

South Africa now a Rogue Democracy

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Barack Obama, the 44th president of the United States, provides a symbol of hope for a nation filled with fear, for an uncertain world battered by the worst economic crisis in 80 years and faces an array of vexed international challenges.

Obama offers the opportunity for the US and the world to look for rights-based and multilateral solutions to the global crises. South Africa should be a willing and vigorous partner in the plan to reinvigorate a more just world order. But our recent votes and voice in international forums, such as the UN, have placed us on a potential collision course with a more enlightened White House and put us in the company of the worlds rights-delinquent nations and authoritarian regimes.()

Shortly before Christmas, South Africas foreign policy was again in the news in Washington and again for all the wrong reasons. Under the headline, outh Africas Crime, the highly influential Washington Post decried our governments enablement of Robert Mugabes estruction of neighbouring Zimbabwe, at the cost of thousands of lives. ()

South Africas blocking last month of a US-British initiative to put Zimbabwe back on the UN Security Council agenda was widely portrayed as another instance of our temporising with tyranny. In its lead editorial of December 21, the newspaper thundered: hats happening here is pretty clear: South Africa, a country that aspires to continental leadership, is allowing a depraved strongman to utterly destroy a neighbouring country Motlanthes government has the economic, political and military leverage to rescue Zimbabweans from their leader; yet it not only refuses to act, but actively blocks interventions by other countries. Mr Motlanthe, Mr Mbeki and those in South Africa who support this unconscionable policy have become accessories to a grave humanitarian crime. The South African embassy in Washington issued no rebuttal.

Apart from blocking UN discussions about human rights in Zimbabwe, we voted against imposing sanctions on Burmas rights-delinquent military junta, and on Iran for violating nuclear safeguards.

Our votes in the UNs Human Rights Council extended forward cover for other tyrannies, from Belarus to Uzbekistan. This led Washington heavyweight Michael Gerson to suggest that South Africas voting record placed it in a new foreign policy category: ogue democracy.

W e are clearly heading for an early collision with the administration of Barack Obama. Our UN votes, with those of Russia and China, have undermined efforts to implement the ground-breaking UN **responsibility to protect** resolution, which authorizes international intervention when a state fails to protect its own people from grievous violations of their human rights. But the new US administration is headed by true believers in this doctrine.

Take Obamas close foreign policy confidante, Susan Rice. She has been nominated as US ambassador to the UN and is an emphatic believer in coercive diplomacy to avert humanitarian catastrophes. She has advocated American-led bombing or naval blockades to force a recalcitrant Sudanese government to stop the slaughter in Darfur.

Seared by her visit to Rwanda after the 1994 genocide which the Clinton administration, of which she was a member, did nothing to prevent she vowed that it would not be allowed to happen again. ()

Obamas ascent on the world stage should provide a pause for thought in Pretoria. Do we want to be remembered for the distance our policies have travelled from Nelson Mandelas 1994 promise that human rights will be the light that guides our foreign affairs? Or will we seize the moment to reconnect our constitutional commitments to equality, human dignity and liberty to our voice and votes in world forums.

Tomorrow, in parliament, I will introduce the DAs foreign policy for the 2009 general election. It will align our approach to external affairs to our own constitutional commitments. It will recommit South Africa to the high road of human rights and ensure that our best national interests are served in the international arena.

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