

\*\*\*\*\*

**Landsberg, Chris/van Wyk, Jo-Ansie (eds), *South African Foreign Policy Review, Vol 1*, Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa and the Institute for Global Dialogue 2012, 290 pp.**

South Africa emerged into a rapidly changing world in 1994 and its transition to democracy was almost coterminous with the tectonic rumblings which shaped the larger systemic contours that signalled the end of the Cold War. While EH Carr's *The Twenty Year's Crisis* (1939) lamented the failure of liberal internationalism and helped to frame the logic for the dominance of five decades of realism, the end of the Cold War saw an ascendancy of liberalism in both the study and the conduct of international relations.

It found its apotheosis in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). Fukuyama's famous exposition of the 'liberal idea' was based on the rule of law, liberal democracy, and market capitalism. In declaring its triumph, liberalism evolved to cast an immense geo-political, economic and ideational shadow across the post-Cold War landscape. Already by the late 20th century, liberal ideas had developed an inter-subjective plausibility and presence that penetrated and transformed many non-Western and developing societies. The gravitational pull for this was provided by globalisation which practically became synonymous with the final expansion of an increasingly liberal world order, driven by the contested power architecture of Western hegemony in its various forms and guises. In an ironic twist, while this liberal world order progressively brought people and societies together as interdependent 'communities of fate', it also intensified divisions, cleavages, and asymmetries within and among countries and regions.

If this is the new geo-political world that South Africa encountered and entered, and if we are to understand that this book is the first in a series, then it does not suffice as a compass for guiding future research agendas. Quite importantly, it does not provide the proverbial scholarly bridge that takes South Africa inexorably away from the *sui generis* preoccupations and *de facto* exceptionalism of post-1994 foreign policy studies by opening new ontological vistas. This is of fundamental importance since, by and large and with some exceptions, the book falls short of presenting fresh appraisals, per-

suasive readings, and nuanced interpretations of the factors that will shape and influence South Africa's foreign policy in the future or bring into sharper focus the relevant cause-and-effect issues as far as the postulates of the 'liberal idea' logic are concerned. The binary of continuity or change in the Zuma era as one of the book's leitmotifs is rather platitudinous in the context of interesting, exciting, and challenging lines of comparative theoretical and empirical enquiry that have arisen over the last five years or so, most crucially among emerging powers and related changing global power dynamics.

As a matter of fact what James Rosenau, the doyen of foreign policy studies, wrote almost five decades ago remains very relevant in charting a future path for this research enterprise. It is worth recalling his words because of their normative resonance and emphasis on greater rigour in foreign policy analysis:

To identify factors is *not* to trace their influence. To understand processes that affect external behaviour is *not* to explain how and why they are operative under certain circumstances and not others. To recognise that foreign policy is shaped by internal as well as external factors is *not* to comprehend how the two intermix or to indicate the conditions under which one predominates over the other.<sup>1)</sup>

In terms of these injunctions for greater theoretical creativity, Rosenau then used a genetic metaphor which enjoined foreign policy scholars and analysts to treat nation states as distinct types of plants that warranted closer observation and comparison and through such activity, he hoped that knowledge could be generated that had explanatory and predictive power across various levels of analysis. Translated into the South African setting, the challenge is to move its 'national role conception' towards a closer and deeper exploration of the interface between systemic imperatives, social context, and foreign policy attributes and ask how does South Africa compare in terms of how it views itself and the role it has assumed in the liberal international arena since 1994? Unfortunately, this book does not take us any further down the familiar road in contrast to the many theoretically innovative and conceptually pioneering contributions contained in previous and more coherently edited volumes which set something of a gold standard for future studies.<sup>2)</sup>

With the above caveats and concerns in mind, the book can be considered more of an anthology or collection of useful and worthwhile chapters which examine various aspects of South African foreign policy.

Besides the first and final chapters by the editors, the book consists of 12 chapters. These might be clustered around four broad thematic headings and the first is the institutional and normative. The chapters by Masters, Zondi, and Smith would fall into this category dealing with decision-making, the external engagements of provinces and municipalities, and soft power, respectively. The stage-setting chapter by Masters reads rather like a catalogue of actors and hardly breaks new ground in examining how foreign policy decision-makers respond to change and uncertainty in their environments while Smith's is very perceptive in highlighting the limits of soft power as the essence of South Africa's foreign policy. Zondi's chapter, although poorly organised and empirically weak, deals with the increasingly important but uncoordinated external relations of provinces and municipalities.

The second theme concerns chapters which examine aspects of South Africa's 'Africa Agenda'. Here there are three very insightful and strategically literate contributions: by Van Nieuwkerk on the politically fraught terrain of peace diplomacy and conflict resolution; Ngwenya on disaggregating African anchor states and assessing South Africa's relations with them; and Jhazbhay on the consequences of the 'Arab Spring' in North Africa and the challenges that arise for South Africa. The third theme concerns multilateralism as an expression of South Africa's soft power attributes and chapters by Vickers, Qobo, and Monyae can be included under its remit. Those by Vickers and Qobo are well-crafted and complementary, especially with their nuanced focuses on how South Africa's economic diplomacy has fared across different regional and global contexts and the extent to which the country has a clear sense of its interests *vis-à-vis* global economic governance, respectively. The chapter by Monyae deals with the critical multilateral nexus of South Africa's regional and continental diplomacy in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) but is disjointed and rather prosaic, failing to impose analytical and conceptual order on the subject. The last category refers to South Africa's regional relations and brings together three very rich and informative contributions. Thus Olivier focuses on South Africa's relations with Europe and the United States, concentrating on the formative Mbeki period; Shelton addresses trends in relations with East Asian countries and is persuasive in demonstrating lost opportunities which could have otherwise promoted South Africa's national interest; while Kornegay explores critical strategic

linkages which have defined South Africa's relations with emerging powers in the context of its Africa diplomacy and foreign policy goal of building alliances with the global South.

Overall, the book suffers from some problems in content, structure, and editing. It is rather odd that the weak contributions passed muster; in what is rather unusual for an edited volume we are informed that the chapters were subject to reviews by "at least two peers". In addition, there are some irritating gremlins and anomalies not listed in detail here. A bibliography certainly would have been useful and while time-consuming and an added expense, the book would also have benefited from an index given its intention to encourage future research.

Despite all its weaknesses, this is nonetheless an important undertaking. It brings together a range of topical reflections and analytical considerations that are relevant to South Africa's diplomatic and political integration into rapidly changing global circuits as well as focusing on its normative and ideological adaptation to a liberal international landscape. It is also to be welcomed since it is a timely endeavour given the recent dearth in studies of South African foreign policy in what was once a fecund cottage industry after 1994. However, its *tour d'horizon* character merely retraces and updates many of the paths already travelled in the rich vein of seminal works variously cited by the authors. Generally, the book does not chart a new course empirically and theoretically — more so since we are led to believe in Landsberg's introduction that chapter authors were encouraged to draw on primary and secondary material and to focus on goals and outcomes. It thus misses a strategic theoretical, methodological and epistemological opportunity notwithstanding the claims which co-editor Van Wyk makes about the *Review's* contribution which is further undermined by an uninspiring agenda for future research. In a liberal world order of recurrent crises, systemic instability, global inequality, and regional turbulence it is to be hoped that editors, contributors, and associated institutions will be more daring and adventurous in future editions.

**Garth le Pere**

**Department of Political Sciences, University of Pretoria**

## Endnotes

1. Rosenau, J (1966), "Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy", in Farrell, R B (ed), *Approaches in Comparative and International Politics*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, pp 98-99. Emphasis mine.
2. See, for example, contributions in Nel, P and J van der Westhuizen (eds) (2004), *Democratizing Foreign Policy? Lessons from South Africa*, Lanham: Lexington Books; and Carlsnaes, W and P Nel (eds) (2006), *In Full Flight: South African Foreign Policy after Apartheid*. Midrand: Institute for Global Dialogue, 2006.