

WHEN AND HOW DOES RECONCILIATION WORK? A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOUTH AFRICA AND SRI LANKA

KOFFI KOUASSI

The international community's reaction to the South African crisis was different from its reaction in Sri Lanka. In South Africa, the international community was more involved. They combined economic and military pressure through economic and military embargoes to help stop apartheid; NGO's and civil society groups from all around the world. International organizations such as the United Nations also dealt with South Africa. However, the world community was more silent on the Sri Lankan case. No military or economic pressure was put on the Sri Lankan government to establish peace. Unlike South Africa, where the *bargaining peace process* was facilitated by domestic actors, India tried to facilitate the peace process in Sri Lanka.

In the case of Sri Lanka and South Africa, the role of the international community was critical to the success or failure of the respective reconciliation processes. The international community includes the United Nations and other international organizations, the United States, and the countries surrounding South Africa and Sri Lanka. In the beginning, the discriminatory policies of apartheid did not draw the ire of the international community. Indeed, these laws were attributed to enforcing values and ideas embraced by international actors—i.e. anti-communism. For example, the law Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 banned all anti-apartheid groups from the political scene; however, it was portrayed as a law that helped South Africa fight against communism. This explains that the apartheid regime itself understood the importance of international support.

The international community became more and more critical of apartheid after drastic changes occurred in international politics overtime. As more African countries received their independence from European powers and became members of the United Nations, as

discriminative laws such as the Jim Crow laws in the USA became unpopular, and as communism's defeat loomed, apartheid drew more and more ire from the international community. This international community was united against apartheid. Through embargoes, it weakened both the South African economy and military, which were the fuel of apartheid's survival. In the case of South Africa, these international actors triggered the domestic bargaining process, where domestic actors actively sought to bring peace in their country. Indeed, the economic stifling of the South African economy encouraged business leaders' desire to contribute to peace, and President de Klerk's decision to allow for the release of political prisoners.

International Actors' Role in South Africa

In August and December 1963, the Security Council of the United Nations adopted Resolutions 181 and 182 to condemn apartheid in South Africa with the former and impose an arm embargo with the latter.¹ The main reason for this condemnation was the oppression of the blacks and the purchase of weapons by the South African government to enforce this oppression, which was unconceivable for some member states.² Needless to say that the 1960s witnessed a worldwide movement of decolonization and most former colonies became members of the United Nations. However, in 1948, when apartheid was born, the world was just recovering from the Second World War, which had ended three years earlier. Therefore, most parties involved in the infamous war were looking to rebuild their economies. Also, apartheid-like laws were not uncommon in the world. For example, in the United States, there were the Jim Crow laws, which separated blacks and whites much like the apartheid did. Besides, the world was still 12 years away from the independence wave in 1960, and European nations were still occupying their

¹ Source, United Nations website. Available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/sc/res/1963/scres63.htm>

² Resolution 182 of the United Nations. Available at: <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/200/55/IMG/NR020055.pdf?OpenElement>

colonies in Africa. So, the system of apartheid was somewhat of a norm through the world, and it was not likely to draw criticism from the international community.

From 1949 to the 1950s, South Africa was a military ally to many countries in the world. For example, they were allies to the United States and participated in the Korean War as well as Middle East military efforts. They also made military alliances with the likes of France, Belgium, the United Kingdoms, and even NATO. In 1952, the Defiance Campaign, which was started by the ANC and the SAIC, drew support worldwide from human right organizations, including the NAACP in the United States. The Turning point in South Africa's relationship with the world was the wave of independence in 1960 and the massacre of Sharpeville, which saw the death of sixty peaceful anti-apartheid protesters. In 1963 and 1964, the United Nations started to consider sanctions against South Africa. They imposed an oil and an arm embargo. In 1965, numerous countries and international organizations, including newly independent African countries, were willing to financially contribute to the efforts of the ANC.³ As the years will go by, more countries would join the embargoes and the United Nations Security Council would amend the arm embargo making it more severe. The last of those embargoes was the one in 1977, which was a total (mandatory) arm embargo.⁴

In 1973, Arab countries stopped selling oil to South Africa in an effort to support black Africans, who were being oppressed in their own nations.⁵ In 1981, American think tanks such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation published studies encouraging the United States to impose an economic embargo on South Africa to help defeat apartheid. This proposed

³ E. S. Reddy. Apartheid and the International Community. Issue: A Journal of Opinion , Vol. 4, No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 21-23

⁴ By KATHLEEN TELTSCH Special to The New, York Times. (1977, Nov 05). U.N. council orders arms-sale sanctions against south africa. New York Times (1923-Current File). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/123107682?accountid=10141>

⁵ By ERIC PACESpecial to The New, York Times. (1973, Nov 29). Arabs halt oil to portugal, rhodesia and south africa. New York Times (1923-Current File). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/119739875?accountid=10141>

trade embargo would become effective in 1986, after Congress signed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 to end American trade and investments in South Africa.⁶

The tide turned for the apartheid regime with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the defeat of the Soviet Union. This defeat will provide South Africa with no more veils to cover the ills of apartheid. The Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, which banned any anti-apartheid political parties from participating in political life, was supposedly established to prevent the expansion of communism in South Africa. However, that law prevented all anti-apartheid groups from being politically active; this law also gave the government the right to repress all such political activism under the guise of fight against communism. The apartheid government was trying to show the world it was active in the fight against communism's expansion. However, with the end of communism and with the flood of criticism from the international community, the ban was rescinded in 1990, and so did human right abuses perpetrated in the name of apartheid.

Geopolitically, the Southern Region of Africa was going through numerous political changes during the apartheid years; overtime, these regional changes strengthened the anti-apartheid movement. In the early 1960s most European colonies in Africa, especially French colonies in West Africa received their independence after anti-colonialism struggles. The apartheid government understood that these independence movements would be threatening to the survival of apartheid as the African struggle would draw support among those new countries. In addition, those new countries automatically became members of the United Nations, guaranteeing advocates of the black resistance within the United Nations.

⁶ By JUAN de ONIS Special to The New York Times. (1981, May 22). Private report recommends U.S. expand embargo on south africa. New York Times (1923-Current File). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/121826866?accountid=10141>

South Africa became involved in fighting anti-imperialist efforts in the region. It did so probably out of the fear of losing its grip within South Africa. Indeed, repressing an anti-European movement overseas would send a strong message to the anti-European forces within South Africa. The nearby Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique were shaken by independence movements. The South African government collaborated with Portugal to quench the independence movements in Angola and Mozambique as they feared these movements would possibly inspire and strengthen anti-apartheid groups. This war lasted from the early 1960s to the middle of the 1970s. However, the Portuguese-South African independence resistance failed, and Angola and Mozambique became independent. As a consequence, South Africa had two newly independent neighboring countries, where anti-imperialist resistance prevailed. These new countries served as refuge, training ground, and weapon suppliers for the armed wings of South African anti-apartheid parties.⁷

South Africa's government also faced a rebellion in Namibia—led by the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO)—which sought its independence. Namibia was a German colony, which they lost since World War I. South Africa gained possession of Namibia as a protectorate through a mandate of the League of Nations subsequent to Germany loss in World War I.⁸ The Namibian independence was also one of the reasons why an arm embargo was imposed on South Africa in the 1960s. The world community wanted the country to give its independence to Namibia. This conflict in Namibia extended to Angola, where the SWAPO trained and received its arm supplies. Crushing all opposition to apartheid therefore, required simultaneously crushing the opposition domestically as well as internationally, since they helped sustain one another. As a consequence, South Africa waged a war in Angola from 1975 to 1988.

⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 2. PP. 13-23 Available at: <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%202.pdf>

⁸ Source: CIA World Factbook, Namibia. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/wa.html>

South Africa also carried these military operations in the region under the umbrella of the fight against communism, which the Ally powers from the Great Wars were fighting against.⁹

Overall, South Africa started to draw the ire of the international community after the waves of independence in Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa was simultaneously stifled by political, economic, and military pressure from within and without. In their region, newly independent countries were opposed to South Africa, and they supported the anti-apartheid political and military efforts within South Africa. These countries also supported political and military efforts outside of South Africa, namely in South West Africa (Namibia). In the meantime, the United Nations were imposing economic and military sanctions to South Africa. Also, the Allies from the World Wars, who were military allies to South Africa, broke their alliances with the country. Finally, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Berlin Wall gave South Africa no more “legitimate” reason to have its apartheid rule in place because there was no more communism to fight.

These pressures coming from everywhere created the defeat of apartheid and the birth of the peace process in South Africa. The pressures urged President de Klerk decided to free political prisoners and announce the end of apartheid to allow all South Africans to exercise their civil rights. Quoting President de Klerk’s reflections on his political decisions, Ivan Fallon of the British paper *The Independent* wrote, “He had, he says, ‘long come to the realization that we were involved in a downward spiral of increasing violence and we could not hang on indefinitely. We were involved in an armed struggle where there would be no winners. The key decision I had to take now, for myself, was whether to make a paradigm shift.’”¹⁰ The

⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, Volume 1. PP. 36-37. Available at: <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume%201.pdf>

¹⁰ Ivan Fallon. FW de Klerk: The day I ended apartheid. The independent UK, February 20, 2010. Available at : <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/fw-de-klerk-the-day-i-ended-apartheid-1886128.html>

international actors played an essential role in allowing domestic leaders to cooperate; they triggered the *bargaining peace process*.

International Actors in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka did not have the attention of the international community like South Africa. For example, a search of the New York Times archives for “Sri Lanka” yielded 3,780 results for Sri Lanka in the period of 1949-1989. A similar search for “South Africa” yielded 99,079 results. The same type of search for the same time period in the London *Economist*’s archives yielded 1102 for Sri Lanka and 12,303 for South Africa. Sri Lanka is also geopolitically isolated, and this has also allowed for the lack of attention from the world. When Sri Lanka’s war started in 1983, the world was already dealing with numerous wars with more dangerous implications than the Sri Lankan war. For example, the war between Iraq and Iran had serious implications for the Middle East and the world’s oil supply. That other conflicts needed more attention than a civil war in a small island with no regional implications was the reason why the world’s eyes were not turned towards Sri Lanka. Therefore India, a country whose democracy was not exemplary, was left to intervene.

In 1960, India was itself trying to deal with grievances of Indian Tamils from Tamil Nadu, who were seeking secession. Therefore, the Indian government did not consider it an option to intervene in Tamil-Sinhalese issues in Sri Lanka. This Indian government’s stance of non-involvement in Sri Lankan issues changed after the anti-Tamil riots of 1983 riots caused the Tamil Nadu government to call on India to react.¹¹ From that point on, India was involved in facilitating a series of talks between Sri Lankan parties. Meanwhile, India was also providing Tamil fighters with military training in the Tamil Nadu region of India. Sri Lanka was also

¹¹ Partha S. Ghosh. *Ethnicity versus Nationalism The Devolution Discourse in Sri Lanka*. Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, Sage Publications, New delhi, 2003. Pp. 100-103

involved with Pakistan and South Africa, from whom they received military aid including obtaining weapons and military training. When the Sri Lankan government decided to attack Tamils groups in 1987, India replied by giving aid to the Jaffna residents by air despite the opposition of the Sri Lankan government. This Indian reaction was condemned by numerous nations including Pakistan, Bhutan, Maldives, and even the USA.¹² Subsequently, accords were signed between India and Sri Lanka regarding the Tamil aid. Later, India sent peace keeping forces in Sri Lanka, which stayed from 1987 to 1990, to the displeasure of Colombo and Tamil groups (India sought the dismantling of the LTTE).

Unlike in South Africa, the international community was not united on the Sri Lankan issue. China, the USA, Pakistan, Bhutan, Maldives, and many other countries were supportive of the Sinhalese government of Sri Lanka. Meanwhile, Tamils had the support of India— even though the LTTE grew tired of the Indian’s negotiations with Colombo and fought the Indian Peace Keeping Forces (IPKF)—, Burma, Ukraine, and Cambodia. Contrary to South Africa, Sri Lanka’s conflict saw the direct involvement of a foreign actor, as India tried to facilitate peace talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. During the Indian interventions India’s role encountered two hurdles. On the one hand, the Sri Lankan government was reluctant of India’s impartiality in the conflict because Indians from the state of Tamil Nadu were supportive of the LTTE, and Sinhalese saw the Indian intervention as an invasion. This was a concern because Tamil Nadu was pressuring India to support the LTTE. On the other hand, the LTTE did not recognize itself in the Indo-Lankan Accords because they were negotiated between India and

¹² Sarah Holt. *Aid, Peacebuilding and the Resurgence of War Buying Time in Sri Lanka*. Palgrave Macmillan New York, 2011. Page 64 Pp. 111, 127-129

the Sinhalese government without the consultation of the LTTE or any Tamil party. The LTTE was also offended by the fact that India was negotiating with the Sri Lankan government.¹³

Geopolitical Analysis

Geopolitically, Sri Lanka only had to fear India. Sri Lanka is a miniature country geographically and demographically compared to India. Both countries are separated by the 40 mile long Palk Strait. At the Palk Strait, there is the state of Tamil Nadu, a state whose population is more than the total population of Sri Lanka and whose Tamil population is sympathetic to Sri Lankan Tamils. By today's estimates, Tamil Nadu's population is more than three times the population of Sri Lanka.¹⁴ While Sri Lanka was fearing India's link to the Indian Tamils, India was worried about Sri Lanka's alliances with countries that were hostile to India, namely Pakistan and India.¹⁵ Sri Lanka was very isolated from the rest of the world; aside from India, no other country was close enough. Therefore, it was strategically normal to let India, the closest country, handle political issues in Sri Lanka. Besides, because of its geographical isolation and its small size, Sri Lanka was not carrying its oppressive policies overseas. Therefore, the government's biggest threat was the LTTE.

The only possible threat to Sri Lanka's Sinhalese government was the state of Tamil Nadu in India because it was sympathetic to the Sri Lankan Tamils. However, Tamil Nadu was just a state within a country, and only the federal government of India would have the authority to intervene in Sri Lanka. Though Tamil Nadu's pressure on India made it intervene in Sri Lanka, India could not have officially endorsed the LTTE for fear of attracting the anger of other

¹³ Partha S. Ghosh. Ethnicity versus Nationalism The Devolution Discourse in Sri Lanka. Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi, Sage Publications, New delhi, 2003. Pp. 137-141

¹⁴ Tamil Nadu's 2011 census indicated that the state had more than 72 Million people, and the 2013 CIA World Factbook indicated that Sri Lanka had 21 Million people.

¹⁵ India tried to prevent these alliances in the Indo-Lankan Accords, where India asked Sri Lanka not to have alliances with its enemies.

parts of the world. Because of its isolation, Sri Lanka did not have to worry that the LTTE would benefit from any successful revolutionary or secessionist movement in a neighboring country. In fact, Sri Lanka is so isolated that it could only be reached by crossing the Indian Ocean.

Analysis of the International Actors in Sri Lanka and South Africa

Overall, the international community's reaction in Sri Lanka was very different than its reaction in South Africa. It was not as vocal against the "Sinhala only" laws as it was against apartheid. Nor did it react with passion against the 1983 riots as it did in South Africa after the 1960's killings of Sharpeville. Granted that South Africa's crisis and transition happened in the same time period as Sri Lanka's issue, the world's focus was more on South Africa's apartheid. The world was also focused on other issues such as the growth of communism, the tensions between Israel and its neighbors, and the war between Iraq and Iran—just to mention a few—, issues that drew the attention of the UN Security Council. Therefore, the Sri Lankan problem did not draw as much attention as the South African problem or other problems.

In the United Nations Security Council, no resolution was adopted in the United Nations Security Council regarding Sri Lanka from 1948 until 2000. Although, the Security Council did not adopt resolutions about South Africa until 1960—the year when other African countries joined the United Nations—, more than 30 resolutions about South Africa were introduced in the Security Council for the same time period. Also, major international news agencies such as the *New York Times* and the *Economist* of London have covered South Africa more than Sri Lanka. As Table 5 below shows, there was no Sri Lanka resolution adopted by the Security Council from 1983 to 1984. Israel was the topic in nine resolutions and South Africa appeared in eight resolutions. When the Sri Lankan war started in 1983, thousands of Tamils died, became displaced, and went to exile.

Table 1: United Nations Resolutions from 1983 to 1984 ¹⁶

Resolutions Adopted in 1983 and 1984	Topic
529, 536, 538, 549, 555	Israel-Lebanon
530	Honduras-Nicaragua
531, 543, 551, 557	Israel-Syria
532, 539	Namibia
533, 547, 554, 556, 558	South Africa
534, 541, 544, 550, 553, 559	Cyprus
535	Lesotho-South Africa
540	Iraq-Iran
542	Lebanon
545, 546,	Angola-South Africa
552	Iran

Source: United Nations' Security Council Resolutions Archives ¹⁷

Countries were also divided regarding their support of the fighting sides in Sri Lanka while it unanimously opposed apartheid and overtly supported the anti-apartheid movements. Besides its opposition to apartheid, the world's condemned South Africa's military expansion in the region. South Africa was militarily present in Angola, Zambia, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe. Besides, it did not want to give Namibia its independence, despite the pressure from the United Nations, Arab countries, and the USA. Consequently, South Africa was the "bad child" in the world. Its reputation as a country under discriminative political system made even the smallest foreign entities cut ties with South Africa. For example, American cities, states, and activists were condemning apartheid and cutting ties with the country.¹⁸ Governments, international humanitarian organizations, and the United Nations were all unanimous in condemning apartheid.

Sri Lanka did not receive such scrutiny for its "Sinhala only" laws. No resolution from the UN Security Council condemned these laws, though human rights organizations such as

¹⁶ This list only omits resolutions about the admission of new members in the United Nations.

¹⁷ Available at: <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/>

¹⁸ By, C. C. (1984, Sep 25). More municipalities joining drive to cut south africa links. New York Times (1923-Current File).

Amnesty International wrote news and reports about Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka also saw the intervention of India, which was not in position to be a good negotiator. First, India was going through its own troubles as the state of Tamil Nadu sought to secede. Second, India had violated the Sri Lankan government's sovereignty by illegally supporting the LTTE. Third, India and the LTTE grew apart while the Colombo government did not trust it was impartial. Therefore, India's negotiation efforts were doomed to fail.

Sri Lanka did not attract the world's ire because it had no weight on the international scene. It was not a former imperialist power, nor did it earn its independence with anti-imperialist struggles. Even in its own region, it was eclipsed by India and Pakistan to the north, and Japan and Korea to the East. Though the international community was united against apartheid, it was remotely involved in South Africa. International actors did not bring troops nor did they get involved in the negotiations. They only applied pressure on the military and the domestic economy through embargoes.

Sri Lanka went through numerous economic changes from the 1960s to the 1990s, but throughout this period its economy was good. The average GDP per capita growth in Sri Lanka from 1960 to 1994 was 2.7%.¹⁹ During the same period, Sri Lanka's FDI net was at an average of more than \$50,000,000. Sri Lanka still benefitted from some economic relations with the exterior. Its government could sustain itself. Therefore, there was no economic incentive to either repeal the "Sinhala only" laws or to engage in serious domestic bargained process. In addition, that most of the economic opportunities were given to Sinhala, it could be argued that there was less of an incentive to engage in peace talks. Indeed, doing so and making compromises on the "Sinhala only" laws would mean less economic opportunity for Sinhalese.

¹⁹ Source: World Bank Development Indicators Dataset.

I chose this topic for my thesis because I wanted to understand why South Africa was able to become such a good democracy despite the racial challenges it had experienced in the past. Many countries have gone through domestic conflicts after the year 2000, and Cote d'Ivoire was one of them. However, a few of them have overcome the troubled past to build sustainable economies and strong democracies. Today, Cote d'Ivoire, whose past was not as troubled as South Africa's, is yet to rebound from its political conflicts from 1999 to 2011.

