti-apartheid groupings abroad with defiance and loathing. Utilizing its Total National Strategy the regime employed a variety of tactics - some public, others covert - in an attempt to elude, coerce and or suppress international interest in and or access to the apartheid crisis of the 1980s.

The regime did not regard most of the anti-apartheid sentiment to be indicative of their political status quo as being abhorred; instead they concluded that it was all the result of a massive global conspiracy - a plot aimed, not against apartheid, but against South Africa itself. In reaction the minority regime constructed an elaborate

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strategy. This so-called Total Strategy determined how the apartheid government would manage their politics in the 1980s. According to this strategy the anti-apartheid campaign was merely a front for a highly sophisticated economic and psychological war waged against the country. In many ways the Total Strategy made the total anti-apartheid campaign an all-enveloping scapegoat for all its woes. The article will focus on relevant aspects of the Total Strategy: the regime's attitude towards a growingly hostile world. Space does not allow for in-depth analysis; nonetheless the incidents and sentiments referred to are indicative of the greater historical process and theme under discussion.

2. TOTAL STRATEGY

"It was not a race war! It was a war against Cuban and Russian communism. There is not such a thing as hatred between the Afrikaner and blacks..."² said the former State President, PW Botha, during a private discussion with the writer. More than a decade after the Berlin Wall had crumbled, bringing the whole Russian empire crashing down with it; and more than ten years after his tenure as State President of South Africa had come to an equally dramatic end, PW Botha is still steadfastly rigid when discussing the concept of Total Onslaught. "I predicted that there was a Total Onslaught against South Africa. I said so in parliament - there is a Total Onslaught, psychological, political, economic and military. And I said that we should develop a Total Strategy against it...In the eighties the onslaught against South Africa was bigger than before. It was an onslaught that manifested itself in South Africa, in Angola, in the fall of the Portuguese regions and was inflamed by international powers..."³

The genesis of the total onslaught, as perceived by the Nationalists, and the motivation for the formulation of a national total strategy both lies in the political changes of the 1960s and '70s. Already then the Nationalist Prime Minister, Dr HF Verwoerd, made his Minister of Defence, PW Botha, attentive to the calamities the future might hold for the country. According to Botha, Verwoerd expected South Africa to come under pressure and warned him to be vigilant in safeguarding the Republic.⁴ Verwoerd also stated, on numerous occasions, that South Africa's white minority had to realize that they would, eventually, stand alone in their politics: "Die witman moet hom handhaaf oral waar hy is, solank as moontlik...Aan ons almal is dit duidelik gemaak dat ons wat hierdie sake betref, op onself aangewese is...dat die witman, al staan hy alleen, nie gaan padgee nie...Die witman van Afrika is egter intussen op sy eie gelaat...Oms moet helder en reguit wees. Die

² J-A Stemmet private collection: Interview with PW Botha. 13 October 2000.

³ **Ibid.**

⁴ **Ibid.**

sentiment van 'n statebond of van 'n monargie, die gedagte dat ons sal beskerm en verdedig word, geld nie op hierdie terrein nie."⁵ As far as the minority regime was concerned all these crises and the growing anti-apartheid sentiments of the international community were indicative of a very real and global conspiracy.

In its theoretical basis, Gen. Magnus Malan's definition concurs with Botha's view. In a 1996 interview with **Playboy Magazine** he defined a total onslaught as follows: "A total onslaught is where you use all your power together to obtain your objective. For instance, if you want to conquer a country you do it through physical power, through economic means, political means, all the means you have to achieve your objective."⁶ Although the understanding of the premise of a total war per se was not unique to the minority Government, what was unique was their finer conceptualization of the total war with respect to the groups which the Government reasoned were involved and its motivation for waging a so-called Total Onslaught. The crux of Total Onslaught, as perceived by the minority Government, was that the anti-apartheid campaign and struggle was part of an international conspiracy, led by the USSR, to take control of South Africa as part of a Kremlin-engineered plot to conquer and rule the world. This onslaught supposedly was not only focused on a military level but manifested itself in all possible spheres. To muster support for the campaign against South Africa, the country's internal situation was exaggerated and exploited under the anti-apartheid banner.⁷

In this regard the government thrived on statements like the ones made by Dr Igor Glagolev, who, until he defected to the West in 1976, was a foreign affairs consultant to the Soviet Politburo, when he gave an enthusiastic appraisal of South Africa's value to the USSR: "The Russians are determined to take South Africa and to get the full benefit of its tremendous mineral wealth...They know that once they take South Africa, once they take its mineral wealth for themselves and can benefit from its strategic position, they will eventually control the world. If they can take South Africa, nothing can stop them."⁸ During 1984, analysts at the American John F Kennedy Special Warfare Centre, alleged that Gen. Malan issued a secret directive to the SADF, prompting them to tone down their references to the 'total onslaught'. Apparently, the General reasoned that an overemphasis of the concept could too easily lead to uproar and distorted assessments of the South African situation.⁹ Nonetheless, the 1980s did nothing to diminish the Nationalists' perception of a conspiracy to wage total war against them. If anything, the violent political

⁵ AN Pelzer (red.), **Verwoerd aan die woord** (Johannesburg, 1966), p. 345.

⁶ S Carter, "Magnus Malan: 20 questions", **Playboy**, Vol. 3, No. 2, March 1996, pp. 73-6.

⁷ JJJ Scholtz, **Fighter and reformer - extracts from the speeches by PW Botha** (Pretoria, 1989), p. 33.

⁸ PW Botha: private collection at INCH. PV 203 / PS 12/6/1.

⁹ C Cooper et al., "Security" in **Race Relations Survey 1984** (Johannesburg, 1985), p. 772.

upheavals and dramas of the mid to latter half of the decade with the coming of age of the mass movement, township violence reaching 'all time high' proportions and the ANC blurring the distinction between hard and soft targets, attracted attention to apartheid and South Africa on a more extensive global scale than ever before.

An example of how the Nationalists' views about a hostile outside world intensified, or at least stayed rigid, and how even the West were seen by them as part of the problem, can be found in a 1979-speech of PW Botha in which he dramatically declared: "We have become disillusioned with the West."¹⁰ A year later he went even further: "There are people who...believe that the West will help us. Let me tell you this: If South Africa were to be confronted tomorrow by Communist forces, the West will not help us. Britain cannot help us, Europe cannot help us, and America does not want to help us."¹¹ During the spring of 1983, PW Botha said: "South Africa is strategically important - because of its military and economic strengths as well as its strategic mineral production, its transport network and its modern harbours. Russian expansionism is threatening us and in spite of that other western countries are reluctant to acknowledge our real value."¹² Throughout the 1980s PW Botha and his regime would blame the growing anti-apartheid actions emanating from the West on their governments having grown decadent, exploitative and their "inherent weaknesses".¹³

In 1982 a document compiled for the State President broke down the objectives of the perceived Total Onslaught against South Africa into six phases:

1. Create a revolutionary climate in your target country.
2. Unleash a terrorist struggle.
3. Isolate the target country internationally.
4. Destroy your target country's will to fight.
5. Neutralise your target country's Armed Forces.
6. A military seizure of power.¹⁴

It stands to reason that not all groupings in South Africa attached the same weight to the regime's conspiracy theories. For many this was paranoid melodrama. The regime was aware of this. A classified security report of 1982 to PW Botha stated: "The impression is created that the total onslaught is something that was thought up by government-advisors to draw attention away from our country's problems."¹⁵ But for the government this was all very real, as the report stated: "Whoever cannot

¹⁰ Scholtz, p. 73.

¹¹ **Ibid.**, p. 75.

¹² H Murray, "Interview: PW Botha", **Leadership SA**, Vol. 2, No. 3, Spring 1983, p. 20.

¹³ Scholtz, p. 74.

¹⁴ PW Botha private collection at INCH. PS 12/6/1:1980-1982.

¹⁵ **Ibid.**

recognize this onslaught as being part of a hostile interwoven strategy, live in a dream world and plays into the hands of those who formulated the strategy against the Republic of South Africa."¹⁶

According to the extensive report, this type of skepticism could be expected as the enemy was trying to brainwash or at least dupe South Africans into mistrusting their government's actions. "The Republic of South Africa is today the victim of the most intensive psychological war campaign in the history of the world."¹⁷

In the context of what the regime was convinced was a well-orchestrated world-wide Total Onslaught, the international anti-apartheid campaign was not merely regarded as being opposed to the system of segregation. It was in fact regarded as a fully-fledged psychological war with the ultimate aim of toppling the government and destroying South Africa. As such, being outspokenly anti-apartheid, indeed being negative about the regime, implied to the state that, knowingly or unknowingly, you were furthering the aims of the Russian masterminded total onslaught. "Russia and its compatriots have developed psychological warfare to a fine art... They have perfected the art to such an extent that they even use their enemies to strive for their aims."¹⁸

3. FROM 1980 TO THE RUBICON SPEECH

By 1980 the word 'apartheid' and the general concept of what it signified made South Africa the most unpopular nation barring one - Idi Amin's Uganda.¹⁹ And yet, the country's main trading partners - the UK, USA, Japan and the EEC - still had not begun to apply seriously detrimental packages of anti-apartheid sanctions.²⁰

Nonetheless, because of South Africa's growing pariah status, the Government particularly had to pay close attention to its increasingly unsure position in the world. The survival of minority power was at stake. In August 1982 the Government had a confidential list compiled in this regard. The list ranked and described Pretoria's most prominent enemies, both at home and abroad.²¹

Those that were situated abroad, included and ranged from the World Council of Churches to the British Council of Churches, the United Nations, the American-

¹⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁷ **Ibid.**

¹⁸ **Ibid.**

¹⁹ JPC Mostert, (ed.), **Die Suid-Afrikaanse krisis** (Bloemfontein, 1986), p. 314.

²⁰ Anon, **Reader's Digest library of modern knowledge No. 3**, p. 1277.

²¹ PW Botha private collection at INCH. PV 203; PS 12/6/1:1980-1982: Die totale aanslag teen die RSA.

based South African Military Refugee Fund, the Committee on South African War Resistance in the Netherlands, the French anti-Outspan Campaign and a whole variety of other American and European anti-apartheid groups, as well as the American and British embassies in South Africa.²²

When examining the list of those groupings - internal and external - that the Government perceived as threatening, it is understandable that the Government desperately needed to establish some breathing space for itself regarding its relations with the world community. An enlightened political act that would take the world by surprise and silence the Government's foreign critics was needed. Political reform (whereby apartheid would be trimmed and tenderized without ever endangering the actual marrow of the system), the regime hoped, would deliver the much needed diplomatic breakthroughs they desperately needed.

In the early 1980s, the South African Government, through its new reformist policies, did succeed in buying itself some valuable, albeit limited, breathing space. If the government boldly continued upon the road of reformist change, with the ultimate goal being a non-racial democratic South Africa, the West would back it all the way. But Botha had to set the pace; it was the National Party who had to be bold, not the West. It was up to the Government to take the initiative. Through the promise of bold reforms yet to come, Botha bought his white minority some diplomatic time and conditional access to the European seats of power. But, in this process the South Africans had also raised expectations, and if Pretoria could not or would not deliver the political goods, severe consequences would follow.²³

PW Botha himself rightly cautioned his followers not to get carried away in the initial positive reactions with which the international community reacted to his reforms. He knew that the Europeans and the world at large, would never be content until his country had a black president and a majority government, and that was not the regime's ultimate goal.²⁴

Although America's Reagan administration was openly adverse to apartheid and all it stood for, Botha's staunch anti-communist rhetoric appealed to the Republican White House. In his correspondence with Botha, Pres. Reagan wrote: "We recognize fully the developments in your country hold the key to long term stability, development and peace in the region. We are prepared to work with you in

²² **Ibid.**

²³ R Schrire, "Botha in Europe - and interim appraisal", **Leadership SA**, 2nd quarter, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1984, p. 87.

²⁴ P Meiring, **Waagmoed beloon** (Johannesburg, 1985) p. 29.

pursuing these shared objectives."²⁵ In February 1984, George Shultz, Reagan's secretary of state, commented on developments in South Africa and said that although these were moves in the right direction, it was not enough to solve the country's crises. According to him, these political changes were "unilateral moves" and negotiations were necessary. He said that although the USA did not have all the answers for South Africa's problems, change was of paramount importance and the White House would give help to whoever aspired for peaceful change.²⁶

A policy of constructive engagement was introduced by the Reagan administration in 1981. When PW Botha was asked to comment on constructive engagement, he said: "We are always prepared to listen to good advice, but we are not prepared to allow any country to dictate to us how we should run our own affairs."²⁷ Botha would determine the process of reform and it was clear that Pretoria would not easily be susceptible to outside forces and that included the USA.

In spite of his public confidence in his State Department's constructive engagement program, Pres. Reagan, during the middle of 1984, before the violence in South Africa had even really been given its full impetus, wrote a tactful letter to his Nationalist counterpart in Pretoria.²⁸ Reagan was telling Pres. Botha that the continuation of moderate American policies towards South Africa was greatly determined by the Botha Government's handling of the violence.²⁹

As political violence erupted in South Africa during 1984, the fight against apartheid became an exceedingly prominent issue in domestic American politics. Among American Civil Rights groups, the anti-apartheid struggle roused feelings and memories of their own struggle for liberty which they had fought in the not too distant past. And so, during 1984, the apartheid issue truly became a domestic American issue.³⁰ Since the world media had descended upon South Africa, the American anti-apartheid movement, whose ranks included various celebrities, also gained media prominence.

Along with the attention-grabbing success of the protests, anti-apartheid sanctions and disinvestment campaigns became points of serious debate waged simultaneously on national, state and local levels across the USA and throughout the world.³¹

²⁵ D en J De Villiers, *PW* (Cape Town, 1984), p. 334.

²⁶ C Cooper et al., "International relations", *South African Institute for Race Relations Survey 1984* (Johannesburg, 1985), p. 859.

²⁷ Murray, p.12.

²⁸ D Prinsloo, *Stem in die wilderness* (Mossel Bay, 1997), p. 320.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.320.

³⁰ H Hampton and S Fayer, *Voices of freedom* (New York, 1990), p. 662.

³¹ Cooper et al., *Survey 1984*, p. 862.

Various types of governmental bodies debated on economic anti-apartheid measures. It was estimated that in August some 53 of Britain's local authorities, including those of such major cities as Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds and Dundee, had all decided not to buy any products from South Africa anymore.³² During October 1984, Oxford University decided to withdraw their R100 000 000 indirect investment from South African businesses, as well as to prohibit any possible future investment.³³

Furthermore, there were also anti-apartheid demonstrations at universities across America and the Washington Office on Africa implemented a 24-hour hotline for people to call regarding the anti-apartheid sanctions issue.³⁴ This group was also mailing thousands of letters to Americans to prompt them to support the anti-apartheid disinvestment and sanctions drives.³⁵ On 12 April 1985 the Republican Congress was also moving closer to agreeing with the Democrats in the Senate that tougher anti-apartheid measures were necessary.³⁶

In England during the same month - March 1985 - 121 local authorities embarked on an anti-apartheid campaign. About 30 publicly denounced apartheid, with 70 more banning all South African products in their areas.³⁷

38 more local authorities compiled disinvestment policies; 22 discouraged economic links with the country; 14 withdrew their money from English banks which had South African ties; 11 prohibited the advertisement of South African products in their areas; 12 decided to diligently promote teaching against apartheid; 21 organised anti-apartheid exhibitions in libraries and undertook to prevent apartheid propaganda; 28 decided to support cultural boycotts; 41 supported sports boycotts; 12 resolved to have direct contact with either African towns in South Africa and/or direct contact with exiled South African organisations; 26 undertook to honour anti-apartheid leaders; 26 local authorities decided that they would henceforth not allow anymore official visits from South Africa and 21 wished to promote a wider understanding of apartheid and South Africa among the British public.³⁸

From 1985 onwards apartheid became *the* international topic; *the* internationally fashionable cause to debate - and this was but the beginning. Read in context of

³² **Ibid.**, p. 872.

³³ **Ibid.**, p. 821.

³⁴ **Die Volksblad**, 11 April 1985.

³⁵ **Ibid.**

³⁶ **Die Volksblad**, 12 April 1985.

³⁷ Cooper et al., "International links", **South African Institute for Race Relations Annual Survey 1985** (Johannesburg, 1986), p. 121.

³⁸ **Ibid.**

apartheid history, 1985 can be viewed as an omen of what was to come. The end of white minority rule was not nearly or clearly in sight, but from 1985 onwards it became more and more apparent that there was going to be an end, irrespective of whether it would be violent or negotiated. From 1985 the worldwide anti-apartheid campaign gained unprecedented momentum and an altogether renewed intensity. While the ANC's diplomats toured the globe lobbying for increased anti-apartheid pressure, their internal branch kept frustrating the Government's plans to maintain the status quo. The security forces and black masses clashed throughout South Africa. As the violence refused to die down, but instead escalated, the international community, shocked by what they saw and read about the turmoil, focused more intently on the country.

During Reagan's second term (1985-1989) constructive engagement would eventually collapse, as international anti-apartheid pressure reached new levels of intensity. At the beginning of 1985, Botha reiterated his Total Onslaught-views by explaining how his country was unique and what they did here should not be judged according to the standards of Americans or Europeans. As for the violence, Botha said he realised full well the frustrations of the black communities but that he would do whatever it took to move in and remove those troublemakers whom his advisors assured him was the cause of the upheavals - irrespective of the economic after-burn.³⁹ This was ominous thinking as far as the South African business community was concerned.

Pres. Botha knew very well how important it was to be supported by the business community. Despite this, he in general did not warm to the corporate executive types. He thought that South Africa's big business could have done a lot more to help him and his government to achieve their goals.⁴⁰ He was also convinced that they were too politicised and that they were deliberately trying to torpedo his government's aims.⁴¹

During the 1980s many of the Chief Executive Officials (CEOs) of the largest South African companies called for an end to apartheid, irrespective of whether it was for moral, political or economic reasons or all three. Many in big business in South Africa found themselves embroiled in a dilemma. Although they supported the speedy end of apartheid they could not very well endorse the international anti-apartheid campaign, which of course included punitive economic measures - it would have meant corporate suicide.⁴²

³⁹ Prinsloo, p. 320.

⁴⁰ J-A Stemmet private collection. Interview with PW BOTHA. 13 October 2000.

⁴¹ **Ibid.**

⁴² B Jameson, **Goldstrike - the Oppenheimer empire in crisis** (London, 1990), p. 48.

"The business community can play an enormous role by setting an example in the way its own operations are run," explained the Chairman of the Anglo American Corporation, Gavin Relly. "While businessmen are quite clearly not politicians, business has an absolute concern with regard to the future of its activities, and it is only natural that we have an interest in the nature of the society in which we invest and in which we operate."⁴³

All in all, during the latter years of the decade, big business increasingly and openly ventured into the realm of politics, to the exasperation and annoyance of Pretoria, while it seemed to have had very little effect on the ANC.⁴⁴ On certain occasions the Government reckoned that the private sector had overstepped their boundaries and was in fact challenging their authority and that could not be allowed. PW Botha did not appreciate these businessmen's meddling with politics. Many a time the State President would summon Harry Oppenheimer's powerful top executives, Gavin Relly or Julian Ogilvy Thompson, to his office and say: "We, my friend, have over a million votes. How many votes have Anglo American?"⁴⁵

While the disinvestment debate was intensifying abroad, the unrest on the local front was starting to reach a dangerous boiling point. On 21 July 1985, the President announced a state of emergency. During the first few days of the state of emergency, the world was shocked at the images they saw of South Africa.

Irrespective of foreign pressures, at the end of the day the minority Government was not only still in power, it was standing tall in the apartheid state. Although violence had beset the country, it had not impeded the power of the authorities. The Government's position in, and its power over, South Africa had not been fundamentally eroded. At the time of the proclamation of the 1985 state of emergency, the Government was looking more downwards and inwards at its internal position and priorities than at the wider political-cum-economic horizon. This mindset was dramatically and traumatically illustrated by a single event: the Rubicon Speech.⁴⁶

In that infamous speech of 15 August 1985, Botha told his international audience of approximately 300 000 000⁴⁷ that he had "applied much self-discipline" and that he

⁴³ M Albedas, and A Fischer, *A question of survival* (Johannesburg, 1988), p. 369.

⁴⁴ B Godsell, and P Berger, (eds), *A future South Africa* (Cape Town, 1988), p. 173.

⁴⁵ Jameson, p. 41.

⁴⁶ For a detailed account, see L Barnard, and J-A Stemmet, "The Rubicon speech of PW Botha of 15 August 1985: A bridge too far and a river too wide", *Journal for Contemporary History*, Vol. 27, No. 1, April 2002, pp. 119-35.

⁴⁷ P Younghusband et al., "Botha goes slow" in *Newsweek*, Vol. 6, No. 9, 26 August 1985, p. 7.

had tried to be most "lenient and patient" but, taking a dramatic pause to leer at the audience, said: "*Don't push us too far...*"⁴⁸

State President Botha repeated that South Africans would solve their own problems: "We have never given in to outside demands and we are not going to do so now. South Africa's problems will be solved by South Africans and not by foreigners...we will not be forced into doing what we don't want to do.. hostile pressure and agitation from abroad" had motivated the violent radical enemies of the state. "They have derived comfort and succour from this pressure."⁴⁹

Botha's speech had markedly soured the political climate, specifically South Africa's international relations, even further. FW de Klerk noted that the problem was not so much about *what* PW Botha said, but rather *how* he chose to say it. Knowing full well that hundreds of millions of people across the world were going to watch him, the President did nothing to adapt his style or content accordingly when he delivered the address. Here lie the seeds of fiasco. Although the planned speech was turned into an international event - the President did not also internationalize his speech or delivery. He simply defiantly ignored the global factor.⁵⁰

Apart from bad publicity, the Rubicon speech also had far-reaching economic implications. Years later, Dr Gerhard De Kock, then head of the South African Reserve Bank, estimated that the Rubicon speech had cost the country about R1 million - per word.⁵¹

By the time Botha's speech was over the rand dropped from 44,5 cents to the US dollar, to 38,5 cents.⁵² Less than two weeks after the Durban speech, on 27 August 1985, or *Black Tuesday* as economists referred to it, it had fallen further to \$0,34. Context is important: in January 1983 R1 was worth US 0,95 cents. On the day of the speech, but before PW Botha delivered it, the currency had already shrunk to US 0,45 cents, all in all, a fall of about 53% in value in only two and a half years.⁵³

⁴⁸ PW Botha private collection at INCH. PV 203: 4/2/133: "Rubicon Speech." Emphasis added by author.

⁴⁹ **Ibid.**

⁵⁰ FW De Klerk, **Die laaste trek - 'n nuwe begin** (Cape Town, 1998), p. 122.

⁵¹ **Ibid.**, p.123.

⁵² H Kenney, **Power, pride and prejudice: The years of Nationalist rule in South Africa** (Goodwood, 1991), p. 357.

⁵³ N Bruce, "The rand and the cash crisis", **Leadership SA**, Vol. 4, No. 3, 4th quarter, 1985, p. 42.

Reserve Bank Governor, Dr Gerhard de Kock, and Finance Minister, Barend du Plessis, realized that the currency's bottom was beginning to wane. The writing was on the wall. Soon R1 would only be worth US 0,10 cents.⁵⁴

For the country's debt situation, the implication was dire. Pretoria's debt grew in dollars as the rand became worth less. At the end of 1987, Pretoria had a debt of R43,6 billion. By October 1988, the rand had lost some more value, so that according to the exchange rate the country now had a debt of R56,5 billion.⁵⁵ Although Pretoria scraped through in obtaining trade credits overseas, after mid-1985 actual loan funding had become scarce.

The price of South African apartheid had now finally overtaken the price of South African gold, and anything else it had to offer. Whereas the minority Government had always succeeded in paying a good economic dividend, Botha's country had now become shaky in the eyes of the international financiers and bankers. The world saw South Africa as an unstable country with an uncertain future.

Simply put: you do not furnish a house when it is on fire, you try to get your furniture out as quickly as possible before the whole thing collapses. This is how many of the world's leading businessmen and bankers thought of South Africa. Why invest in a country where, as 1985 showed, anything could happen? Quite arguably, the idea of South Africa having an apolitical capitalist economy had expired. Apartheid politics and the South African economy had become inseparable. And although during this period things had not yet become economically unlivable, analysts knew what lay ahead. The apartheid albatross was dragging the South African economy into the depths of a socio-economic-cum-political quagmire. The country's economic recovery did not lie in the realm of economics, but in the political sphere.

4. POST RUBICON TO THE END OF AN ERA

After the Rubicon affair, PW Botha realized that only quick political grants would bring about the foreign capital his country so desperately needed. And yet Botha was still resolutely steadfast, stating in 1986: "South Africa will never hand this country over to those who would see it destroyed...Peace and prosperity will come about for those who are with us. And despite those who are against us."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 44.

⁵⁵ D Geldenhuys, **Isolated states** (Johannesburg, 1990), pp. 403-6.

⁵⁶ PJ Vorster, "Political communication in South Africa after Rubicon: a trend towards professionalism?", **Communicare**, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1986, p. 22.

This was nothing new - already in 1985 PW Botha addressed the Rand Afrikaans University in Johannesburg and lamented all the *unfair* pressures aligned against Pretoria and the country.⁵⁷ He said that South Africa was a microcosm of the world and that it was here that "emotions of hatred and guilt are discharged by the international world. South Africa is caught in the collision between the First and the Third World, with the Soviet Union and its clients as catalysts in the struggle against this country."⁵⁸

At Delareyville on 10 October 1985 he spoke of the "international lie and pharisaic hypocrisy" and that the international leaders preferred to ignore "realities" and rather acted upon "perceptions".⁵⁹ "The critics of South Africa will not act when we present them with the realities of this country; they want to talk to you about perceptions, impressions." Eleven days later he told Free State Nationalists that there was "an international lie directed against this country in an organised manner".⁶⁰

PW Botha had no intention of following the advice of foreign diplomats. At that stage the President had grown resentful of foreign pressure groups trying to force his hand. He might have grasped the problems and the choices then facing him, but PW Botha was no diplomat, so he continued to apply the one option he understood very well, having used it throughout his political tenure: force.

It increasingly dawned on South Africans that, ironically, under PW Botha's progressive reformist programmes, the country was internationally worse off, because the further the Government went with reforms, the more the world clamoured for more. It was now becoming very clear that the only way South Africa would be accepted as a full member of the international community again, would be when the country would get rid of apartheid. This was the crux of the Botha Government's dilemma.

Pres. Botha and his Government came to the conclusion that reformist concessions were not enough to keep sanctions at bay. In the past, when the outside world had pressured Pretoria, the government made some internal conciliatory reformist overtures, but that type of reasoning had gone. From then on, as a whole, outside pressure would not be countered with internal reformist concessions. Foreign diplomatic pressures on the apartheid state would be countered with forceful actions on the part of the Government, which included military force. The

⁵⁷ Scholtz, p. 78.

⁵⁸ **Ibid.**

⁵⁹ **Ibid.**, p.79.

⁶⁰ **Ibid.**

Government increasingly appeared to be "committed to an attitude of defiance in which caution regarding their sensibilities was cast to the wind...and it had ceased to care about any additional abuse it might bring upon itself". Botha and his administration apparently speculated that international pressures "might just be headed off by a realisation on the part of the outside world that it had gone too far". Concessions, the Government concluded, created the impression that it was going soft and/or felt threatened which just served to motivate its enemies.⁶¹

According to the President his people had seen what had happened in Angola and Vietnam and dramatically proclaimed: "We shall ... prevent our civilization of more than three hundred years from needlessly being placed on the altars of anarchy and ruin."⁶² For Botha there could be no doubt that the country was more in the "international crossfire" than ever before and that "our naïve friends abroad" were displeased when he "decided not to negotiate with people or groups who do not want to renounce violence. They insist that the Government yield to pressure to negotiate with the ANC while ANC bombs are destroying people..."⁶³

In reaction the powerful Federated Chamber promptly issued a statement under the signature of its head, who was also the head of Shell South Africa, John Wilson. In the stinging communiqué the group distanced itself "from the strategy of political repression and economic isolationism" which they felt the Government was clinging to.⁶⁴ Botha wrote a private letter to Wilson. The President told the powerful business leader that he should not trouble him with his viewpoints if "you are not prepared to take the trouble of familiarising yourself with mine". The State President warningly informed Wilson that he should "come to grips with the realities of the security situation...and act accordingly" or Wilson too was "bound to pay a heavy price".⁶⁵

On 4 June 1986, Pres. Botha wrote a letter to Pres. Reagan about certain pressing internal and external factors regarding the South African crisis.⁶⁶ "I am concerned at the mindset concerning South Africa which is evolving in your State Department and certain other circles in the United States of America, which does not take account of the inevitable consequences of handing-over power to a communist dominated organisation."⁶⁷

⁶¹ RW Bethlehem, **Economics in a revolutionary society - sanctions and the transformation of South Africa** (Craighall, 1988), p. 97.

⁶² PW Botha private collection at INCH. PV203//4/2/143. Address - 12 June 1986.

⁶³ **Ibid.**

⁶⁴ Bethlehem, p. 185.

⁶⁵ **Ibid.**

⁶⁶ Prinsloo, pp. 323-4.

⁶⁷ **Ibid.**

On 13 June 1986, the US Ambassador, Herman Nickle, met with Pres. Botha. The Ambassador made it clear that Reagan was immensely upset by PW Botha's letters.⁶⁸ Botha told Reagan's emissary that if countries wished to impose anti-apartheid sanctions, they should not hesitate and "do so as quickly as possible". Botha declared: "I'm not going to crawl before other countries because of the threat of sanctions..." The State President then went ahead and challenged the Americans to impose sanctions against his country: "If you want to threaten us with sanctions, why don't you go over and apply it so that we know where we stand."⁶⁹ Botha said that "South Africa had had enough of these threats... I prefer sanctions rather than the threat of sanctions...". He told the American that he had no intention "to look for trouble" with the White House, but that the Americans "must stop interfering..." And then uttered: "We are a small country but I'm not going to be buggered about - I'd rather fight."⁷⁰

In the wake of the Rubicon speech, Pretoria's military action against neighbours housing ANC bases, the renewed wave of brutal violence and Botha's harsh handling of it, dragged the apartheid state's international image further into the doldrums.

On 20 June 1986, a couple of days after he had imposed the comprehensive state of emergency and while the international anti-apartheid crusade was as intense as ever, Pres. Botha addressed a parade of young police recruits. This speech, given to the group of young impressionable policemen, was an example of his government's new defiant views. He told the SAP that the West was aimed against the Republic and its people.⁷¹ He told them that nobody abroad could actually have a clear picture of what was going on in the apartheid state as "(i)nternational politics today is overshadowed by the Great Lie".⁷² The President told the young group of police officers that wherever and whenever on earth the South African issue was discussed "common sense disappears".⁷³ He then added: "For years I have been warning against the extensive international onslaught..." Botha argued that the world wanted to see his reformist politics fail because if his policies were to have succeeded "the charges and so-called excuses for the onslaught against us would fall away... This sly interference for the benefit of the radicals in our country must be exposed to public contempt," the State President demanded from his policemen.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ **Ibid.**

⁶⁹ **Ibid.**

⁷⁰ **Ibid.**

⁷¹ PW Botha private collection. INCH: PV 203: 4/2/144: 20 June 1986.

⁷² **Ibid.**

⁷³ **Ibid.**

⁷⁴ **Ibid.**

So widespread had the worldwide outcry against the Botha Government become that the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that his Government had reached a point where they were fed up with "a Western world that is sick". The usually moderate Pik Botha announced that the West could "hurt us, threaten us, damage our economy, but they cannot kick us out of our land".⁷⁵

The Government and State President continuously stated that South Africa could withstand sanctions and disinvestment and believed that the country could survive sanctions and the whole economic anti-apartheid campaign. "We have had to deal with voluntary and mandatory sanctions in the military field for years. We broke the sanctions and we came out stronger than we were before the sanctions were started," the President said. He went on to say that the apartheid state was an economically strong country, pointing out its strategic mineral wealth. He said: "South Africa has a strong trade with most Western countries and cannot be denied its potential; and South Africa will maintain its position and will fight sanctions in a decent responsible way, and eventually, I believe we will be stronger economically than when we went into it."⁷⁶

On 2 October 1986, the constructive engagement of the US Congress was effectively halted when Reagan's opposition at long last succeeded in introducing the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986.⁷⁷ The new law's prologue explained that it was designed "to set forth a comprehensive and complete framework to guide the efforts of the United States in helping bring an end to apartheid in South Africa and lead to the establishment of a non-racial, democratic form of government."⁷⁸

Furthermore, in 1985 some 40 American companies withdrew from South Africa and during 1986, 48 followed them. In August 1986 the state of California followed the example of 20 other US states and sold its South African related stocks. In practice this meant that the state had sold off R25 000 000 000 worth of stock that was associated with South Africa. Throughout the year American states, cities and universities continued cutting all economic ties with the apartheid state. This resulted in getting rid of R55 000 000 000 worth of South African related stock.⁷⁹ The group of American companies that withdrew from the apartheid state in 1986 in one form or another included Exxon, Carnation, Coca-Cola, Eastman Kodak,

⁷⁵ WE Smith et al., "See no evil, hear no evil", **Time**, Vol. 127, No. 26, 30 June 1986, pp. 6-9.

⁷⁶ T Kruchem, and G Von Boehm, "Getting to know the President", **Financial Mail**, Vol. 101, No. 10, 5 September 1986, pp. 57-61.

⁷⁷ DJ Venter, **South Africa, sanctions and the multinationals** (Chichester, 1989), pp.154-6.

⁷⁸ **Ibid.**

⁷⁹ C Cooper et al., **South African Institute of Race Relations Survey 1986** (Johannesburg, 1987), pp. 67-8.

General Motors, Microsoft, Revlon, Warner Communications, Honeywell, Proctor and Gamble and Pepsico.⁸⁰ As the anti-apartheid cause had grown in the USA during 1986, so too did the anti-apartheid lobbies and pressure groups burgeon.

During this period many whites argued that sanctions, and a so-called siege economy, would stimulate the local economy, as the country's business community would be compelled to utilize its capital for inward development and industrialization - the country would become economically more independent and self-reliant. These arguments concluded that sanctions could help to boost the economy instead of breaking it up. There was some truth in this, but there would eventually come a point where the country would be stripped of investment from abroad. No country on earth could survive, never mind develop, while isolated from foreign financial and technical input.⁸¹

As could be expected, the relatively good relations that had existed between the Government and the private sector during the early part of the decade, had soured considerably by the latter half of the 1980s. Big business blamed the National Party Government for economic mismanagement and the country's ever deteriorating international position. For its part, the National Party hierarchy accused the private sector of being opportunistic and blamed them for not following the Government's instructions on how to turn the economic slump around.⁸²

Concern over the Botha Government's management of the economic state of the country prompted the newspaperman, Ken Owen, to write at the end of 1987: "Businessmen are saying openly that they no longer fear revolution; they fear that economic mismanagement will make revolution unnecessary." He warned that "the cost of Botha's administration has yet to be paid".⁸³

In spite of criticism, the Botha Government held its position and again stated that outside pressure would not force it into a direction it was not prepared to take. "[F]or us to avoid sanctions, boycotts or economic retrogressions," Pik Botha remarked on the issue of foreign pressure, "merely because we feel time is limited, or merely to please the Americans or British, the United Nations or some outside forces, will in the long run bring greater hardship, more poverty, more suffering. We must show a firm attitude towards any interference or imposition of any system which we know this country cannot adopt and cannot accept."⁸⁴

⁸⁰**Ibid.**⁸¹ H Murray, "Anton Rupert", **Leadership SA**, Vol.5, No.4, 1986, p. 14.⁸² J-A Stemmet private collection. Interview with PW Botha. 13 October 2000.⁸³ K Owen, **These times - a decade of South African politics** (Parklands, 1992), pp.118, 120.⁸⁴ Albedas and Fischer, p. 476.

In the middle of March 1988 the State President spoke to the **Washington Times** newspaper. Speaking about the international anti-apartheid sanctions drive, the President said that he believed the Kremlin then understood his Government to be "a regional power of importance" and then reiterated his view about sanctions: "I don't believe in sanctions. Never believed in boycotts either...The world should be a free place, to converse with each other, negotiate, trade and generally help each other improve their way of life."⁸⁵

Pres. Botha also spoke out against the USA: "What worries me more than anything is that the US, whose symbol is the Statue of Liberty, can act the way it does. Whether because of what is described as an imperial Congress and, weakened executive, or a media that distorts facts, or other reasons that escape me, I don't know. But the fact of the matter is that there is a growing perception, all over the world, of a superpower that is playing domestic politics with critically important problems."⁸⁶

According to Botha the communists had a far better view of sanctions than the Americans: "New Soviet leaders also know that the destruction of our economy would be a disaster for the entire region." PW Botha said that the Russians had seen how black Africa's "half-baked Marxist economics" had destroyed the economies of pro-Kremlin African states. According to Pres. Botha, Moscow knew that ANC-rule would mean the destruction of the economy of South Africa and "what a drain this would become to the Soviet Union".⁸⁷

To develop economically, any country needs foreign economic trade and investment and South African commentators increasingly realized that this was where the true effect of sanctions lay: the country's diminishing prospects for future economic development. Henri de Villiers, the head of Standard Bank, noted: "In this day and age, there is no such thing as economic self-sufficiency, and we delude ourselves if we think we are different. South Africa needs the world. It needs markets, it needs skills, it needs technology, and above all it needs capital."⁸⁸ It would seem, by 1988, that the minority Government had lost its traditional nemesis with which it had scared white voters into following and accepting its political logic. Irrespective of whether or not the arguments of Botha had any merit, the fact was that arguments were not going to stop the wave of international pressure against South Africa. The international community wanted change and only change in South

⁸⁵ PW Botha collection at INCH. PV 203 / PS 12//106//1 / 1988.

⁸⁶ **Ibid.**

⁸⁷ **Ibid.**

⁸⁸ P Waldmeir, **Anatomy of a miracle: the end of apartheid and the birth of the new South Africa** (London, 1997), p. 134.

Africa would normalise the country's position in the world. Politically, ideologically, economically, diplomatically, intellectually and socially the apartheid state was trying to do a very difficult balancing act. When PW Botha had taken control of the National Party some ten years earlier in 1978, he presided over a relatively steadfast country. In the interceding ten years the country had gone from being relatively safe and prosperous to being relatively unpredictable and haphazard.

By the last part of the 1980s, this was most certainly a very real and overriding concern for the white minority in South Africa. Apart from that, in 1989, politically the world stood on the brink of being recreated. The Cold War was thawing at a dramatic rate and the USSR was falling apart. With the end of the Cold War in sight, the Government's propaganda of an international communist plot to overthrow South Africa was also fast becoming obsolete. At the same time the apartheid regime was facing a severe economic and diplomatic crisis because of its refusal to change fundamentally.

5. CONCLUSION

The Total Strategy of the Botha Government had serious implications. This socio-economic, security and political program proved incompatible with many democratic norms and values. It was in the international community that some of the most important shortcomings of the Total Strategy lay. The Total Strategy could not change people's perceptions of the illegitimacy of the minority Government nor could it ward off growing international isolation and the accompanying economic deterioration of South Africa. The Total Strategy, in some respects, prevented South Africa from, quite literally, falling apart - but it could not prevent the country from deteriorating at an unprecedented pace.

The Total Strategy was a security strategy, not an economic plan or diplomatic solution. The Government's Achilles' tendon was the economy. It could control and maintain the internal situation, but South Africa was not an economic island; it was part of the global village and needed the latter for economic development. It could not separate its domestic politics from its international economic positioning, subsequently, as the violence grew, so the rand plummeted. As tougher security measures were announced to stamp out political dissent and protect minority rule, so overseas investors and bankers announced that they were cancelling investments.

The Total Strategy, or rather the way the Total Strategy was implemented and managed, jeopardized its very *raison d'être*. The Botha Government stated repeatedly that it defended minority rule to ensure that Western norms of

democracy, Calvinistic values and economic prosperity prevailed in South Africa, yet, in its attempts to defend these, the minority Government threatened the long-term survival of all these bastions of minority society.

The 1980s was not to be the decade for negotiations. Although there was repeated clamour for negotiations, neither the ANC nor the Botha government, nor their supporters, were geared for that. Both sides still believed that a unilateral solution was possible; that it was possible to overpower the other and win the political combat. The 1980s was the decade of impasse and processes brought about or intensified by the violence, prompted a stalemate. It was during the stalemate that existed by the end of the 1980s, that the two opposing sides started to redress their strategies, political viewpoints and views of a future South Africa. The option of violent strategies to bring about or prevent fundamental political change were simply not feasible in the long term; the socio-economic and political consequences were simply too devastating and too unpredictable.