CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND EVALUATION

By the end of Reagan’s era developments in South Africa did not suggest that the country was poised on the threshold of genuine political change away from white minority rule. Most essential feature of the South African political system during this period was the control of the state by a small racial minority, and the correlative exclusion from political participation and access to state power of the country’s black majority. There was little significant alteration in this basic reality of the white control and black exclusion. The ruling National Party had not accepted the fact that all the South Africans: Blacks, White, Coloured and Indians, would have to be given a proper share in power.

The situation in South Africa was one of conflict between the ANC and the white regime. The ANC was reluctant to make a firm commitment to abandon armed struggle which was a precondition on the part of the white regime to start negotiations. On the other hand white regime’s accusation was that the ANC did not represent a majority of blacks, but only a small group of communist controlled agitators. On its part South Africa’s white regime had not taken any substantive steps which could demonstrate that it was sincere in holding negotiations
with the black majority and bringing about reforms. It had not released important black political prisoners including Nelson Mandela who could create conditions for negotiated solutions for South African problems. It had not lifted even the state of emergency which had been in force since June 1986.

The Reagan Administration could hardly claim that constructive engagement had brought about genuine improvements in the lives of South Africans. On the contrary, the piecemeal reform that had been enacted in the past eight years had been the object of resentment. The introduction of the new tricameral, parliamentary system had coincided with the most devastating internal violence the country had ever experienced since the formation of the unified South African state in 1910.

The South African government, having expected so much, was itself disappointed with constructive engagement. It had reverted to old style denunciation of American pressure as counterproductive and it was furious over economic sanctions, worried that other nations might do the same or more and weaken the South African economy further.

Black South Africans were more disillusioned with the United States. Their impression was that although some sanctions had been instituted by Reagan Administration and American officials continued to condemn apartheid and
demand further reforms, Washington was still collaborating substantially with the apartheid system. With President Reagan appeared to exaggerate the degree of reform that had already taken place, the United States was viewed increasingly by black Africans as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Similarly, other Southern African states were blaming constructive engagement for much of their own distress. In some cases, overestimating the degree of actual American influence on the South African government, they had developed unrealistic expectations of what the United States could do to improve their situations, and they were bound to be disappointed. Briefly it appears diplomacy of constructive engagement had failed to achieve the desired goals in Southern Africa.

It is now a truism in international relations that there are numerous instruments which states can use in achieving their foreign policy objectives. Such instruments include diplomacy, military action, trade boycotts, embargo and other forms of economic reprisals that may from time to time be imposed by one country on another. It is in the light of this that the United States and some other countries of the West were called upon to help dismantle apartheid by imposing mandatory economic sanctions against South Africa.
It was believed that the United States could impose economic sanctions against South Africa with little or no danger to American vital economic interest and even if this was going to be done at some cost, the dynamic nature of the American economy could easily absorb the cost. It was also argued that if the United States impose mandatory economic sanctions against South Africa and through friendly persuasion carried its allies along to do the same, it would not be too long before the apartheid system was destroyed. This thinking was common among third world members of the United Nations. Other international institutions like the OAU, NAM and the Commonwealth had, also joined issues on the desirability of economic sanctions. They believed that mandatory economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations was the surest means by which the international community could bring about the collapse of the apartheid system. It was hoped that mandatory economic sanctions were capable of turning the attention of the South African government to move towards rapid and more positive change.

However, Reagan Administration consistently opposed the imposition of mandatory economic sanctions, preferring that the issue of imposing sanctions be left with each state to resolve in accordance with its economic, political and military interests. The White House harboured so much fear about Soviet "geopolitical encroachments in
Southern Africa, an area considered to be of vital importance to the United States that it sought to keep South Africa above waters, with American technology, trade links and investment.

Indeed the Reagan Administration frequently stood alone on South Africa's side in the UN Security Council. It vetoed resolutions critical of South Africa on occasions when Britain and France abstained. And in some cases it registered the only abstention when Western allies voted to condemn South African actions. No specific conditions were imposed on South Africa in exchange for these American favours. On the contrary, they were granted at a time when many of the restrictions on black South Africans were being tightened and tensions inside and outside South Africa were growing.

There were of course important limitations on America's ability to affect the situation in South Africa. The U.S. military was not about to intervene on any side in any current or future crisis. Nor could American Leaders wave political or economic wands that could transform South Africa overnight. But there were some official steps that the United States could take in an effort to move South Africa towards meaningful change and full participation by all of its people in the affairs of the country. Indeed
American sanctions or moves towards disinvestment from the South African economy were sometimes more important as symbols than as practical measures. American officials needed to become a more direct and persistent in their condemnation of apartheid. U.S. representatives in South Africa could have denounced and even defy the system whenever possible making clear their official and personal support for organisations like the UDF ANC etc. that represented the victims of arbitrary pass arrests and other government actions.

All of this would have had the immediate effect of helping develop a healthy, more vigorous multiracial opposition within South Africa. Thus it would have been far more difficult for the regime to crush, if it had clearly enjoyed outside support. Moreover, an American decision to confront more boldly could have ultimately led to a growing international vote of no confidence in the leadership of P.W. Botha. However refusal of the Reagan Administration to take such actions in this direction evidently shows lack of serious commitment to end apartheid. It also portrays the United States as a supporter of South Africa and a major hindrance to the liberation efforts.

It is true that, Reagan imposed economic sanctions against the South African regime in 1985. However it
did not represent any fundamental change in American diplomacy toward South Africa. Nor did they portend or promote a meaningful evolution in the South African political and social system. On the contrary they continued the American practice of attempting to reform the South African system by working entirely within it and honouring its rules. It relied almost entirely on white led change. Thus it ignored the politics and the passions of the black majority in South Africa. One of the consequences of its anti-sanction stance was that South Africa was more strengthened in its determination not to be bothered by any threat of sanctions or to be pressured into making major changes. Hence it simply smacks of hypocrisy and selective morality.

The potential of the blacks as an ethnic pressure group on U.S. policy is unprecedented. Blacks are numerous, almost one-twelfth of the U.S. population. Although weak economically, the black community as a whole, has developed quite rapidly in the sense of economic and social modernization. In the process it has produced a new elite oriented toward identification with blackness as a positive value. This has implications for political action in a number of areas, including foreign policy. The most important factor in potential black ability to influence U.S. policy towards South Africa, is however, the moral factor. It is difficult within the framework of contemporary American public values to deny the legitimacy of black American concern with the
treatment of their brothers in South Africa.

In the case of U.S. diplomacy toward South Africa, Reagan Administration considered Black American concern with apartheid legitimate. This is especially significant in the light of the fact that Black Americans did not devote much political energy to the matter. However, American blacks were not an important influence on U.S. diplomacy toward Africa generally or South Africa in particular during first term of Reagan. Certainly for the period 1980-84, the bulk of evidence tends to support the validity of this assumption. Chester Crocker worked in relative obscurity, with out much public scrutiny and with virtually free hand from the Administration.

The second term of the Reagan Administration however saw the strong pressure of black led anti-apartheid movement. In 1984, uprising in South Africa propelled apartheid into the mainstream of public attention and Reagan's Southern Africa diplomacy (constructive engagement) had come under fire. There was protest from the various representative bodies of blacks over the U.S. diplomacy in Southern Africa. The policies they were protesting were those pertaining to Southern Africa, including explicit U.S. refusal to support certain anti-apartheid resolutions in the U.N.
A Black led American anti-apartheid movement commanded great voting strength in Black districts. It was well organised and directed by a quality of leadership. Moreover it had an issue whose validity no U.S. Administration could deny barring fundamental changes in U.S. public values. Finally it had large number of white sympathizers. Reagan Administration could not ignore these realities of its domestic politics. Under pressure from this movement Reagan Administration was finally forced to impose limited economic sanctions by an Executive Order in 1985. That fact in itself proves the existence of a powerful and real black pressure group on U.S. diplomacy towards South Africa. Certainly, during second term of Reagan Administration, the bulk of evidence tends to prove the validity of this assumption. For example, the public outcry over repression in South Africa and the failure of the United States to respond appropriately had resulted in an overwhelming vote of no confidence in the Administration's diplomacy by passing of Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 by the Congress.

As far as problem of Namibia was concerned one can find that in the last phase of Reagan Administration diplomatic breakthrough was made. With Crocker providing good offices, a U.S. brokered agreement was signed by Angola, Cuba and South Africa. It called for removal of South African troops from Angola and independence for Namibia in 1990. For
Reagan officials, this was a clear verification of the soundness of constructive engagement and a proof that containment of Soviet Union could be implemented even without American military power.

How for diplomacy of constructive engagement by the United States had motivated Angola, Cuba and South Africa to sign an agreement is difficult to answer. Because the present international scenario on which premises of constructive engagement was based had undergone tremendous changes. By the late 1980s all of the combatants had recognised that military victory by either side was unlikely. Building on the improvement in East-West relations, Crocker had enlisted Soviet support instead of portraying it as a common enemy of Washington and South Africa. Moreover, linkage formula had been repackaged so that South Africa could free Namibia before, not after, all the Cuban troops left Angola, as the United States and South Africa had insisted on for years.

Most important, Crocker had distanced the United States from South Africa’s strategic interests. It was in direct contradictions to his original call to identify with white fears in order to influence South Africa’s white regime. Where as previously Crocker had spurned multilateral diplomacy, in the last phase, he was pursuing it vigor-
ously. Instead of shutting Cuba out, he came to see that it had to be included as an integral part of the negotiating process. Thus gradually Reagan Administration was no more pursuing diplomacy of constructive engagement. It had introduced new flexibility in its regional diplomacy.

These changing realities of regional and international politics suggest that factors other than diplomacy of constructive engagement were the main motivating factors for the final agreement on the Namibian problem. Even if one accepts Crocker's claim that diplomacy of constructive engagement brought about peace in South Africa, however in the process valuable time had elapsed imposing heavy costs in human terms, when the US might have influenced the course of events by persuading South Africa to begin negotiating a settlement of Namibian problem. Many would argue that constructive engagement was a necessary step in the evolution of American attitudes towards South Africa. But the cost had been great. American diplomacy had actually exacerbated the situation by linking the issue with the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

It might be argued that this move was probably made by Crocker to hardliners within the Administration and to offer Pretoria greater inducements for withdrawal from Namibia, the linkage nevertheless, placed the Angolan
in a difficult position. Not only did they see demands for
the withdrawal of the Cubans as an infringement on their
sovereignty but in the face of continued UNITA pressure and
South African military incursions, the MPLA believed that
its political survival was contingent on the Cuban
presence. At the same time, if the Angolans balked, they
would be blamed for hindering the independence of Namibia
which was actively sought by all African nations. These
dilemmas of linkage diplomacy, delayed the resolution of
South West Africa problem, leading much of the interna-
tional community to believe that, whatever, the rhetoric
emanating from Washington, American prestige was on the
side of the Pretoria government.

Continent leaders termed the linked pull out plan
as black-mail. They did not appreciate the efforts expended
by Washington in this regard and their criticisms had been
constant and seething. Forgotten was the reality that the
United States was only one of five negotiators that had
failed. In the eyes of many African nations, the United
States was the only failure.

At the end of Reagan era, U.S. diplomacy toward
South Africa was thought of as favouring glacial progress,
if any toward freedom and equality for all in South Africa.
There was general impression that significant progress toward solution of the racial problem in South Africa had not occurred between 1980 and 1988. Eight more years had passed. Eight years of lost opportunities.