

Matthew Graham, *The Crisis of South African Foreign Policy: Diplomacy, Leadership, and the Role of the African National Congress* (London, UK: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, 2015). pp. 292.

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Through its longevity, the African National Congress (ANC) has embraced their struggle as harbingers of righteous, domestic and international change. Constant scrutiny has been focalized upon the ANC and its policies after its full grasp of the democratic helm in 1994. Matthew Graham expressly responds to the recurring inquiry of ‘how and why did it go wrong’ for South Africa, reinvigorating a newly distinct comprehension through the diminishment of mistaken assumptions.¹ In his book, Graham strongly argues that the ANC did *not* come into power with an irrespective disconnect from its turbulent past.

In the pivotal moments of South African President F.W. de Klerk’s unbanning of the ANC in May of 1990 and the country’s subsequent transition from apartheid to democratic rule over the four-year period (1990-1994), the ANC faced the crossfire of concentrated interests and pressures both internally and externally. Furthermore, both the internal variability within the ANC and its elite-dominated centralization of power led to frequent controversy and the repression of vital internal debate. The very nature of the ANC’s ideological diversity presented immense difficulties for the elites as they struggled to clearly define their party’s movement. By comprehensively analyzing these aforementioned perspectives—in addition to an abundance of other historical drivers—Graham chronologically ascertains a much more thorough account of the ANC’s historical foreign policy influences. His imperative separation of focus—the ANC in exile (1960-1990), the transition from apartheid to democratic rule (1990-1994), and the ANC under political control (1994-present)—allows the audience to clearly identify the perpetual influence that the past has had, and continues to have, on the ANC’s diplomacy, while simultaneously gaining incredible insight into the crisis of near-present South African foreign policy.²

Graham initiates his chronological analyses with two distinct foci: the ANC in exile (1960-1976) and the transition from exile to liberation (1976-1990). Within both frameworks, Graham further compartmentalizes the foci into categories of temporal prominence; by doing so, he seams events together into a

definitive illustration of the sheer achievement of the ANC's survival and evolution. However, Graham correspondingly notes that although the party's identity had transformed beyond recognition, its international relationship and stance on foreign policy was questionable at best after the thirty-year period. The ANC was significantly dependent on the Communist Bloc for its survival, although it exhaustively sought assistance from Western powers. According to Graham, this mystified the perception of its domestic and international intentions. Yet, the ANC's unrelenting domestic and international pressure proved insurmountable forced the apartheid government to unban liberation movements and free Nelson Mandela. These episodes proved extremely influential in the development of the party's foreign policy.³

Analyzing the transition from apartheid to democratic rule, Graham delineates the sequential development of the democratic elections in April of 1994 and emphasizes that the ANC was not immediately involved in the foreign policy process until later in the transitional era.⁴ More importantly, Graham posits that during the transitional period, the National Party's (NP) lingering, yet dominating, control over foreign affairs enabled it to realign South Africa's foreign policy to its own interests and hinder the progress that the ANC had made internationally and domestically. In effect, ANC leaders worried that their ideological aspirations would be delegitimized and repressed by a predetermined foreign agenda.⁵

However, the ANC's foreign policy gradually developed over the period. Even though particular facets of the ANC's foreign policy mirrored the NP's, Graham argues that the decisions were entirely pragmatic. He additionally stresses that the ANC did, in fact, make bold decisions related to foreign policy, particularly by prioritizing human rights as a paramount emphasis. The ANC's international re-engagement, resulting in the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) Sub Council on Foreign Affairs' (SCFA) imperative assistance, demonstrated that it was *capable* of appropriate foreign policy once assimilated.⁶ Ultimately, Graham proposes that, due to a predetermined international position and a foreign policy position not purely its own, the ANC-led government faced tremendous hurdles in the establishment of a more characteristically 'ANC' foreign agenda.⁷

As the ANC-led government began its democratic embarkment, Graham emphasizes that the party's behavioral

eccentricities crippled the efficacy of its foreign policy. Muddled party interests did little to accentuate the needs of the country as a whole, especially on an international stage.⁸ Inefficiencies in the human rights aspects of South Africa's foreign policy resulted in their quiet dismissal and an increasing centralization of power. Graham argues that such conversion gave rise to foreign policy that increasingly represented the ANC, rather than South Africa.⁹ While Nelson Mandela's successor Thabo Mbeki was arguably successful in achieving his political goals, Graham characterizes his presidency as an ascent into international renown predicated upon idealistic ambition with minor attention devoted to the plausibility of such aspiration. The success of his aspirations were essentially contingent upon firm relations and partnerships with Western powers, and yet the contradictory ideologies to this contingency were prioritized, resulting in what Graham understandably argues as purely predictable.¹⁰

The legacies of exile, the effects of the transition into a post-apartheid state, the external and internal constraints and contradictions, and the ANC's idealistic prioritization all share an unquestionable influence on the ANC's foreign policy objectives when historically analyzed. Graham fastidiously delineates the crucial historical circumstances that molded the ANC in this deeply fascinating assessment; by doing so, he presents the audience with an extraordinary cognizance of the past and near-current crises of South Africa's foreign policy and the African National Congress.

Notes

¹ Matthew Graham, *The Crisis of South African Foreign Policy: Diplomacy, Leadership, and the African National Congress* (London, UK: I.B. Taurus & Co. Ltd, 2015), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 1-4.

³ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 210-211.