

# KEEPING SOUTH AFRICA AT BAY

*South Africa's strategy of resisting change depends on the weakness of its neighbours. Canada has a role in helping the Frontline African states secure their borders and boost their flagging economies.*

BY STEVE GODFREY

SINCE THE CONSERVATIVE government took office in 1984, Canada has adopted a policy towards South Africa in sharp contrast to the accommodationist attitude of its main western allies. Driven by the personal convictions of the Prime Minister, the viewpoints of the leaders of the Frontline States and of the leadership of South Africa's black majority have permeated official policy through a virtual flood of private exchanges and meetings with Mulroney, Clark and other Canadian Ministers. Canada has shifted the focus of its political ties ever closer to the neighbouring states, and also begun to transform its economic ties away from South Africa towards them. During this same period violence in southern Africa has risen inexorably. Inside South Africa thousands, and in the region hundreds of thousands, have died. No one – black or white – has been untouched by the economic and political turmoil of a region which is in a state of war.

South Africa, as its President and Foreign Minister frequently proclaim, is a regional superpower in southern Africa. With half the population of the nine neighbouring states, South Africa has twice their annual production. In military terms, its regular forces and reservists (613,000) outnumber the armed forces of its neighbours by about four to one. Seven neighbouring states are dependent on South Africa for supplies of strategic goods such as energy, food or foreign exchange; and Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland are effectively integrated into the South African economy.

Despite this overwhelming power, South African influence over its neighbours has eroded significantly during the 1980s. In the late 1970s, South Africa developed a regional policy based on the creation of a "constellation" of southern African states locked into a dependent economic and political alliance with South Africa. The Frontline States have successfully challenged this strategy for increased dependence on South Africa by creating the Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference (SADCC)\* in 1980.

SADCC WAS BORN WITH THE TWIN aims of reducing economic dependence – particularly on South Africa – and building economic co-operation between its members. This concept won the support not only of the Frontline States but also of Lesotho, Swaziland, and Malawi, and it bound the independent states of the region in an experiment which has slowly shifted the political centre of gravity away from Pretoria.

SADCC's initial focus was to rehabilitate the railways through Mozambique and Tanzania that are its alternatives to using South Africa. SADCC's Programme of Action also includes energy, food and agriculture, mining, industry, fishing and other sectors. To date, nearly 500 projects have been developed, at a cost of US \$6.4 billion, and \$2.2 billion attracted in financing. The results are visible in a myriad of ways. Phone calls within SADCC now go direct – rather than through London,

*\*The Frontline state members are Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. SADCC includes all the Frontline States plus Lesotho, Malawi and Swaziland.*

Lisbon or Johannesburg. Power lines to share electricity are being erected, scientists and experts from the region work together on agricultural projects, or combine efforts to tackle deforestation.

By developing closer economic ties SADCC addresses the need for collective economic security against South Africa, and appeals to the national interests of all nine member nations. The more subtle political consequence has been to overcome the colonial legacy of isolation among the nine members – who related more to South Africa and to their colonizing powers than to each other.

South Africa has been unable to derail SADCC by political or economic means and even the conservative or most dependent member nations have continued to back SADCC. Despite differences of opinion on many issues, regional solidarity is preferred to greater reliance on Pretoria.

For South Africa, the political failure of its regional strategy was a setback, not a defeat. The foreign policy doctrines of the South African government dictate that the region is a natural sphere of influence, and an important market for South Africa. Friendly or dependent neighbours are seen as bulwarks against sanctions, and collaborators in the suppression of political or armed resistance to *apartheid*.

This rationale, acquiesced to by the major western powers during the period 1980 to 1985, underpinned an ambitious and successful response of regional destabilization by South Africa, which continues today. It combines direct military intervention, support to the rebel

movements in Mozambique and Angola, and the use of economic blackmail and sabotage.

THE SCALE OF THE HUMAN AND economic damage caused by this policy has still not been fully registered in the West. According to SADCC and UN estimates, during the period 1980 to 1984 South African destabilization cost SADCC over US\$10 billion with the total rising to over \$25 billion by the end of 1986. This amount exceeded total aid flows into the region over the same period and is equivalent to about one-third of total export earnings. The human reality behind these figures is brutal: according to UNICEF some 535,000 Angolan and Mozambican children have died between 1980 and 1986 as a direct result of South African policy. In parts of Mozambique and Angola normal life has been totally destroyed, and more than a hundred thousand people starved in Mozambique in 1984 and 1985 because insecurity prevented the movement of relief supplies. In Angola, 60,000 people, mainly women and children, have lost limbs in explosions of land mines planted by South African-sponsored rebels.

South African policy is a complex strategy designed to maintain South Africa's dominance in the region. Angola and Mozambique have been made particular targets because of their strategic importance. The Mozambique transport corridors are the key to SADCC's efforts to reduce the amount of its trade passing through South Africa; and Angola has the richest re-