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J. E. Davies. *Constructive Engagement? Chester Crocker and American Policy in South Africa, Namibia and Angola 1981-8.* Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007. x + 246 pp. $59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8214-1781-2; $26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8214-1782-9.

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Destructive Engagement?

Since "constructive engagement," conceived by President Ronald Reagan's assistant secretary of state for Africa, Chester Crocker, was such a monumental failure, as the author of this book concedes, it is difficult to believe that any country or its diplomats would want to revive it as "a tool of foreign policy" (p. 2).[1] A term invented for the purpose of conferring respectability on a policy of appeasing apartheid South Africa and concealing the fact that the United States was doing so should have ensured its demise not its resurrection. Besides, the term is meaningless, as critics who ridiculed it as "destructive engagement" recognized.[2] Nevertheless, "current applications" of constructive engagement is one of the "key questions" raised in this book (p. 2). It is also the subject of a recent article in the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, improbably applying it to South African President Thabo Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy" with Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe.[3]

J. E. Davies divides the book into two parts–"Constructive Engagement and South Africa" and "Linkage: South Africa, Angola and Namibia," the linkage having been added to appeal to Reagan's anticommunist crusaders and President P. W. Botha's hawks in Pretoria. Part 1 consists of an analysis of the aims of Crocker's policy and the debates arising over it in the United States, including the bureaucratic rivalries, the sanctions controversy, and the response from public opinion, political parties, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and lobbyists. Equal coverage (three chapters) is given to South Africa's perception of constructive engagement and the "competing agendas" and "local realities" in that country, including the black opposition and the business community. Although part 2 deals with regional and international issues, it also includes "Crocker's aims" and "Washington's interests" as well as South Africa's "perspectives" and "concerns," thus repeating much of what appears in part 1.

In the introduction, which includes "the historical context" (up to 1980), the first leader of Angola's ruling party, the MPLA (Movimento Popular De Libertacao De Angola), is given as "Antonio" instead of Agostinho Neto; the MPLA's foundation as "1958" instead of 1956; the signing of the Alvor independence agreement "at a conference in Kenya" instead of Alvor, Portugal; and (later) the date of Angola's independence in "1974" instead of 1975 (pp. 13-14, 122, 181). In addition, some of the myths devised to justify constructive engagement, such as the need to protect "the Cape route" and South Africa's "vital mineral wealth," should have been deconstructed for what they were, just that (pp. 57-58). Furthermore, the figures provided by South Africa, and especially UNITA (Uniao Nacional Para A Independencia Total De Angola), for the gains and losses in the war should have been discounted as propaganda rather than accepted at face value, as they are in a table of South African military (SADF) operations in Angola prepared by a UNITA lobbyist in the United States.

The failure of constructive engagement is revealed quite early on in the book, when the author points out how "remarkable" it was that Pretoria's admission that it was "not prepared to play the reciprocal role demanded by constructive engagement"–the reform of apartheid and the release of Namibia in exchange for "respectability" as a U.S. ally in the Cold War–had "no apparent impact" on Crocker's policy (pp. 80-81). Having made the admission with no ill effects in return, the more volu-

ble (and indiscreet) Pik Botha (the foreign minister) often behaved as though he could not quite believe the windfall accorded South Africa: they could continue to repress their internal opposition and "destabilize" their black-ruled neighbors and the United States would not intervene to prevent them. But they would still have to go through the motions of "negotiations" because this would give the appearance of conforming to Crocker's agenda, while allowing South Africa to delay any real change indefinitely–in effect for another six years. By then, Crocker would be able to preside over the signing of a "peace" settlement ending South Africa's war in Namibia and Angola (and the presence of the Cuban forces) while leaving Pretoria's UNITA ally to fight on for another decade of death and destruction.

When apartheid finally came to an end it did so despite constructive engagement, which after the U.S. Congress had enacted sanctions against South Africa, became known (in State Department parlance) as "the policy that dare not speak its name" (p. 206). And, it came to an end as a result of at least two other matters "beyond Crocker's control." One of them was the resistance of the black opposition–the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the African National Congress (ANC)–which Crocker had dismissed as "communist" or "Soviet-controlled." The other was the Cuban defense of Angola at the crucial battle for Cuito Cuanavale, which finally drove out the SADF after more than one decade of occupation. The end of the Cold War helped as well, since South Africa's role as a U.S. ally against the "total onslaught" had ceased to exist, as had the Soviet Union.

But what is still missing from this book is any consideration of morality, or more properly, the lack thereof, even though, in the long run, it was the immorality of apartheid South Africa (symbolized by the resistance of Nelson Mandela) that mobilized the international community against it. There is also no acknowledgment of the victims of "destructive engagement." As a result of Crocker's policy, the SADF was given a green light to invade "Marxist" neighbors with impunity, thus causing the loss of more than one million lives in both Angola and Mozambique and more than thirty billion dollars in destruction in the front line states. Since the author discussed "the issues of this book" with Crocker and his loyal successor, Herman Cohen, the reader is left wondering how they would have responded if confronted with such an indictment, and also with the author's verdict of "failure" (p. vii).

Notes

[1]. The book is also published by James Currey (Oxford) and Jacana Media (Johannesburg).

[2]. David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, eds., *Frontline Southern Africa: Destructive Engagement* (New York: Four Walls, Eight Windows, 1988).

[3]. Joanne Davies, "South Africa and Constructive Engagement: Lessons Learned", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 34, No. l (March 2008): 5-19.

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