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# Partner to History

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## Who Owns This Negotiation?

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**I**N JUNE 1992, Nelson Mandela sent word that he wanted to phone President Bush.

In South Africa, the negotiations for ending apartheid, which had seemed so promising only a month earlier, had broken down. A terrible burst of violence at a town called Boipatong had further inflamed this situation. The UN Security Council was about to meet on the situation and consider its options.

Within the Bush administration, policymakers saw an opportunity. Washington was flush with the success of the Gulf War and, more importantly in this case, the resulting ability of the United States to bring about renewed peace talks in the Middle East. The Bush advisers wondered whether here, too, American diplomacy could play a major mediating role. Why not offer the skills and high-level involvement of the U.S. secretary of state to the parties in South Africa? This indeed might be just the help Mandela wanted.

But when Mandela called, that was not his plea. Instead, what he asked of the president was strong U.S. support in the upcoming UN Security Council meeting. Mandela wanted the UN body to condemn the violence, putting primary blame on the South African government, and for the United Nations to send observers to help contain such violence in the future. It would be the first significant UN presence within South Africa. U.S. support would be critical to obtaining this outcome.

President Bush willingly offered his support. Then he ventured further, offering to Mandela the good offices of Secretary of State James A. Baker to help restore the negotiating process. Bush cited the promising steps being taken in the Middle East and suggested the same process could be useful in South Africa.

Mandela returned to the question of the UN Security Council, emphasizing how important it was. Bush reiterated his readiness to support Mandela's objectives there. And once again Bush offered the services of Secretary Baker. Mandela turned back to the issue of the United Nations. Bush tried one more time. There was a pause.

"And how is Mrs. Bush?" asked Mr. Mandela.

Bush's intentions were well motivated, indeed deeply sincere. And Mandela very much appreciated that. Yet, with negotiations at a perilous stage, where the danger of further widespread violence was perhaps greater in South Africa than at any time since the mid-1980s, Mandela turned down the offer of direct U.S. involvement in the process. Months later, both he and President de Klerk would do so a second time.

The ground rules were firmly set and they would guide U.S. policy throughout the next two years: the South Africans would "own" this transition process. This did not mean that the United States and the international community in general did not have a vital role to play. What it did mean was that we had to fashion our assistance to this process to facilitate it, help it through several crises, and encourage it in a multitude of ways. But we would not be at the table. We would not be partners to the negotiations themselves, or formal guarantors.

In the end, it was this ownership by South Africa that made the final settlement as effective and durable as it has been. The agreements that were finally reached in late 1993 and early 1994 represented difficult compromises by both sides. They limited the degree of control that liberation activists felt was their birthright in a free election. They failed to give whites the protection of veto rights they had been promised by de Klerk. They left all participants and stakeholders with the feeling that much had been given up to achieve a settlement. That it was their settlement, however, and not one "imposed" or devised by outsiders, made it acceptable.

## THE FACILITATING ROLE

This book is the story of how the United States played its role in this period. It was an active, intensive involvement. And it made a difference. For, as much as the parties wanted to retain control of the process, mobilizing international support was an important element in their strategy. That provided the United States with the opportunity to use its influence throughout the process, sometimes with one party to the negotiations, sometimes with another, and often with public opinion and important interest groups. This book is a case study of how this form of conflict resolution diplomacy can be done. It is also a study of managing sometimes competing priorities. Ending apartheid without civil war was the number one priority for American diplomacy. But South Africa's lingering programs for

weapons of mass destruction posed a serious, complicating problem for the United States, one that continued well into Mandela's presidency.

Part II of this book tells this story from my perspective as ambassador to South Africa from August 1992 through the end of 1995. It is told therefore very much as a personal story, very much in the first person. As ambassador I had the responsibility for directing the American policy during that period and was its chief spokesman. Often too I had opportunities for personal interaction with key figures in this drama that add important details to the story. But, as I hope I make clear in those chapters, my actions and representation reflected the work of hundreds of Americans in many U.S. government agencies and in Congress, who contributed to the policies and programs and made such success as we had possible.

## THE HISTORICAL SETTING

It is impossible, however, to measure the American influence only by the role of official acts of diplomacy, aid, and support in the final stages of South Africa's transition to democracy. One of the reasons South Africans were confident and able to manage the transition with such skill and statesmanship was that they had long been participants in a process of engagement with interested parties around the world. For more than a decade preceding the actual negotiations, American foundations had been providing to those opposing apartheid scholarships, financial support, and access to the finest minds in America and to its best institutions. The civil rights community made the anti-apartheid movement its own, giving it moral, political, and financial support, and exercised over time major influence on U.S. government policy. For those in South Africa's white community, both Afrikaner and English, there was also engagement, though more controversial—as Nieman fellows, in leadership exchange programs, in countless appearances before interested audiences. European countries and institutions were doing these same things.

Part I of this book thus provides important background to this story. Chapter 2 conveys, if briefly, the history of apartheid, how it came to be and the way it came to represent one of the most challenging issues on the international scene. Chapter 3 then recounts the American response, both governmental and private. It seeks to provide a sense of the commitment of those in the anti-apartheid movement who set out to challenge both apartheid and the American policy toward it. It focuses heavily, moreover, on the critical period of the 1980s, for this was the period of the greatest confrontation in American political circles over apartheid, and this period shaped the policy outcomes that I was to carry forward in the 1990s. I was more an observer of these policy debates than a major participant. As deputy assistant secretary of state for African affairs, 1981–86, I was responsible primarily for matters in East and West Africa; and I was in Nigeria from

1986 to 1989. But I was at least close enough to the events in this period that I can provide some personal observations on the intensity of that debate and the personalities of those who shaped it.

### **THE FUTURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP**

The successful transition to democracy in South Africa was a triumph for the South African people. It also laid the groundwork for a new relationship with the United States. But, as described in chapter 11, there were some sour notes as well. South African expectations of U.S. largesse were out of touch with the realities of the 1990s, leading to bitter disappointment. Growing economic relations brought with them trade disputes. Foreign policy differences over South Africa's relations with what the United States termed "rogue" states surfaced almost immediately. In sum, the United States built foundations for a solid and cooperative relationship, but with "normalcy" came all the challenges of relationships between two countries with similar basic principles, but often very different world perspectives.

The challenge for the future is to build on those shared principles. There are many serious issues on which the United States and South Africa can partner if the will and vision are there on both sides. AIDS, conflicts in Africa, human rights, nonproliferation, and broadening substantially the benefits of and participation in globalization—all of these offer that possibility. Moreover, the transition in South Africa itself is still far from complete, especially economically. Problems of poverty, unemployment, poor educational facilities, and gross inequalities of income remain legacies of the past discriminatory system. Therein lies the challenge of the next phase of American support to the transition process.

And it will take place in a similar context. For the new South African leadership demonstrated early on, as the United States began planning for the post-apartheid system, that it would own the economic policy process, and indeed its other policies, as it owned the negotiating one. The stage is thus once again set for a facilitative, but no less critically important, program of support from the international community.

### **FACILITATIVE DIPLOMACY: LESSONS LEARNED**

Chapter 12 puts forth the more general lessons one can learn from the South Africa story. They are lessons of conflict resolution. And they are lessons for the conduct of American diplomacy in any important, complex situation. Above all, they are lessons that we should not have to keep relearning, thus the title of that chapter. They require looking deeply into how we see ourselves as well as how we project our power and influence.