

THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL SECLUSION

A STUDY OF SELF-ISOLATED STATES



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by

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A STUDY OF SELF-ISOLATED STATES**

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INTRODUCTION

In an era of growing contact and interdependence between states, any notion of self-isolation seems rather anachronistic. Yet, voluntary isolation or isolationism is still a foreign policy orientation that some states may consider and indeed pursue.¹ For those attracted to the idea, there are many historical examples to go by.

Over the centuries, a diversity of nations have resorted to policies of international seclusion. From great imperial powers to obscure mountain kingdoms they have tried to seal themselves off from the outside world. They have resorted to various measures to restrict or eliminate interaction with foreign countries in the diplomatic, economic, military and socio-cultural spheres.

This study examines the policies and practices of a number of self-isolated countries. The intention is not to present an exhaustive list, but rather to consider a fairly representative selection of voluntarily isolated states, both historical and contemporary. Nor will detailed case studies be undertaken; instead, a brief overview of the main features of the various states' isolation will be presented.

Another qualification should be added. Some of the case studies do not neatly fit the category of self-imposed isolation; they also displayed features of externally enforced isolation. The dominant trait of their international position was nonetheless seclusion rather than ostracism.²

The discussion will be arranged around a series of key questions. What motivated policies of self-isolation? What were the major domestic and external manifestations of such policies? In cases where voluntary isolation was abandoned, when, how and why was it done? And, finally, how viable an option is isolationism in this day and age?

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

For many, particularly Western, students of international relations, pre-war American foreign policy still represents the outstanding example of self-isolation and this remains the most thoroughly researched case of voluntary isolation.³

The enduring scholarly fascination with American isolationism is in part related to its very persistence over a period of some 140 years. As Selig Adler pointed out, "the isolationist impulse has been woven into the warp and woof of the American epic".⁴

Two celebrated expositions of early American isolationism are President George Washington's Farewell address in 1796 and President Thomas Jefferson's First Inaugural in 1801. Washington maintained that "Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have no or a very remote relation". Consequently, he argued,

it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves by artificial ties in the ordinary vicissitudes of her (i.e. Europe's) politics or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities.⁵

Washington went on to warn his countrymen against "permanent alliances" and urged them capitalise on America's "detached and distant situation".⁶ Jefferson's famous injunction was that America should seek "honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none".⁷

Although Washington had made non-intervention and neutrality "national fixations", in Adler's words,⁸ American isolationism by no means meant a complete withdrawal from international relations. Thus, in 1793, the United States entered the War of the First Coalition in support of France⁹ and "blundered" into war with Britain in 1812.¹⁰ Nor did the United States adopt a *laissez faire* attitude with regard to the Western Hemisphere. In 1823, President James Monroe warned against European interference in the New World. In what became known as the Monroe Doctrine, he declared that the American continents "are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers".¹¹

One of the considerations behind American isolationism was a sense of political, cultural and moral uniqueness, if not superiority. Europe was portrayed as a forlorn continent, wracked by power politics, diplomatic intrigues, dynastic rivalries and class conflicts. Scores of European immigrants had crossed the Atlantic Ocean as "chosen peoples". This strong sense of manifest destiny could only remain uncontaminated if Americans separated themselves from their European origins.¹² "Self-quarantine" was in other words regarded as the best way to prevent the intrinsically different and superior American way of life "from being soiled and tainted by Europe's undemocratic domestic institutions and foreign policy behavior".¹³

But while on the one hand keen to detach themselves from the perceived evils of the Old World, Americans were on the other hand imbued with a missionary zeal. They tended to see themselves as the world's "moral renovators", applauding struggles for national self-determination elsewhere. The conviction that the fortunes of America's free institutions "depended upon the universal triumph of democracy", moderated the intensity of isolationism.¹⁴ This has produced an enduring ambivalence in United States foreign relations: "As a people", Kissinger wrote of the Americans, "we have oscillated between insistence on our uniqueness and the quest for broad acceptance of our values, between trying to influence international developments and seeking to isolate ourselves from them".¹⁵

America's relative lack of power was in itself a motivation for isolationism. The new republic experienced military weakness, its population was small and moreover subjected to sectional rivalries. Under such circumstances, a policy of abstentionism vis-à-vis Europe was sensible and indeed imperative.¹⁶ External commitments could have reduced the vulnerable young state to a mere pawn on the international chessboard.¹⁷

A sense of external threat also shaped early American isolationism. The new Republic was "hemmed in on three sides" by European colonialism. The British, French and Spaniards moreover tried to interfere in United States domestic affairs and to incite the Indians against the white settlers. By pursuing a policy of isolationism, American leaders hoped to prevent external subversion and secure their freedom of action at home and also abroad.¹⁸ The extent of threats from abroad should, however, not be exaggerated. The United States was not seriously coveted by the great powers of the nineteenth century. They had far more immediate preoccupations than America.¹⁹

Geographic considerations also militated against imperialist ambitions in America. Geography was indeed a crucial element in the makeup of American isolationism. The United States was physically far removed from the European centres of power. As part of the New World, it belonged to a different geographic sphere. Isolationism, in Drummond's words, "appeared to have been ordained by nature".²⁰ This was reinforced by pseudo-religious notions that America was the "New Zion", severed by the Almighty from a decaying continent.²¹ The blessings of geography led Bismarck to remark pointedly that "God takes care of fools, drunkards and the foreign policy of the United States".²²

Self-isolation provided the United States with a kind of shield behind which it could attend to pressing domestic affairs. There were boundaries to be rounded out and authority established. The quest for (white) American control over the continent officially ended only in 1890, with the last of 37 wars against the Indians.²³ Other concerns included the establishment of a democratic order and economic development.²⁴

These, then, were the major factors influencing American isolationism. Self-isolation was not an end in itself, but a way of promoting American security in the final analysis. It was by no means a policy of total abstention from international affairs. Isolationism did not prevent the United States from engaging Spain in a war over the situation in Cuba in 1898,²⁵ nor did it preclude American participation in the first Hague conference in 1899²⁶ and involvement in most of the fifty or so international unions established between 1804 and 1914.²⁷ In the decade and a half leading up to the First World War, the United States pursued what Adler has termed "a grossly inconsistent policy". On the one hand, it maintained a (qualified) isolationism with regard to Europe, yet on the other hand cooperated with other great powers in establishing the "open door" doctrine in China and resorted to "big stick" diplomacy to ensure its dominance over the New World.²⁸

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 presented American isolationism with its first major test. After almost three years of neutrality, the United States intervened in the war. Instead of explaining the declaration of war in terms of American interests, President Woodrow Wilson turned involvement into an ideological crusade: it was a war to make the world safe for (American) democracy.²⁹ This "Wilsonian globalism"³⁰ was hopelessly idealistic and set the scene for a profound disillusionment. The upshot was a new era of American isolationism.³¹ An early casualty of this resurgence of isolationism was, of course, the League of Nations.

By the time Warren G Harding became President in 1921, a "great isolationist front" had been solidified in American politics.³² The revived self-isolation displayed some familiar features. American leaders in the 1920s reasserted the nation's claims to uniqueness and indeed moral superiority. This was accompanied by a rising tide of anti-foreign sentiment. Anti-foreignism, Adler remarked, "was the Siamese twin of isolationism" -- a characteristic not uniquely American, as we will see later.³³ America's economic prosperity reinforced the notion that the country could maintain its international position with minimal involvement in foreign affairs.³⁴ The international climate was also conducive to an American retreat, in large measure, ironically, due to the League of Nations. By resolving a number of major issues arising from the war, the League obviated any need for American involvement.³⁵

Even so, American isolationism in the 1920s was rather restrained and superficial, compared with official policies and the popular mood of 1930s. A series of domestic and extraneous events combined to unleash an "isolationist tornado". Two principal factors led to the renewed upsurge in detachment. The first was the Great Depression and the second was the subversion of the post-war settlements by the aggressive actions of foreign powers. Japan invaded Manchuria and Italy occupied Abyssinia. Nazi Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and began embarking on an expansionist foreign policy. Spain was plunged into civil war. In 1937, the Berlin-Tokyo-Rome Axis was consummated.³⁶

The isolationism of the 1930s found expression in a number of far-reaching legislative measures. With the Johnson Act of 1934, Congress legislated a form of economic isolationism. (The law prohibited American citizens lending money to or purchasing securities from foreign governments in default to the United States.) The "supreme triumph" of the isolationist creed was the neutrality legislation of 1935-37. The provisions of the first two temporary neutrality laws of 1935 and 1936 were given permanence in the Third Neutrality Act of 1937. The latter measure directed the President to impose an arms embargo against all belligerents in a foreign war. In addition, a prohibition was placed on American loans to any of the belligerent powers.³⁷ On the eve of the Second World War, the United States was therefore caught up "in a stage of acute self-imposed isolationism", according to Rostow, "in which a desire to protect the nation merged with a sense that only isolationism could protect the special virtues of American domestic society". The country sought refuge in a "chastity belt" of neutrality laws.³⁸

When Britain and France declared war on Germany in 1939, Roosevelt declared America's neutrality and proclaimed the 1937 neutrality law operative. Still, the outbreak of another major war presented American isolationism with a far more serious challenge than in 1914. What of

course brought matters to a head, was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. It spelled the end of America's neutrality.³⁹

Four years later, the United States again emerged on the side of the victorious coalition after a global war. This time, it was the sole, undisputed super power. American interests, goals and values became very closely identified with those of Europe. The protection of its interests now demanded an alliance policy well beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere. For Kissinger, these developments "marked the definitive end of US isolationism".⁴⁰ True, there have since been flickerings of isolationist sentiments. Disillusionment with early post-war international politics, notably Soviet machinations, gave rise to a new mood of American isolationism.⁴¹ The United States' political and military setbacks in Southeast Asia in the late Sixties and early Seventies again rekindled isolationist sentiments.⁴² But these sporadic bouts of isolationism fell well short of the thorough-going self-isolation of the pre-war years.

GREAT BRITAIN

Britain has always been an essential part of the European continent which, until the end of the nineteenth century, represented what Hedley Bull would have called international society.⁴³ But although its fortunes were closely tied to Europe, Britain's insular position gave it considerably more freedom of action than continental powers enjoyed. Geographical location thus facilitated Britain's imperial exploits in distant parts of the world. However, this very situation presented Britain with a dilemma: on the one hand it could not escape the influence of events in Europe, but on the other the primary sources of its "greatness and prosperity" lay in its overseas empire and foreign trade. Britain tried to reconcile the two considerations by closely observing the European scene but intervening only when the balance of power was in serious jeopardy. Peace and the maintenance of a continental equilibrium allowed Britain to concentrate on its vital interests elsewhere.⁴⁴

A crucial component of this traditional British foreign policy of the "free hand", was the refusal to enter into permanent alliances in peacetime (with the exception of the Anglo-Portuguese alliance which was related to safeguarding Britain's sea communications) and the avoidance of any commitments to go to war. When Britain went to war in Europe - it intervened in five major conflicts in the last four centuries - it was to prevent continental powers (Spain, France and Germany, in turn) from upsetting the power balance and establishing dominance over Europe.⁴⁵

Just how old the tradition of avoiding permanent alliances is, is open to dispute. This notion had nonetheless been publicly expounded by leading British politicians since at least the 1840s.⁴⁶ In 1866, for example, the Earl of Derby, Prime Minister, declared it the British government's duty to maintain goodwill towards all surrounding states, "but not to entangle itself with any single or monopolizing alliance with any one of them".⁴⁷ (These words are strongly reminiscent of Jefferson's First Inaugural.) By then, the so-called Manchester liberals had for some years been urging Britain's complete and permanent detachment from European affairs.⁴⁸

Circumstances permitted Britain to adopt a posture of aloofness. During the extended Victorian peace, Britain found itself economically powerful and ruler of the oceans. Britain established a vast empire in which its authority remained unchallengeable, since the European powers were preoccupied with more immediate matters. Britain's international standing in the era of "pax Britannica" in the nineteenth century has been described by George Monger as follows:

It was the apogee of her power. She had no need of allies; and isolation, which had at first been partially imposed upon her by events, was soon accepted as a sign of her strength and self-sufficiency.⁴⁹

In the 1980s, it indeed became common to refer to Britain's "isolation" as a matter of policy. By then, the term had also lost much of its earlier pejorative connotations. Instead of being regarded as an inadvisable refusal to cooperate in any way with other states, isolation was now associated with British power and pride.⁵⁰

In 1896, George Goschen, First Lord of the Admiralty, made a celebrated statement on Britain's voluntary isolation:

Our isolation is not an isolation of weakness; it is deliberately chosen, the freedom to act as we choose in any circumstances that may arise.

While other powers were "bartering favour for favour, promise for promise", Goschen continued, the British had stood alone in "our splendid isolation".⁵¹

Goschen had borrowed the expression, splendid isolation, from Canada. A few weeks earlier, a Canadian cabinet minister, George Foster, asserted in the Canadian House of Commons that "(t)he great mother Empire stands splendidly isolated in Europe". He and other Canadian politicians who echoed this view did not portray Britain's isolation as a deliberate policy, but as the result of circumstances. Britain was the target of other nations' antagonism and it had neither allies nor friends among the other great powers. In this sense, Britain was experiencing a degree of enforced isolation. The epithet "splendid" referred, for some, to Britain's superiority based on its naval power and trade. For others, "splendid" meant that Britain could in times of international adversity always rely on the loyal support of its self-governing colonies (Canada included).⁵²

The two components of British isolation - seclusion and ostracism - were also acknowledged by Sir William Harcourt, Chancellor of the Exchequer. In 1896 he spoke of "two kinds of isolation": one "which arises from the unfriendliness of the world" and the other which flows from the desire "not ... to enter into permanent or entangling alliances".⁵³ Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary, took up the same theme two years later. For fifty years, he said, "the policy of Britain had been a policy of strict isolation. We have had no allies. I am afraid we have had no friends". He attributed this to envy of British successes, suspicions of British motives and the notion that Britain wanted other nations to protect its interests without rewarding them.

Chamberlain added that Britain's policy of isolation brought it many advantages, such as avoiding foreign quarrels.⁵⁴ Such statements are of course not to suggest that Britain could completely turn its back on the world; that would have been impossible for an imperial power and trading nation. Like America's, Britain's self-isolation was severely circumscribed. There was however never any document that represented a classic, popularly known exposition of Britain's policy of isolation, comparable to Washington's and Jefferson's earlier mentioned declarations.⁵⁵

As the course of events in Europe and elsewhere in the 1890s took a decidedly inauspicious turn for Britain, these two aspects of its isolation were highlighted. On the one hand, Britain's solitary international position was emphasised: there were tensions in its relations with several of the other major powers and Britain's prestige suffered from diplomatic setbacks in both hemispheres.⁵⁶ On the other hand, the unfavourable international conditions began to raise doubts in Britain about the viability of its traditional policy of self-isolation.

The major foreign developments influencing Britain's position, can be listed briefly. The Franco-Russian Alliance of 1894 united two of Britain's most formidable opponents. Russia embarked on a new round of territorial expansion, bringing it in conflict with Britain. Germany's growing economic and military strength, coupled with an assertive foreign policy, caused concern among its neighbours. Japan emerged on the scene as a military power to be reckoned with, as witness its subjugation of China in 1895. The United States' claims to predominance in Central America and the Caribbean invariably affected British interests. It was an unprecedented concentration of great power attention on territorial expansion, confronting Britain as never before with intense competition all over the world. The very foundation of the "pax Britannica" was effectively destroyed.⁵⁷ Confident assertions about the splendour of isolation could not mask the necessity of considering alternative policies for safeguarding Britain's interests at home and in the Empire.

A serious challenge to Britain's imperial designs came from Africa, where the Anglo-Boer War broke out in 1899. It was Britain's first - and costly - taste of a spirit of nationalism resisting the might of Empire. The vastly outnumbered Boers' stubborn resistance to British attempts to conquer their two republics by force, "knocked the gilt off the Victorian age", JAS Grenville wrote. Britain was moreover placed on the defensive all over the world. Many Britons were unpleasantly surprised by the abuse from abroad to which they were subjected during the Anglo-Boer War. Continental newspapers, Grenville recorded rather graphically, "vied with each other to praise the heroic Boer farmer defending his homestead against the English soldiers in the pay of gold-grabbing English capitalists". The British government was concerned that this wave of anti-British feeling might encourage some European governments to take advantage of its vulnerability. There was indeed some evidence that the Russians were trying to raise a continental league against Britain.⁵⁸ This was clearly no time to be without friends or allies.

It was in the Far East that Britain faced its most acute problems and where the need for a formal ally was greatest. The crisis over China provided the real testing ground for a new British foreign policy orientation after the demise of the "pax Britannica" had rendered isolation obsolete. In 1898, Lord Salisbury, Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, warned about the conflict among

the great powers caused by their rival claims in China. The situation called for a remedy, but he did not think that Britain's traditional policy of isolation could secure peace. He was followed by Chamberlain, who alluded to Britain's vast commercial interests in China. Of one thing Chamberlain was certain:

if the policy of isolation ... is to be maintained in the future, then the fate of the Chinese Empire may be, probably will be, hereafter decided without reference to our wishes and in defiance of our interests.

He urged that Britain should not reject the idea of an alliance with powers whose interests coincided with its own.⁵⁹ With regard to China, Chamberlain and also other cabinet members favoured an alliance with Germany.⁶⁰ The upshot was the Anglo-German China Agreement, signed in October 1900. Unsatisfactory though the terms of agreement were for Britain - it fell short of a military alliance - the treaty represented a significant break with traditional British foreign policy.⁶¹

A more important departure from the longstanding British aversion to entangling alliances followed in 1902 with the conclusion of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. By entering into a military pact with Japan, Howard wrote, "Britain's 'isolation', in all its assorted connotations, had come to an end".⁶² Grenville took a more qualified view, depicting the "new course" of British foreign policy at the turn of the century as one of "partial-commitment". It was only in 1939, Grenville argued, that Britain finally accepted the proposition that its fate "was not only linked to, but dependent on, the fate of continental Europe".⁶³

The point, nonetheless, is that Britain became convinced that a policy of detachment and a condition of alienation presented a threat to its interests in the new world of the twentieth century.

JAPAN

The first account of Japan to be written in a European language, was authored by the intrepid 13th century Venetian explorer, Marco Polo. In his *Travels*, he recorded that the "civilized" inhabitants of the Japanese islands "are independent of every foreign power, and governed only by their own kings". Marco Polo's report contained many geographical inaccuracies about Japan, however. It was only some years after the Portuguese had reached China, in 1519, that an accurate description of Japan and its people reached Europe. By the time Japan was "discovered" by Portuguese seafarers, it had of course been in existence, as a separate national entity, for many centuries.⁶⁴

The landing of Portuguese traders in Japan in 1542, soon followed by Portuguese Jesuits, marked a new chapter in the history of Japan. The country was for the first time being penetrated by Europeans. In the early 1600s, the Dutch and the English arrived on the scene to trade. From

Spain came a number of friars. By 1614, some 170 foreign priests had been allowed to work in Japan. The expatriate missionaries had an uneasy relationship with Japan's rulers, however, not only or even primarily because of their alien religion, but because of their involvement in domestic politics. Successive Shoguns' retaliated by persecuting Christians, both foreign missionaries in Japan and local converts. But it soon became apparent that far more was involved than political misdemeanors of foreign priests. It was a fundamental conflict between Christian values and those of traditional Japanese society. The existence of Christianity, in short, became irreconcilable with the Japanese political and social order.⁶⁵

The campaign against foreign influences did not end with the suppression of Christianity. The tight restrictions that the Japanese rulers had from the very beginning imposed on Dutch and English traders resident in Japan, were made progressively more severe. European merchants were, for example, confined to Nagasaki and the island of Hirado. In 1624, all Spaniards were expelled from Japan. The Portuguese were still permitted to trade with Japan, but under highly restrictive and humiliating conditions.⁶⁶

Up to this point, Japan was being sealed off from the outside world by severely restricting access to the country. Then, in 1636, Shogun Iyemitsu cut off the reverse flow of people. He issued a decree that made it a capital offence for a Japanese to leave or attempt to leave the country. A permanent ban was also placed on the building of ocean-going ships in Japan. This drastic measure, "which placed the whole Japanese people in an ethical quarantine", could be explained in terms of classic isolationist considerations. The Tokugawa Shogunate had managed, after centuries of internal war, to establish a form of government that held out the promise of a peaceful, orderly and prosperous life for the Japanese. Having developed this supposedly superior political system, there was not much to be gained from foreign nations - but Japan might learn much that could be damaging. Foreigners and their ideas, it was feared, may well disturb the political and social equilibrium upon which the new system rested.⁶⁷

In the wake of Iyemitsu's decree, Japan placed further restrictions on what little remained of a foreign commercial presence. Following the alleged complicity of Portuguese in a Christian revolt in 1637, all trade with Portugal was outlawed by banning Portuguese ships from Japan. When a Portuguese vessel in 1640 arrived in Nagasaki in defiance of this edict, all but a handful of the crew were executed. The survivors returned to the Portuguese enclave of Macao with a chilling formal message:

So long as the sun warms the earth, any Christian bold enough to come to Japan, even if he be King Philip himself or the God of the Christians, shall pay for it with his head.⁶⁸

The only exception applied to the Dutch, who were permitted to continue their trade with the Japanese, but under severe restrictions.

For two hundred years, the system of *sakoku* - the "closed country" - was maintained. The Japanese lived well removed from the rest of mankind. Their only source of knowledge about

events abroad was the occasional book that Japanese authorities allowed the handful of foreign merchants to bring into the country. Japanese were not encouraged to extend their knowledge of matters foreign either. Until the nineteenth century, consequently, their conception of international relations was shaped largely by what they had learned two centuries earlier.⁶⁹

In due course, Japan began encountering a problem familiar to isolationist nations, namely, unfavourable developments abroad. Any isolationist state's seclusion depends on the willingness of others to respect its wishes to be left alone and, related to that, the state's ability to withstand foreign demands that it should open up to contact with the outside world. International events since the late 1700s worked to Japan's disadvantage in both these respects. One major development was European expansionism into the Far East and elsewhere – coupled with industrial growth and a search for markets – which served notice on Japan that it would not forever escape the attention (and material desires) of the Europeans. Indeed, by the 1840s there was good reason for assuming that mercantile interests in Europe would force continental governments to put an end to Japan's self-isolation. But apart from commercial considerations, foreign powers – notably Russia, Britain and the United States – also had political and strategic interests in the Far East. Another important development undermining Japan's isolation, was the unequalled advances in European science and technology, which by the nineteenth century left Japan militarily vulnerable.⁷⁰

There was another rather unusual reason why foreign powers wanted to force Japan out of isolation. They could no longer tolerate Japan's notorious lack of civility towards alien seamen in distress or in need of supplies. "Japanese seclusion had therefore become an offence", Beasley noted.⁷¹

By mid-century it became apparent "that the closed door must open or it would be broken down". It was the Americans who, in 1853, forced their way into Japan and opened the door for others to follow suit. In July, a squadron of American naval vessels, led by Commodore Matthew Perry, sailed into Yedo Bay – without the consent of the Japanese. It was the first modern Western squadron to reach Japanese shores and its evident strength caused much consternation among the unwilling hosts.⁷² Perry was a man with a mission. He presented the Japanese authorities with a polite letter from President Fillmore emphasising America's wish for an opening of trade and for hospitality and facilities for foreign ships. In his own letter to the Japanese, Perry was more forthright: if the Americans' "very reasonable and pacific overtures" were not accepted at once, he would in due course return for a reply – "with a much larger force".⁷³

When Perry duly returned in February 1854, the Japanese were ready to accede to American demands, except on the issue of trade. In March, a treaty was signed that designated two Japanese ports of refuge, contained Japanese assurances of good treatment for castaways and provided for the appointment of consuls. Britain, Russia and Holland soon concluded similar agreements with Japan. It was only in 1858 that foreigners secured the right to trade with Japan, with the signing of a Japanese-American commercial treaty.⁷⁴

The conclusion of these treaties represented a watershed in Japanese history: it heralded a slow, often grudging, move out of two centuries of strict isolation and into the international fold. For those in the Japanese leadership supporting a new policy of opening up to the world, the disadvantages of seclusion began to outweigh the benefits. Advantages there certainly were. By turning its back on the world, Japan had for 200 years managed to keep itself out of major foreign wars. Isolation enabled Japan to concentrate on internal unification and economic development. It furthermore provided the impetus for a deeper, more uniform spread of a common culture across the island of Japan. Seclusion may even have been the crucial factor protecting Japan from subjugation to Western powers in a period when many parts of Asia succumbed to Western imperialism.⁷⁵

On the debit side, Japan's geographic location could no longer insulate it from external influences and designs. The Western naval presence in the Pacific Ocean was by then so formidable that it could quite easily break through Japan's traditional natural impenetrability. And the Japanese soon realised that they could only defend themselves if they acquired European military knowhow.⁷⁶ From a military perspective, Japan was in 1853 "in the position of a naked man faced by ten armed adversaries", in Porter's words. The country had no allies, it lacked a navy and possessed only a pitiful supply of modern weapons.⁷⁷

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Japan embarked on a "political, social and industrial revolution" that transformed it into an "Occidentalized country". But the process of modernisation did not always proceed smoothly, least of all in the early years. A major reason was the undisguised Japanese hostility to what they regarded as treaties imposed on them from outside. In 1859, the Emperor and the Shogun jointly committed themselves to revoking the treaties and declared: "we must assuredly keep aloof from foreigners and revert to the sound rule of seclusion as formerly laid down in our national laws".⁷⁸ Despite this uncompromising statement, there were some differences within the ruling class, with the Shogun and his advisers on the whole more sympathetic to the introduction of Western ideas than were the Mikado and his courtiers. Foreign powers, moreover, left Japan with no real choice but to permit increasing external penetration in various spheres of life.⁷⁹

Such was the scope and speed of modernisation in Japan that it defeated Russia in the war in 1904-05. It was the first time in modern history that an Asian country triumphed over a great power in all-out war. Like the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902 (extended in scope in 1905), the war with Russia signified Japan's attainment of equality in the society of states. It moreover launched Japan on imperialist expansion. Treaties concluded with France and Russia in 1907 confirmed Japan's international status. With the outbreak of the First World War, Japan was for the first time powerful enough to intervene in a European conflict. The end of the war saw Japan as a world power, acknowledged in its permanent seat on the Council of the League of Nations.⁸⁰ So, within five decades after Japan's two centuries of voluntary isolation made way for enforced integration, it joined the ranks of the major powers.

CHINA

For most part of their history, the Chinese would probably have regarded as preposterous any suggestion that their country either practised or experienced isolation, that they were a hermit nation cut off from the great mass of humanity beyond their borders. China, for some 2 000 years, regarded itself "as the only great empire on earth, the only civilization, the only culture that really mattered".⁸¹ China was, to put it differently, "a world unto itself, in which Europe had no part. It was a complete international system".⁸² As the Middle Kingdom, China was at the head of an East Asian "family of nations". The smaller countries on its periphery – Korea, Annam, Siam, Burma and for a time also Japan – played the role of subordinate members. The Chinese emperor claimed to be the "Son of Heaven", divinely ordained as the supreme ruler over all mankind. Among his subjects were numerous "uncivilized and outlandish" peoples – known as "barbarians" – awaiting acculturation and assimilation into the great Chinese society. If there was any notion of isolation, it would from a Chinese perspective have referred to the barbarians, whose inferior cultural standards put a distance between them and the Chinese.⁸³

The cultural alienation was vividly expressed by Su Shih, a famous Sung statesman:

The barbarians cannot be governed in the same way as China is governed. That is to say, to seek good government among animals will inevitably lead to great confusion.

In similar vein, early Chinese officials thought Western barbarians displayed the disposition of "dogs and sheep".⁸⁴ Barbarians allowed to enter China proper were subjected to a policy of segregation and constant surveillance. They were not permitted to travel to the heartland of China or to fraternise with the local people lest their actions subvert the Chinese way of life.⁸⁵

Geographic factors fostered the peculiar Chinese view of the world. China's physical remoteness had indeed shielded it from direct confrontations with other perhaps more advanced nations. Interaction with the Western world was at best sporadic. So while a Western system of nation states with a new set of rules of behaviour was evolving in the wake of the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, the Chinese were practising a wholly different kind of diplomacy. The universal Chinese state, with its monolithic prestige, was the very antithesis of a community of legally equal and sovereign states conducting international relations on the basis of such equality. Since China moreover recognised only barbarian and not foreign affairs, there was no need for a foreign office.⁸⁶

When the expanding Western-based family of nations eventually and inevitably came into contact with the closed Oriental family of nations, the experience was traumatic for both sides. It produced a collision of two fundamentally different, culturally based systems of diplomacy. The Chinese were still wedded to their traditional tributary system, which inter alia required visiting envoys of other sovereigns to perform the kowtow in approaching the emperor. This formality, consisting of three kneelings and nine prostrations, was particularly offensive to

Western representatives, for it implied their nations' vassal status vis-à-vis China.⁸⁷ Whereas Western nations became eager for and insistent upon formal diplomatic representation – a common Western practice since the Renaissance – it was a concept unknown in the East Asian family of nations. Resident envoys were never exchanged between China and its tributaries.⁸⁸

China's isolation from Europe had negative consequences in other areas too. Until at least the end of the Middle Ages (in Europe), China managed to stand its ground in technology. But the scientific renaissance in Europe in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, as well as the later industrial revolution, largely bypassed China.⁸⁹ It was only when the Western powers came knocking at the door that China awoke from its lethargy to realise how far it had been left behind by developments in the distant barbarian world.

The first Westerners to arrive in China were the Portuguese in the early sixteenth century. In 1557 they occupied Macao and began developing it into a trading port. Next came the Spaniards, followed by the Dutch and the Russians. China's first treaty was concluded with Russia in 1689. The Treaty of Nerchinsk formally ended a border war between the two states. Further agreements with Russia followed, but they did not "open China up" either to foreign trade or diplomatic relations. The Russians were merely granted trade privileges at the border and the right of residence for Russia's embassy in Peking (no provision was made for reciprocal representation).⁹⁰ Trade and the other early Western activity in China, the spread of Christianity, were placed under severe restrictions by Chinese authorities. The object of these typically isolationist measures was to prevent the Chinese economy being undermined by imported Western goods and Chinese culture and Chinese culture being undermined by Jesuit missionaries and Catholicism.⁹¹ It is also instructive to note that China's "periods of morose exclusiveness" always coincided with "periods of maladministration and consequent disorder at home".⁹²

It was eventually left to Britain to open China up to the West. A number of British emissaries despatched to the imperial court – including the famous mission of Lord Macartney in 1793⁹³ – failed to achieve the desired results. But force succeeded. Following the British victory in the Opium War, the two countries signed the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. The Chinese made major concessions, reminiscent of those made by Japan a decade later. Five Chinese ports were opened to trade, Hong Kong was ceded in perpetuity to Britain and equal status in diplomatic correspondence was to be observed. Other powers soon followed suit, with America, France, Belgium, Sweden and Norway all concluding trade agreements with China between 1844 and 1847.⁹⁴ These became known as the "unequal treaties" and China remained subject to this system of international relations for a century, until the treaties were nullified in 1943.⁹⁵ It was a "century of shame and humiliation" imposed by foreign powers.⁹⁶

It took another war before Britain managed to accomplish fully its objectives of a substantial opening up of China to trade and direct diplomatic dealings with the Peking court. The second war between Britain, supported by France, and China (1858–60) was finally concluded with the Treaty of Peking in 1860. A number of further ports were opened to foreign trade, access was granted to the hitherto closed North China and diplomatic relations with the Imperial Court were established. This concession represented nothing but a "forcible imposition of foreign legations

on China". More fundamentally, their establishment "signified the victory of the expanding Western family of nations in the East".⁹⁷ For the rest, the great interior of China remained closed to foreign trade and residence. The period 1689 to 1860 nonetheless represented the first stage in the opening of China – or the beginning of the end of its seclusion.⁹⁸

China's integration into the international community did not proceed smoothly. Diplomatic relations were seriously hampered by the poor organisation of China's Foreign Office. It was only in 1877 that China sent its first diplomat overseas, to London.⁹⁹ Three years later, China had established legations in most leading Western states and Japan. A second problem bedevilling China's foreign relations, was the popular strength of anti-foreigner prejudice. "Antiforeignism" was a mass sentiment resulting in large measure from "injustices" caused by foreign countries in China.¹⁰⁰ The antagonism to the West found violent expression in the infamous Tientsin Massacre of 1870 and the Boxer Uprising thirty years later.¹⁰¹

These obstacles notwithstanding, China had by 1880 "realistically, if also painfully, assumed her place in the world community of nations" – only four decades after the Opium War heralded China's enforced opening to the West. The age of China's universal empire and the myth of universal overlordship were things of the past; China had entered the age of the nation-state. In the words of Hsü, "Chinese history began to merge with world history".¹⁰²

The revolution of 1911 and the establishment of a republic marked a new phase in China's foreign relations. Its political system was transformed and a vigilant nationalism guarded against further Japanese or Western encroachments on Chinese sovereignty. China's (reluctant) entry into an alliance with the Allied forces in the First World War – its first ever alliance – and its subsequent contributions at the Versailles Conference and in the League of Nations, led Western states to adopt an attitude of equality towards the country.¹⁰³ But international integration had its price: with growing economic cooperation with foreign powers went the increasing danger of excessive external influence over China's economy through trade, loans and investment.¹⁰⁴ So for China the pendulum had swung from a traditional autarkic economic system to international economic interdependence and even dependence. The penetration of China by alien and more powerful Western societies ever since the Opium War reversed China's traditional status: it now in effect became "a tributary of the West".¹⁰⁵

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949, following the Chinese Communists' victory over the forces of the ruling Kuomintang in the Chinese civil war, marked yet another phase in China's long history. Not only was the country subjected to an internal transformation into a communist society, but its foreign relations were profoundly affected by these events. What greatly complicated matters, is that the defeated Kuomintang fled to the island of Taiwan but still claimed to be the legitimate government of the Republic of China (ROC) as proclaimed in 1911. A large number of countries, with the United States in the vanguard, accepted the rival Taiwan-based government's claim to be the legitimate ruler of all China and they consequently tried to ostracise the new communist government in Peking. The latter, however, also had its supporters among foreign states, which meant that they in turn ostracised the government in Taipei. The upshot was intense international rivalry between the

PRC and ROC for support for their respective claims to be the sole legitimate voice of the entire China. Each side wanted to break out of its own enforced isolation and promote the ostracism of its rival.¹⁰⁶

By the mid-sixties, the PRC had made major strides in overcoming its imposed isolation, particularly in the diplomatic and economic spheres.¹⁰⁷ But then China's gradual international integration was temporarily interrupted by a severe spell of self-isolation, which completely eclipsed the remaining elements of ostracism. This period of isolationism coincided with the cultural revolution.

Mao Tse-tung's "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" - largely designed to establish fundamentally new conceptions of authority - held China firmly in its grip in the years 1966 to 1968.¹⁰⁸ The domestic struggle was inevitably and dramatically reflected in the PRC's foreign relations. The external effects can usefully be explained in terms of Scalapino's twin concepts of "quasi-isolation" and "quasi-involvement" in Chinese foreign policy.¹⁰⁹

Quasi-isolation had several manifestations. One was the familiar feature of anti-foreignism. With its slogans of "anti-revisionism" and "anti-imperialism", the new wave of anti-foreignism affected the political, economic and cultural life of society. There were early campaigns against such bourgeois remnants as Western fashions and taxis. Even Peking's *Legation Street*, housing foreign embassies, was renamed Anti-Imperialist Street. There was a complete rejection of all Western art, literature and music. Chinese who were educated in the West or communicated with people abroad were persecuted; such a foreign connection was synonymous with spying in the revolutionaries' book. Foreigners in China were often harassed in public. Mass demonstrations took place outside several foreign embassies, including those of Kenya and Outer Mongolia. Foreigners found it almost impossible to travel in China because of the suspicion they aroused.¹¹⁰

China's introversion also resulted in the effective suspension of its previously sizeable foreign aid programme. Virtually all foreign students in China were sent home in 1966, and most Chinese students abroad were ordered to return to participate in the cultural revolution. The following year Peking recalled all but one of its nearly 50 ambassadors and other senior diplomats abroad for "ideological revision". This left China's foreign embassies in the hands of junior personnel.¹¹¹ In 1967-68, no top-level Chinese official visited any foreign state, not even in Asia. Low-ranking delegations were, however, despatched to a handful of Third World countries. Few foreign dignitaries visited China in these years. The cultural revolution was also marked by a further deterioration in relations with the Soviet Union. This in turn compelled China to cease its activities in most communist states. One of the exceptions was Albania, China's closest ally throughout the cultural revolution.¹¹² Its only other reliable friend during these years was another communist state, North Vietnam. According to one calculation, China was involved in quarrels of varying seriousness with 51 countries during the cultural revolution. Two of the major causes were campaigns of anti-revisionism, directed primarily against the Soviet Union and secondarily against some other communist states, and anti-imperialism focused mainly on the United States.¹¹³

The quasi-involvement dimension of China's foreign policy essentially consisted of the spreading abroad of Mao Tse-tung's thoughts on world revolution. The Chinese leadership assumed that the success of socialism in the PRC, ensured and demonstrated by the cultural revolution, would serve as model and encouragement for successful socialist revolutions abroad. The isolation of the cultural revolution was therefore regarded as being in the interests of "proletarian internationalism".¹¹⁴ The export of revolution involved support for armed revolution in developing countries such as India, Indonesia and the Philippines, and support for "mass struggle" in capitalist states, including the United States, Britain and France. This attempt to export revolution was another cause of China's disputes with over 50 states during the cultural revolution.¹¹⁵

The cultural revolution came to end in early 1969. A series of international events - including Soviet-American détente, the advocacy of a European Security Conference and growing Soviet political and military actions in the Pacific and Indian Oceans - led the Chinese to fear not only isolation but encirclement. These unfavourable developments offer an explanation for Peking's return to a more pragmatic and conventional approach to foreign affairs.

Senior diplomats were gradually reassigned to their foreign posts, so that 29 ambassadors had been reinstated by the end of 1970. Peking also resumed its place on the "diplomatic air routes of the world", with scores of foreign delegations converging on China. A "floodgate" of international recognitions and formal diplomatic relationships was opened by Canada in October 1970. That established counterpart of isolationism, anti-foreignism, began to wane in the China of the 1970s. The most dramatic achievement in China's quest for international integration, was the *rapprochement* with the United States in the early 1970s. The process actually began in the latter half of 1969, when the Nixon Administration relaxed trade and travel restrictions applied to China. In 1971, Washington went a step further by lifting its embargo on all non-strategic trade with the PRC. A major result of the thaw in relations between the two powers, was that it opened the door for the PRC's admission to the United Nations in 1971.¹¹⁶ The following year, President Richard Nixon visited the PRC and put his name to the celebrated Shanghai Communiqué, which defined the foundations of the new Sino-American relationship. The end of China's brief period of self-imposed "revolutionary isolation"¹¹⁷ thus coincided with the final end of its enforced isolation.

BURMA

Burma, which borders on China, for most of its history paid nominal tribute to the Chinese Imperial Court; China was in effect the suzerain state of Burma.¹¹⁸ This, however, did not inhibit the Burmese from developing their own visions of grandeur. Burma's conceptions of the universe, grounded in its history, strongly resembled Chinese ideas. Another striking similarity between the two countries is that each experienced a period of historical-cum-traditional isolation and a period of contemporary isolation.

Burma's history, which can be traced back to the eleventh century AD, has always been influenced by its geographic location and its population composition. Because of its formidable

natural boundaries, communication with the outside world was never easy. In fact, Burma's isolated geographic position to a large extent cut it off from the world. But more than that, the Burmese for very long felt little need or desire for contact with foreign nations. "In the days of her kings", Maung wrote, "Burma existed splendidly alone, and the mountain walls that shut her off from the rest of the world helped her to deceive herself that the world outside was nothing compared to what she was".¹¹⁹

The Burmese Court at Ava was regarded as the centre of the universe and Burmese kings claimed to derive their titles from divine right and a heritage of ten thousand years. The Burmese also considered themselves superior to all aliens unfamiliar with Burma and the pure Buddhism it practised.¹²⁰ The analogy with traditional China is all too obvious.

The other principal feature shaping Burmese history for some ten centuries, has been the diversity of its population. Such is the plurality – there are seven main ethnic groups and over 100 distinct languages – that there has never been a Burman nation in the sense that all its people felt a common loyalty, had a single language and enjoyed a sense of common identity and unity. Instead, society has always been sharply divided with ethnic loyalties taking precedence over national loyalty. Much of Burmese history has indeed been a "struggle for dominance and survival" between rival ethnic groups. Domestic relations among ethnic groups have consequently always been more important to Burma than its foreign relations.¹²¹

Despite its geographic and also psychological isolation, traditional Burma maintained some contact with its neighbours, whether for commercial, religious or cultural purposes, or for less amicable reasons. Frequent diplomatic visits were exchanged with China, but permanent diplomatic missions were not established.¹²² The first European to set foot in Burma, in 1435, was a Venetian merchant. For the next two centuries, the Portuguese – merchants, missionaries and adventurers – were by far the largest group of Europeans to come to Burma. The next phase in Burma's relations with Europeans began in 1635 and lasted until the end of the eighteenth century. The Europeans were then represented by and conducted their relations with the Burmese through the Dutch, British and French East India Companies. In their bid to trade with Burma, the chartered companies met with little success. The Burmese were either unwilling to trade or, if they wanted to, imposed prohibitive conditions.¹²³ This is a familiar tale, as we have seen in both Japan and China.

The despatch of the first British diplomatic envoy to Burma in 1795 marked a third phase in Burma's contacts with the Western world. In the next sixteen years a number of British Residents served in Burma. They had to endure "all the arts of subterfuge, evasion and studied rudeness" from their reluctant hosts.¹²⁴ Suspicious of foreigners, the Burmese made plain their opposition to permanent embassies. After 1811, the British in India abandoned their attempts to establish a permanent diplomatic presence in Burma.¹²⁵

Britain sought a number of other concessions from Burma, including a commercial agreement and a resolution of frontier problems between Burma and British India. In both these matters, the British "encountered little but hostility and deliberately imposed humiliation". Continuing frontier

incidents sparked off a war between the two in 1824. It was only the first of three wars between Burma and the British in India, and each time the Burmese were defeated. After the final war in 1885, the whole of Burma came under British control. (It was administered as a province of India until 1937, when Burma was made a separate territory of the British Empire.) Burma also had to make other smaller but familiar concessions after its first two defeats: it had to accept a permanent British diplomatic representative in its capital and had to conclude a commercial treaty with Britain.¹²⁶

After centuries of seclusion, the Burmese were ill-prepared for the challenges posed by a more advanced world that came closing in on them in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the pinnacle of their power from roughly the 1750s to the 1820s – by which time Burma through successive conquests "had outgrown herself into an imperial power" – the people of Burma "were proud and blissfully ignorant of world affairs", to quote Maung. The realities of power politics escaped the Burmese, "wrapped cosily in the illusion of supremacy". True, Burma began sending diplomatic and trade missions to Europe in the latter half of the nineteenth century to look and learn and also to form alliances. This was a belated realisation that Burma could not live alone and that the distant world mattered. But by then Burma had fallen so far behind in material and scientific progress and in diplomacy that it "finally fell under".¹²⁷

Burma's defeat in the war of 1885 signalled the gradual decline of its power and the disintegration of the state. When the British finally annexed the whole of Burma in 1886, the country's "medieval isolation" came to an end. During the 60-odd years of British control, Burma was brought into contact as never before with the knowledge and thoughts of the world beyond its borders.¹²⁸

In January 1948, Burma became an independent republic outside the Commonwealth. The new state tried to pursue an independent foreign policy that was partly grounded in Burma's traditional isolationism and partly based upon a new concept of "all-round international goodwill". This policy was born out of Burma's precarious situation, "hemmed in like a tender gourd among the cactus", as U Nu, the first Prime Minister, described it. He was of course referring to the fact that Burma was surrounded by more powerful countries and particularly vulnerable to foreign subversion in support of disaffected Burmese minorities.¹²⁹ The days when Burma could retreat behind its geographic barriers and effectively ignore the outside world, were gone forever.

In an endeavour to make friends abroad and prevent enmities, Burma sided with the non-aligned nations. It was not a passive non-alignment, however, for Burma featured prominently in the Non-Aligned Movement and made its presence felt in the United Nations. U Nu also engaged in a considerable amount of personal diplomacy.¹³⁰

As a Third World country, Burma initially pursued a familiar development strategy involving foreign expertise and investment, modern technology and, invariably, external tutelage. It accepted aid from all major powers as well as from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Thousands of Burmese students enrolled for tertiary education in the United States and Britain, in particular. Scores of expatriate advisers were recruited by Burma, and foreign tourism

was actively encouraged. American and British cultural programmes thrived, while some foreign embassies were locked in ideological rivalry for the sympathies of the Burmese populace. English language newspapers and other foreign publications were freely available. Missionaries from abroad enjoyed free access to *Buddhist Burma*, and Western academics were much in evidence at Rangoon University. There was no sector of Burmese society that was not accessible to, if not dominated by, foreigners.¹³¹ It is only when one has some picture of the extent of foreign penetration, that the scope of the subsequent self-isolation falls into proper perspective.

Ethnic rivalries – the other main factor that had historically determined Burma's fortunes – played havoc with the independent Republic of Burma from the very outset. These centrifugal forces, which had "built to a crescendo" by 1961, were the precipitating cause of a military *coup d'état* in 1962.¹³² It was under General Ne Win's military government that Burma again retreated into isolation.

The Revolutionary Council that took power in 1962, moved swiftly to suspend the constitution and to dissolve Parliament and even the high and supreme courts. Ne Win was invested with full legislative, executive and judicial authority by the council.¹³³ Having disposed of institutional constraints, the revolutionary rulers set about the task of transforming Burmese society.

The ideological foundation of the new order was expounded in three key documents published within ten months of the coup: *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, *the constitution of the Burma Socialism Programme Party*, and *The System of the Correlation of Man and his Environment*. The documents were fully in the Burmese tradition, Steinberg pointed out, "appealing to and melding the three central concepts in modern Burman life – nationalism, socialism, and Buddhism".¹³⁴ Although socialist ideology had been "an article of political faith" in Burma well before the military takeover, *The Burmese Way to Socialism* contained a distinct Marxist flavour. This seemed to find particular expression in a programme of wholesale nationalisation – or "Burmanisation" – of the economy. In actual fact, nationalisation owed as much if not more to simple national feeling. Since most of Burma's trade and industry was under foreign control, nationalisation was a way for Burmans to seize the control and profits of these enterprises.¹³⁵ Foreign firms, including banks, were the first targets of the Burmanisation drive, but scores of small local undertakings were likewise brought under state control. In all, some 15 000 enterprises were nationalised. Another early measure was to prohibit all further foreign investment in Burma. Restrictions on production and trade and new currency regulations forced an estimated 200 000 expatriate Indians and Pakistanis to leave Burma – without their assets.¹³⁶ Through these actions, the Burmese government managed to monopolise economic decision making and to end foreign control of the economy.¹³⁷

It can reasonably be argued that the military rulers' economic policies amounted to more than indigenisation, but extended to isolationism by severing or severely curtailing Burma's existing external economic relations.¹³⁸

Isolationist proclivities also appeared to inform the military government's policies toward foreigners. Ne Win explained the measures in terms of not wanting foreigners present while

"housecleaning" was under way.¹³⁹ Numerous foreign correspondents were requested to leave Burma. All foreign news services operating in Burma were replaced by a new government-created news agency. The publication of all privately-owned foreign language newspapers was stopped. A government subsidiary was given sole right to import foreign publications. The translation of materials of various kinds – *inter alia* containing pornography or indulging in superstition – was either censored or simply banned. The cumulative effects of all these measures was that within four years of the military coup, the populace had access to only such foreign information as the Government approved; conversely, what little the outside world learned of Burma came from government news sources.¹⁴⁰

Further means of restricting contact between Burmese and foreigners included limiting ordinary visitors' visas to a mere 24 hours and moreover denying recipients the right to travel outside the capital; this effectively brought tourism to an end. Strict limitations were also imposed on the mobility of resident foreign diplomats.¹⁴¹ Foreign doctors, teachers and missionaries were forced to leave. All foreign mission hospitals were nationalised under the same law that brought business enterprises under state control.¹⁴²

The restrictions cut both ways. For their part, officials and all members of Burma's sole political party were obliged to obtain high-level clearance before issuing or accepting social invitations that involved foreigners; afterwards, the Burmese had to report fully on their conversations with the aliens.¹⁴³

These were still not the full range of seclusionist measures. The Ford and Asia Foundations, which ran economic and cultural programmes in Burma, were expelled. The Fulbright exchange programme was terminated by the Burmese authorities. The British Council had to suspend its cultural activities. Foreign embassy libraries were likewise forced to close and embassies were not allowed to show any "propaganda" films to the Burmese public. What is more, foreign missions had to submit all their publicity releases to the Burmese Foreign Ministry prior to distribution. In another attempt to eliminate foreign cultural influence, the Government ordered the dissolution of the local Lions and Rotary Clubs. Rangoon University became rapidly Burmanised and the curriculum was in large measure changed to suit "Burma's needs".¹⁴⁴

Within a few years of coming to power, the Revolutionary Council "had transformed Burma from a society accessible to many, to one sealed off from virtually all outside contacts", Holsti concluded. But it was not only on what Holsti termed the "ingress dimension of foreign policy" that isolationist tendencies were evident; they were also manifested in the relative lack of externally directed activities in the 1960s.¹⁴⁵

At the regional level, Burma showed no interest in joining the increasing number of cooperative institutions such as ASEAN and the Asian Development Bank; it belonged to only the Colombo Plan, which it had joined at independence. In the Third World context, Burma's withdrawal was even more profound, for it abandoned its previously prominent role in the Non-Aligned Movement and also became a passive member of the United Nations and its agencies. Diplomatic stagnation was further reflected in the fact that only two new Burmese embassies were opened

between 1962 and 1974, and that Burma concluded or adhered to an average of only three international agreements per year (compared with eight under U Nu). A final measurable indicator of isolation is restrictions on foreign travel. The number of Burmese who could work for international organisations, the United Nations included, was strictly limited. Similarly, the number of students sent overseas for university education was greatly reduced.¹⁴⁶

There were two rather paradoxical exceptions to the rule of withdrawal in Burma's foreign policy. First, Ne Win was a frequent traveller and visited a fair number of countries (usually in secret); his itinerary was notably shorter than U Nu's, though. Second, the existing diversification in Burma's external trade was maintained under the Revolutionary Council.

These qualifications do not detract from an overriding isolationist orientation. Looking at Burma from a comparative perspective, Holsti argued that, with the possible exceptions of Cambodia after 1975 and Albania, no nation in recent history has so effectively sealed itself off from the outside world and displayed so little concern about issues which confronted other nations in the region and in the global system.¹⁴⁷ In like vein, Donnison wrote that one feature common to Burma's relations with all countries "is that she would much rather not have any such relations at all". He depicted the military rulers' isolationist policies as a form of "extreme, almost fanatical, self-imprisonment".¹⁴⁸

The most convincing explanation for Burma's resort to seclusion acknowledges the role of historical and psychological factors. Many Burmese officials were fond of idealising their traditional secluded society, specifically that of the pre-colonial Ava kingdom, "with its characteristics of equality, piety and built-in welfare mechanisms". British colonialism had largely ruined that culture and left little besides an alien, ill-suited elite democratic political order. During the Second World War, the Burmese moreover had to endure the hardship of Japanese occupation. Looking ahead, the Burmese leadership had serious misgivings about the process of modernisation in such neighbouring countries as Thailand. Development under foreign guidance, they maintained, led to the destruction of their society's culture, modesty and piety. Against this background, Burmese leaders were attracted to a policy of isolationism

as a means of protecting traditional values and avoiding tutelary and dependent relationships which they considered to be demeaning and exploitative.¹⁴⁹

Ne Win's exclusivist policies could in many respects be regarded as more in line with Burmese traditions and attitudes than U Nu's internationalist tendencies. Ne Win himself did not hide his dislike and fear of all kinds of foreign penetration of Burma, particularly those that conflicted with his notions of Burmese piety, culture and economic socialism.¹⁵⁰

In summary, Holsti explained the military government's policies as primarily a response to a century's "westernization and exploitation" of Burma since the 1850s, "reflecting a complex amalgam of nativist, socialist, nationalist and xenophobic attitudes".¹⁵¹

Inevitably, Burma paid a price for its isolationist policies, particularly in the economic sphere. Nationalisation, the handmaiden of economic isolationism, produced a vigorous black market, endemic corruption and declining productivity. Riots and planned military coups suggested that many Burmese considered the costs of isolationism too high. It is not surprising, then, that Burma in the 1970s began gradually to depart from some of the more extreme forms of seclusion. It accepted loans from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank and subsequently joined the latter. The possibilities of economic cooperation with other countries were again being explored, the exchange of students and technicians was resumed and even some tourism was again permitted. However, the fact that these changes were confined to a few selected sectors and moreover introduced rather slowly, indicates the absence of any overall strategy to fundamentally reverse the isolationism of the 1960s.¹⁵²

In 1981, Ne Win was succeeded as President by General San Yu, a former Army Chief of Staff. He continued Burma's incremental international reintegration by, for example, increased development assistance from foreign sources and the encouragement of foreign tourism.¹⁵³ In 1986, total foreign aid amounted to over US \$400 million. Japan was by far the largest bilateral donor, followed by West Germany, Britain, Norway and Australia. Multilateral assistance came from, among others, the International Development Association, the UN Development Programme and the Asian Development Bank.¹⁵⁴ Tourist arrivals stood at 41 644 in 1986/7, an increase of nearly 50 per cent on the total for 1981/2.¹⁵⁵ Burma also pursued what was officially termed an "independent and active foreign policy" aimed at friendship with all nations, especially neighbouring states. Official visits were exchanged with several countries. By 1986, 28 states maintained embassies in Rangoon.¹⁵⁶

This process of greater international involvement received a setback following a military *coup d'état* in September 1988. The military seized power amid a popular revolt against the Government. The ostensible reason for the coup was to maintain order until multi-party elections could be held in mid-1990 and the resulting legislative assembly could draft a new constitution that would usher in a civilian government. The military rulers' brutal suppression of ongoing demonstrations by opposition groups prompted widespread international censure, giving Burma its first taste of ostracism. Several creditor nations, including Japan, West Germany, Britain, the United States and Australia, suspended their aid until Burma's human rights record improved. India, in a protest action, closed its trade routes to Burma. Washington excluded Burma from its Generalised System of Preferences and also took the lead in getting the UN Commission of Human Rights to pass a (mildly) critical resolution on events in Burma.¹⁵⁷

In June 1989, the military government changed the name of the country to the Union of Myanmar. This was done to remove the ethnic connotation of the previous name: the population consisted not only of Burmans but many other groups too.¹⁵⁸ A mere name change will, however, not resolve the deep-seated ethnic antagonisms plaguing the country. The way in which this conflict is handled may well have a bearing on Myanmar's international fortunes.

KOREA

It seems an ironical twist of history that two isolationist powers, Japan and China, should have played such a prominent role in shaping the destiny of Korea, another historically secluded state. Their actions towards Korea at first helped to set it on an isolationist course and then, much later, Japan forced Korea to open itself up to the outside world – specifically to Japan.

Another irony is that the Korean nation, today divided into two separate and hostile states, had one of the longest traditions of unity within roughly the same frontiers of any nation of the modern world. The Korean peninsula was united in 668 and remained, with rare and temporary exceptions, undivided until after the Second World War.¹⁵⁹ In the new state of North Korea, history seemed to repeat itself when its communist rulers imposed fairly rigid isolationist policies. South Korea, by contrast, was in due course portrayed by some observers as an outcast state. This study considers the traditional and communist versions of Korean isolationism, whereas South Korea's supposed enforced isolation is examined elsewhere.¹⁶⁰

For our purposes, it will suffice to begin this discussion with the capitulation of the Koryo dynasty (founded in AD 936) to Mongol invaders in 1259. (The Western name Korea is derived from this dynasty.) A century of Mongol overlordship followed, with the Koryo court relegated to an underling of the Mongol imperial family. Korea regained its national freedom in 1368, when the Mongols were finally driven out. In 1392, the new Yi dynasty was founded.¹⁶¹ Korea, during most of the 500 year Yi dynasty, acknowledged a tributary relationship with the Chinese Empire; China thus held suzerainty over Korea. This relationship could, however, not prevent the Japanese overrunning and devastating Korea in the 1590s. The Manchu invasions of 1627 and 1636 were even more traumatic, for they reduced Korea to a vassal state of the new Manchu dynasty of China. This situation existed until Japan annexed Korea in 1910.¹⁶²

Repeated foreign invasion and subjugation made the Koreans painfully aware of external dangers and their own vulnerability. Realising the futility of purely military defence against foreign aggression, "both polity and culture adopted other means of maintaining essential independence and identity".¹⁶³ One such was a policy of conscious seclusion, already adopted in the fourteenth century in the wake of the Mongol invasion. Apart from limited liberalisation in the first half of the fifteenth century, isolationism remained the order of the day right up to the 1980s. This long period of withdrawal earned Korea the designation "hermit kingdom".¹⁶⁴

Korea for long also experienced a form of natural isolation, resulting from geography and poor communication with the outside world. It had firm boundaries, with the sea protecting it on three sides and a northern border formed by the great Yalu and Tumen rivers, beyond which lay the vast, inhospitable Manchurian and Siberian regions.¹⁶⁵

Despite its exclusivist policies, Korea could not completely insulate itself from outside influences. From early on, Korea was exposed to Buddhist and Confucian influence, and many other aspects of Chinese culture. A far more portentous and pervasive development occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Like other Asian nations, Korea failed to escape the attention of the

Europeans. The first travellers from Europe were explorers and traders, then came missionaries followed by soldiers. Both Roman Catholicism and Protestantism reached Korea in the early part of the seventeenth century. The spread of the Roman Catholic religion caused concern among the Confucian ruling class of the Yi dynasty, who regarded it as heretical and subversive. A government ban was consequently imposed on the Christian movement in 1786.¹⁶⁶ Another factor that limited the extent and impact of contacts between Western nations and Korea, was "the cultural chauvinism and isolationism of the Korean ruling class", to whom it was inconceivable that they could find anything of value from abroad, except from China.¹⁶⁷ Such notions of superiority were of course inherent in the behaviour of other isolationist nations that we have already discussed.

In the later nineteenth century, Korean isolationism acquired more overtly xenophobic qualities – a development related to events in other Asian nations, notably China and Japan. At issue was the Western nations' demands, backed by force, that China and Japan should open their ports to foreign trade. Korea's turn was not long in coming. In the 1830s, Western vessels frequently appeared in Korean waters and Western goods began flowing into the country. The Taewon'gun (Prince of the Great Court) responded to Western pressure for opening up Korea with an attempt at wholesale isolation. All foreign contact was refused and all foreign ideas inside Korea were forcefully repressed. The latter found brutal expression in the death of some 8 000 Korean Catholics between 1866 and 1872. Western ships demanding trade with Korea were greeted with hostility and sometimes violence. For a time, the Koreans actually succeeded in repulsing the rather feeble incursions of what the Taewon'gun termed "Western barbarians".¹⁶⁸

In the end, it was not Westerners but the Japanese who pressurised Korea into permitting trade and diplomatic relations. It probably seemed a cruel irony to the Koreans that their fellow Asians, who had themselves succumbed to external demands for lifting seclusion, should now be wielding the big stick against them. Like the Western powers, Japan was in need of foreign markets for its expanding industries. Japan also had strategic considerations in mind: it wanted to keep Korea out of the hands of a potentially hostile power. And, taking a leaf from the Western book, Japan amply demonstrated its readiness to use its superior military power to secure Korean compliance. In 1876, the reluctant Koreans signed the Kanghwa Treaty with the Japanese. Following the Western formula, the agreement provided for the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Korea, and the opening of a number of Korean ports to Japanese trade. The treaty was heavily weighted in Japan's favour, which secured for itself virtually a free hand in exploiting Korea.¹⁶⁹ In retrospect, the Kanghwa Treaty paved the way for Japan's later annexation of Korea.

Having opened the door to the Japanese, Korea probably had little option but to allow other powers in as well. Korea concluded a treaty of friendship and commerce with the United States in 1882, and with Britain, Germany, Austria, Russia, Italy and France in subsequent years. Korea was now more exposed to foreign influences than ever before. A Korean author depicted it as a "new culture" that "swept over us like a great wave, bringing significant changes to our spiritual and material worlds ... The transformation penetrated to the basic facets of our everyday lives". The Western imprint could be seen in, among numerous other things, food, clothing, housing, religion, education, medicine, transport, the role of women in society, and in the

introduction of such devices as a postal system, a new currency, the solar calendar and even watches and cameras.¹⁷⁰

Korea's integration into the international community of the day was relatively brief, for in 1910 the country was colonised by Japan. The period of occupation came to an end when Japan surrendered to the Allied powers in August 1945. The United States and the Soviet Union agreed, in order to accept the Japanese surrender in Korea, that the country should be partitioned into two occupation zones. Soviet forces would control the area north of the 38th parallel, and American forces the southern sector. What was intended as a temporary military expedient, became the foundation for two separate, ideologically hostile Korean states.¹⁷¹ The pro-Western Republic of Korea was founded in August 1948, and the communist Democratic People's Republic of Korea a month later.

From 1948 to 1970, North Korea "had been among the most seemingly hostile and isolated nations anywhere", *Tai Sung An* contended. The new communist government was vehemently opposed to the West and proclaimed its ideological convictions with a shrillness quite extraordinary for even a revolutionary government. In the process of revolutionary transformation, North Korea to some degree withdrew into itself. At the same time, however, the country was subjected to ostracism from the United States in particular. Even so, North Korea was far from being without friends in its early years. So close were the ties between Pyongyang and Moscow that North Korea was regarded as a Soviet satellite state. In due course, North Korea developed into a "nationalistic, independent-minded, and self-reliant member of both the Communist and Third World nonaligned orbits."¹⁷²

The year 1971 marked a watershed in North Korea's foreign relations. It was the year of détente between the United States and the two principal communist powers. This encouraged North Korea to embark on a careful outward movement to broaden its international contacts.¹⁷³ At that stage, North Korea had already been labelled a socialist "Hermit Kingdom", *inter alia* because of its official ideology of *chuch'e* (or *juche*, meaning self-reliance), and its "tightly controlled, xenophobic, and self-enclosed character".¹⁷⁴ While these features did not simply disappear after 1971, North Korea managed quite dramatically to break out of its self-imposed constraints in the realm of foreign affairs.

Pyongyang was particularly successful in extending its diplomatic network. Between 1970 and 1980, diplomatic relations were established with 66 countries. By 1983, North Korea already maintained formal relations with 106 states, 69 of which also had diplomatic ties with Seoul. The overall figure was close to the number of countries with which South Korea enjoyed diplomatic relations. In 1973 North Korea was given observer status in the United Nations and established an observer mission at UN Headquarters in New York. By 1981, North Korea had joined nine UN agencies and five other intergovernmental organisations, compared with the respective figures of 17 and 37 for South Korea. North Korea was first admitted to a conference of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1976, and has been a regular participant since.¹⁷⁵

North Korea's foreign trade provides further evidence of its integration into the international economic system. In the early years of the state, trade with "fraternal" communist countries was emphasised, and over 80 per cent of North Korea's trade was conducted with the Soviet Union and China. In this regard it should be remembered that a Western-initiated UN trade embargo remained in force against North Korea until 1957. Although the United States and South Korea thereafter still disallowed trade with North Korea, the end of UN-imposed economic isolation facilitated North Korea's access to Western markets. In the 1960s, the country in fact began establishing trade links with non-communist states, particularly Japan.¹⁷⁶ By 1979, trade with communist countries constituted 51,2 per cent of North Korea's foreign trade, against 48,8 per cent for the noncommunist world. Japan has since the 1970s emerged as North Korea's third largest trading partner after the Soviet Union and China. In 1984, North Korea modified its previously rigid insistence on self-sufficiency by accepting joint ventures with foreign companies, including those from capitalist states. This change flowed from the need to stimulate the economy. Five years later, the new policy had achieved only limited success in attracting Western capital and technology. Meanwhile, in November 1988, another door opened (slightly) for North Korea when the United States announced the easing of some of the trade sanctions it had maintained against Pyongyang.¹⁷⁷

In the military sphere, North Korea also managed to diversify its sources of supply. Apart from the Soviet Union and China, West Germany entered the picture in 1985 with the sale of 87 US-built Hughes helicopters to North Korea.¹⁷⁸

These achievements notwithstanding, North Korea could still not manage to shake off the label of a socialist Hermit Kingdom. It remains in many respects a closed society with traces of xenophobia and Kim Il Sung's iron rule displays features reminiscent of the Soviet Union in the Stalin era. Another peculiar characteristic is that North Korea may produce Marxism's first "hereditary dynasty" in that Kim Il Sung's son, Kim Jong Il, is being groomed as his successor.¹⁷⁹ And then North Korea is, finally, also burdened with a pariah image of sorts due to its widely believed complicity in acts of terrorism against South Korea. The most outrageous incident occurred in October 1983, when North Korean agents allegedly planted the bomb that killed several high-ranking South Korean officials in Rangoon, Burma.¹⁸⁰

ALBANIA

Our next case study is also a communist state, but this time located in Europe. Within the communist world, Albania is much more of a maverick state than North Korea, despite all Pyongyang's idiosyncrasies. What the two countries have in common, is that their contemporary revolutionary self-isolation was preceded many decades earlier by long periods of seclusion.

Albania first gained recognition as a separate political entity under its own name when Charles I, King of Naples, founded the Kingdom of Albania in 1272. The dynasty lasted for some 100 years. Nearly five centuries of Ottoman domination followed, before Albania was proclaimed an independent state in 1912.¹⁸¹ By the time Albanians "first began to wake up culturally as well as

politically" towards the end of the nineteenth century, the four Albanian provinces of the Ottoman Empire had become known as Europe's "dark hole". Located on the fringes of ancient civilisations and modern empires, the mountainous provinces "were almost lost in a corner of southeast Europe penetrated by few foreigners", Holsti recorded. For centuries, the isolated Albanians had to live off their own resources.¹⁸²

The new Albanian state, recognised by the great powers of Europe in 1913, was soon confronted with threats to its very survival. It was invaded by the armies of Serbia, Greece, Italy and Austria during the First World War. Although the Albanian state survived the war, it ceded territory to Yugoslavia in the 1920s. During the Second World War, Albania experienced the trauma of Italian and German occupation. Again, Albania emerged from war as an independent state, but the cost was extremely high: nearly half the Albanian people fell under alien rule. The Albanians remaining in Albania proper now found themselves under communist domination; the People's Republic of Albania was proclaimed in January 1946. Albania became a communist state through a successful guerrilla struggle, led by communist Partisan forces, against the Italian and German occupation armies, and the defeat of the Partisans' domestic opponents. Albania was the only East European country from where the Germans were driven out without Soviet forces.¹⁸³

In this brief account of Albanian history, we have already touched on some of the major forces that have shaped the character of the Albanian people. Their country's fortress-like geography tended to isolate Albanians from social and commercial interaction with foreign nations. This, combined with the fact that Albanians had known little government control through most of their history, bred a strong spirit of independence and individualism. Albanians' bitter experiences of foreign conquest and domination made them highly suspicious of surrounding states and alert to any threats to their independence and ethnic identity. It is indeed a remarkable achievement that the small Albanian nation (present population roughly three million) has survived, in the face of formidable odds, as a distinct ethnic group. A final feature worth noting here, is that in 1945 over 70 per cent of Albania's population was Moslem and the rest Christian. This unique situation in Europe was the result of the Ottoman occupation. Prior to that, Albanians had been predominantly Roman Catholic.¹⁸⁴

From its very inception, the communist state of Albania seemed something of an anachronism. With its backward, semi-feudal socio-economic order, Albania was the least qualified candidate for communism in all of Europe. Yet, the Albanian Party of Labour (APL) became "the most doctrinaire and orthodox of all the ruling communist parties in Europe". On a good many issues, the APL stood apart from all other communist parties in Eastern Europe and indeed from all other parties in the whole socialist world. What adds to Albania's uniqueness, is that it is still the sole Moslem country to have adopted communism.¹⁸⁵

The APL government, led by Enver Hoxha, lost no time in embarking on a process of communist transformation of Albanian society. Hoxha resolved to follow the route taken by the Soviet Union under Stalin in the 1930s and 1940s. Stalinist Russia, it should be explained, was Albania's closest ally. When other East European communist parties in varying degrees abandoned Stalinist practices in the wake of the 1956 congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Albania refused to

follow suit. For many years to come it would remain "the last stronghold of Stalinism in Europe".¹⁸⁶

Relations between Tirana and Moscow began deteriorating after Stalin's death in 1953. One reason was Albanian resentment over the new Soviet leaders' attempts at a rapprochement with Yugoslavia. (Belgrade, its erstwhile ally (1945-8), was suspected by Albania of harbouring expansionist designs.) A further cause of tension was Albania's support for Peking in the Sino-Soviet ideological dispute. The Soviet Union denounced Albania and broke off formal relations in 1961.¹⁸⁷ This was a serious setback, leaving Albania for the first time largely isolated from Western as well as Eastern Europe. And it heightened Albania's sense of military vulnerability. To offset the damaging effects of this schism, tiny Albania allied itself with the 700-million strong Chinese nation.¹⁸⁸

Thanks to generous infusions of Chinese aid, Hoxha could proceed with his Stalinist programme for development despite the break with Moscow. Chinese largesse also made Albania confident enough to end its participation in the communist bloc's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in 1962 and to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact in 1968.¹⁸⁹ The latter decision was ostensibly taken in protest against the alliance members' invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹⁹⁰

Such was the depth of alienation between Albania and the Soviet Union that the APL by its own admission became a fierce enemy of Moscow. A key issue between the two concerned the proper relationship between socialist and capitalist countries. Whereas other European communist parties had long since subscribed to peaceful coexistence between East and West, the APL supported violent revolution as the only reliable strategy for ensuring the ultimate triumph of communism over capitalism.¹⁹¹

The APL earned itself another dubious distinction when it became the first and only communist party to institutionalise atheism. In 1967, Albania declared itself "the first atheist state in the world" and outlawed all religious institutions and practices. The 1976 Constitution reaffirmed the atheist nature of Albanian society.¹⁹² But despite their irreligious line, Albanian party leaders' public attitudes towards "manners and morals", Prifti observed, "project an image that is closer to that of the Grand Inquisitor than to modern libertarians and advocates of the sexual revolution". Albania's brand of communism was thus "the most puritanical" in Eastern Europe.¹⁹³

In all these respects, the APL found itself the sole dissenting voice in European communism. It was, to quote Prifti again,

a loner party that not only seemed convinced of the correctness of its lonely path but presented Albania as the model for the future social and political development of the nations of Europe.¹⁹⁴

This seemingly contradictory combination of isolationism and what might be called ideological projectionism is of course not unique to Albania; we encountered it in the earlier discussion of the People's Republic of China.

The Tirana-Peking alliance soon fell on hard times. Albania became disenchanting with China following the latter's rapprochement with the United States in the early 1970s. Sino-Albanian relations continued to deteriorate after Mao Tse-tung's death in 1976. Matters came to a head in 1978 when Albania declared its full support for Vietnam in its conflict with China. Peking in response terminated all economic and military cooperation with Tirana.¹⁹⁵ This left Albania more isolated than ever.

In the economic field, Hoxha's isolationist policies produced some positive results. By the early 1980s, Albania had become self-sufficient in the production of a number of key commodities – including cereal grains, electric energy and oil – and could provide over 80% of the required consumer goods. The principle of self-reliance was the principal element in Tirana's economic development programme. The lengths to which the country was prepared to go – or the price it was willing to pay – in its quest for economic autarky, was reflected in some remarkable provisions in Albania's 1976 Constitution. They prohibit the government from seeking foreign aid and loans, allowing foreign investment, granting concessions to other states and forming joint-venture companies with foreigners.¹⁹⁶

International isolationism went hand in hand with domestic repression. Hoxha "employed terror and coercion to impose a totalitarian system that denied his people the most basic of rights", according to Biberaj. His propaganda assiduously cultivated a siege mentality by claiming that internal and external enemies threatened Albania's very existence. This made it easy to equate political opposition with treason – and to deal with it accordingly. Foreign contacts that could threaten his totalitarian regime were eliminated through Hoxha's isolationist policies.¹⁹⁷

Having considered some of the APL's policies and practices, we should next try to identify the main determinants of its behaviour. Prifti considered nationalism as the most important factor. It finds expression in, for example, the APL's homage to Albania's national figures, its observance of historical anniversaries and its efforts to promote culture. Prifti noted a "qualitative leap" in the development of cultural institutions under the communist leadership. Much had been achieved in terms of aesthetic and intellectual enrichment, qualities virtually absent in pre-war days. Nationalistic considerations also explain the attempts of the Albanian leadership to restrict Western and Soviet cultural influences. In the cultural realm, nationalism referred to "the powerful yearning for cultural affirmation that had been bottled up for centuries".¹⁹⁸ It was probably also for primarily nationalistic reasons that a decree was issued in 1975 compelling persons with "inappropriate names and offensive surnames" to change them.¹⁹⁹ Nationalism is indeed a typical ingredient of isolationism, not only in Albania but also in other secluded states, as we have seen.

The other mainspring of ALP politics is the ideology of Marxism-Leninism. Albania's own cultural revolution, which occurred almost concurrently with and in several ways resembled China's cultural revolution, was based on the premise – as was China's – that "human nature is plastic and that by means of political and ideological indoctrination a new man, the Communist Man, could be forged", in Prifti's words.²⁰⁰ The banishment of religion and support for atheist propaganda are likewise aimed at what the Constitution called "inculcating the

scientific-materialist world-outlook in [the Albanian] people".²⁰¹ In dealing with dissident intellectuals in the 1970s, the ALP launched an "ideological struggle designed to educate writers and artists in the principles and goals of "Socialist Realism" in literature and art."²⁰²

There is also a third motive force that should be mentioned, namely, the preservation of state power per se. An ALP campaign against liberalism in the arts was, for example, not so much aimed at resisting alien influences as to maintain party control over the intelligentsia as a way of protecting state power.²⁰³ It is thus not always possible to distinguish clearly between the three motives. A particular policy or action on the part of the ALP - for example, with regard to culture - may thus serve one or more of these interests.

This discussion can also be extended to the realm of foreign policy, where the ALP's general line was "a composite of ideological, national, historical, geographic, and cultural forces". Of these, nationalism is again of paramount importance, for it refers to the Albanians' determination to preserve the independence and integrity of their state. Albania's long history of foreign aggression and control in turn explains to some extent the Government's isolationist orientation and apparent paranoia, even at a time of East-West détente. Ideological considerations found expression in Albania's revolution-oriented foreign policy. Détente of course eroded this kind of foreign policy with its Cold War premises and inevitably meant "increasing isolationism for the maverick socialist country ... and mounting pressures on its militant regime for reform and change".²⁰⁴

Despite the country's overtly isolationist policies, Hoxha publicly denied that Albania was in fact isolated. Addressing an ALP congress in 1976, he supported this contention by noting that Albania had established diplomatic relations with 74 nations. The list included all West European countries with the exception of Spain, West Germany and Britain. What Hoxha did not say, is that only 25 of the 74 had resident diplomatic missions in Tirana.²⁰⁵ What also detracts from this diplomatic manifestation of international integration, is that Hoxha in the same address reaffirmed his dogmatic, Stalinist foreign policy that had left Albania "a Cold War island" in Europe. By the late 1970s Albania was, as Prifti put it, "the most isolated country in Europe ideologically, politically, and in most areas of her cultural life".²⁰⁶

It needs to be said that Albania's isolation from the West was not only attributable to Tirana's exclusivist policies. Most Western states, with the notable exceptions of Italy and France, for many years showed very little interest in Albania. For one thing, it was not an attractive trading partner, given Tirana's insistence on barter trade, its low foreign reserves and the small number of its products that could compete in Western markets.²⁰⁷ In this sense, Albania experienced an isolation of indifference on the part of the West. But this is very much a secondary explanation for Albania's international seclusion.

Hoxha, who dominated Albanian politics for forty years, died in 1985. He was succeeded by his protégé, Ramiz Alia. Many of the isolationist features of the Hoxha era were initially retained. Foreign tourism - a potential source of vital hard currency - was still not promoted for fear of the negative influences of alien customs. Another example is the uncompromising fashion in which young people influenced by foreign "ideological diversion" were dealt with.

In economic matters, by contrast, Alia showed early signs of flexibility. Although the new leadership formally subscribed to Hoxha's autarkic notions, Tirana increasingly turning to the West as a source of trade and technology. West Germany and Italy counted among Albania's principal trading partners. In another major break with its isolationist past, Albania announced that it would allow foreign investment. Isolationist policies, together with Albania's rigidly centralised management system, had retarded the country's technological advancement and left it in a position inferior to all its neighbours.²⁰⁸

The relaxation of economic isolationism corresponded with the new Government's somewhat changed approach to international affairs generally. According to a member of government, Albania under Alia favoured "an active as opposed to passive policy" and would become a direct participant in rather than a mere observer of international developments.²⁰⁹ Tirana expanded its diplomatic network and had formal ties with over 100 states (although representation was in most cases on a non-resident basis) by 1990. Ministerial visits were exchanged with several countries, and agreements on economic and cultural cooperation were concluded with assorted foreign states. This outward movement focused on the West and Japan, with the notable exception of the United States. Closer home, Albania in 1988 for the first time in decades attended a meeting of Balkan Foreign Ministers.²¹⁰

Over the next two years, Albania's protective shield of surrounding communist states began to collapse. Perhaps sensing the potentially serious implications for Albania, Alia rejected the reforms in other communist countries as the machinations of "the bourgeoisie and opportunists" who conspired with Western imperialism to discredit socialism.²¹¹ So effectively did the Government initially resist the foreign tide of change that Albania could by the end of 1989 still be described as "totally unreconstructed: a museum piece of democratic centralism living in a time-warp."²¹²

The following year, however, dramatically exposed the limits of ideological insulation offered by Albania's rigid isolationism. In January, Alia announced the first cautious steps toward a market-orientated economy (including an unprecedented measure of privatisation in low-level retail trades). These modest reforms followed hard on the heels of anti-government demonstrations in December 1989. Popular discontent would soon force the Government to announce more far-reaching changes. Probably taking their cue from protestors in other communist states, thousands of Albanians fled to Western embassies in Tirana - and won free passage out of the country. The Government granted Albanians generally the right to travel and also lifted the 23-year ban on religious worship.²¹³

In November, Alia went further by allowing the formation of the first legal opposition in over 40 years - the Democratic Party was founded in December - and promised free parliamentary elections in February 1991. In their election manifesto, the ruling Communists pledged "non-stop" reform to convert Albania into a democratic state with a market-style economy. But despite breaking out of the Stalinist mould, Alia insisted that this party would continue to embrace Marxism.²¹⁴

All these announcements could not prevent riots in several Albanian towns in December – which the army put down – or prevent more than 5 000 Albanians fleeing across the border into Greece.²¹⁵

Meanwhile, Albania also began breaking down the walls of isolationism by improving relations with other countries. In May 1990, the Alia government hosted a visit by UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar. The following month Albania announced its wish to join the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Other first-time multilateral contacts in 1990 included Albanian participation in a conference of Mediterranean chambers of commerce and the hosting of a meeting of the Balkan countries' national commissions for Unesco in Tirana. Alia also announced that Albania would seek diplomatic relations with both the Soviet Union and the United States.²¹⁶

Slowly but surely, features of Albania's long self-imposed isolation are giving way to the need for interacting with other nations. The costs of isolationism seem to have outweighed the benefits. And on the domestic scene, profound changes have occurred as it became evident to the Alia government that isolationism could not indefinitely shield the country against hostile foreign influences.

PARAGUAY

We turn to an entirely different corner of the globe for the last of our selection of primary case studies. The South American state of Paraguay was in a sense born out of isolation into isolationism, to which a degree of enforced isolation was added many years later.

The origins of national independence movements in Spanish America were to be found in rivalries between *peninsulares* (Spaniards born in the mother country and sent out as soldiers or administrators) and *criollos* (descendants of original Spanish colonists born and bred in South America). These antagonisms were particularly pronounced in Paraguay, partly because of the territory's geographic isolation and the early development of a "distinctive Paraguayan racial consciousness". The Paraguayans' spirit of independence grew as Asuncion became increasingly detached from other parts of the Spanish American empire in the seventeenth century. Spain, in the early part of the century, lost interest in Paraguay. In 1776 the territory was incorporated into the Vice-royalty of the Rio de la Plata. The Paraguayans deeply resented taking orders from Buenos Aires, the entity's capital; the *porteños* (inhabitants of the port of Buenos Aires) had long been thoroughly disliked in Paraguay, not least because they controlled the landlocked territory's access to the sea. The *criollos* of Buenos Aires in 1810 deposed the Spanish Viceroy and in effect declared their independence. Considering itself the legitimate heir of Madrid, Buenos Aires believed it only natural for Paraguay to become an integral part of the Argentine Confederation. When Paraguay refused to subject itself to the new authority, Argentinean force was sent to secure the rebellious province's allegiance. The defeat of the invaders at the hands of the Paraguayans in 1811 ended both Spanish and Argentinean control over Paraguay. In May 1811, Paraguay formally proclaimed its independence.²¹⁷

Compared with many other Spanish-American possessions, Paraguay gained its freedom through a relatively brief and painless process. In this regard, Paraguay's remote and isolated location had been of direct relevance. Hopkins asserted that Paraguay secured independence "more by the advantages of her isolated geographical position, than by any exertion on the part of her inhabitants".²¹⁸

A co-equal two-man consul form of government was established to rule Paraguay after independence. Soon, one of the two became first consul and later president for life. He was Dr José Gaspar Rodríguez de Francia, variously styled as Dictator, Father of the Country, Pontiff and El Supremo. Until his death in 1840, Francia ruled Paraguay with an iron hand, unfettered by constitution, legislature or court.²¹⁹ His tenure became known as the "Franciata" and he turned Paraguay into "the first institutionalized dictatorship in the New World".²²⁰

To understand Francia's domestic and foreign policies, we should keep in mind Paraguay's geographic isolation, its dependence for access to the sea on a river running for most part through foreign territory, and its being hemmed in by two powerful states, Argentina and Brazil. Paraguay enjoyed an uneasy relationship with its two giant neighbours. Buenos Aires continued with its efforts to bring Paraguay under its control, imposing economic sanctions against "the upstart dictatorship" and planning an invasion of Paraguay. Brazil, in turn, tried to seize territory from Paraguay. This left the Paraguayans with an acute perception of external threat.²²¹ Paraguay could furthermore not ignore the fact that much of South America was in the first half of the nineteenth century engulfed in all kinds of violent upheaval. Apart from these factors in the external environment, some allowance should also be made for Francia's personal idiosyncrasies. He has, among other things, been depicted as an inscrutable, mystical, morose, tormented, paranoid and neurotic tyrant.²²² These features may help to explain some of the more bizarre aspects of Francia's rule.

Francia was particularly concerned about maintaining order in Paraguay against the background of the turmoil elsewhere on the continent. Another preoccupation was the preservation of Paraguayan nationality and independence.²²³ This led him to a dual policy that is by now familiar to us: isolationism and repression.

Many of Francia's isolationist measures were comparable to what we have already seen in other isolationist nations, although other actions bore the dictator's peculiar imprint.

In his book on nineteenth century Paraguay, Williams discussed foreign relations during the Franciata under the caption, "The Diplomacy of Isolation". There was no diplomacy, in the sense of "give and take according to mutually understood, internationally standardized norms", in this era.²²⁴ Francia's declared policy was one of neutrality and he was determined to avoid foreign entanglements. By committing Paraguay to non-intervention in the affairs of other states, Francia endeavoured to maintain the nation's independence by steering clear of antagonising other countries. This applied particularly to Brazil and Argentina, with which Francia would not even enter into diplomatic relations.²²⁵

While it is an exaggeration to contend that Francia had adopted "as his established principle, perfect non-intercourse with all the world",²²⁶ he certainly went to great lengths to discourage foreign relations. There was in fact some contact between Paraguay and foreign nations, but since it was "almost entirely unsought by Paraguay", it can hardly be regarded as diplomacy.²²⁷ In the economic sphere, severe restrictions applied. Foreign trade was strictly regulated and confined to Ytapua and Pilar, which served as Paraguay's major if not sole points of contact with Brazil and Argentina respectively. These entrepôts sufficed to provide Paraguay with all vital commodities, including arms, it required from abroad. By limiting trade to two small ports far removed from population centres, and by scrupulously controlling the movement of goods and merchants, Francia "effectively isolated the virus of foreign ideas and influences from his people". To El Supremo, the real danger of international contacts lay in "the possibility that foreign ideologies and ideas might communicate the very real political chaos that surrounded his nation to the body politic of his people", Williams explained.²²⁸ Another concern was that foreigners would exploit Paraguay to the detriment of its own people.²²⁹ But despite all manner of restrictions on external trade, Paraguay still held an attraction for foreign merchants who both denounced the economic isolationism and continued to seek commercial opportunities.²³⁰ Their interests or desires were however not imposed by state power, as had happened in China, Japan and Korea. Paraguay was, after all, a much smaller commercial prize.

Francia pursued a rather ambivalent policy with regard to the movement of people. On the one hand, access to Paraguay was strictly controlled for fear that foreigners might carry subversive ideas into the country and take out views derogatory to Francia.²³¹ On the other hand, large numbers of settlers were allowed into Paraguay on the assumption that they were simple, peace-loving and enterprising people. Francia also offered asylum to foreign army deserters and even runaway slaves from afar.²³² What was singularly bizarre, however, was Francia's practice of detaining perfectly innocent foreign visitors, often for lengthy periods. Among El Supremo's unwilling guests were a noted French scientist, Aimé Bonpland, and two Swiss physicians.²³³ Francia forbade the emigration of Paraguayans, and others who wished to leave required a special licence issued directly by the dictator.²³⁴ The treatment of foreigners led Thomas Carlyle to remark that "Paraguay had grown to be, like some mousetraps and other contrivances of art and nature, easy to enter, impossible to get out of".²³⁵

Francia extended his campaign against foreign influences to the Roman Catholic Church. In 1815 he renounced Rome's religious hegemony and declared himself head of Paraguayan national church. Since no foreign priests were admitted into Paraguay during Francia's rule, there was no further danger of unsympathetic curas being appointed from outside. It should be added that Francia's actions against the church were also inspired by his sense of Paraguayan nationalism and his dictatorial inclinations, and perhaps also by his known disdain for the Church.²³⁶

Not surprisingly, Francia also controlled the flow of published material. Only he could import books and other publications and he then decided which of these went into his library in Asunción.²³⁷

A final isolationist feature worth noting, is a suspicion of foreigners. Paraguayans proved highly receptive to Francia's invective against "monstrous" foreign enemies plotting the destruction of Paraguay. The Paraguayans' attitude towards outsiders has even been compared with the traditional xenophobia of the Chinese and Japanese. Together with the Paraguayans' suspicion of aliens went a militant nationalism, again a familiar phenomenon in isolationist nations.²³⁸

Some of Francia's isolationist measures may equally well have served the purposes of repression. Indeed, Francia, like authoritarian rulers through the ages, was forever vigilant against domestic enemies, real and imaginary, who threatened his power and by extension the state itself. These dangers he combated through repression and isolationism: the rationale for seclusion was that internal subversion might feed on alien ideas and that foreigners themselves might commit subversive acts in Paraguay.²³⁹ It is also possible to argue a link between repression and natural or geographic isolation. Pendle, for instance, maintained that Paraguay's remoteness "helped more than one local autocrat to erect an 'iron curtain' around it so that its people might be more thoroughly dominated".²⁴⁰

Let us now consider some of the consequences of Paraguay's self-isolation during the Francia era. The domestic economy experienced quite remarkable growth and diversification, while at the same time achieving a high degree of self-sufficiency.²⁴¹ It was a not altogether empty boast of Francia that he would continue his policy of non-intercourse with other nations "above all since Paraguay had no need of these countries and was self-supporting."²⁴² Richard Burton, the noted traveller and linguist, as well as a leading nineteenth century commentator on Paraguay, depicted Francia's country as "a reproduction, in somewhat a sterner mould, of the Jesuit Reduction system".²⁴³ A contemporary analyst, evidently not without ideological leanings, wrote sympathetically about Francia's "economic nationalism" that freed Paraguay of its colonial dependency status and moreover, by "rejecting the structurally inequitable concept of free trade", prevented capitalist penetration of its economy.²⁴⁴

Another important achievement is that Paraguay managed to gain *de facto* recognition of its statehood during the years of seclusion. Although still not formally recognised by any foreign power, the existence of the state of Paraguay was a fact that neither Argentina nor Brazil could reverse. And Paraguay found itself a place on the map of the world, albeit not least because of Francia's eccentricities.²⁴⁵

Francia's isolationist policies, combined of course with domestic repression, allowed Paraguay to escape the chaos, violence and bloodshed that ravaged so many South American nations at the time. El Supremo described his policy in these words:

I have kept it (i.e. Paraguay) on a system of non-intercourse with other Provinces of South America, and from contamination by that foul and restless spirit of anarchy and revolution that has more or less desolated and disgraced them all.²⁴⁶

The price for domestic tranquility was high, of course. Lott, for example, graphically likened it to the "peace and order of a graveyard".²⁴⁷ In similar vein, a Paraguayan expatriate observing the fate of his country during the Franciata, lamented that "Paraguay is in complete darkness from that which occurs in the world; it has been dead for twenty-five years".²⁴⁸ Such was the cost of Paraguay's period of "hermetically sealed peace".²⁴⁹

Paraguay's status of the "American China"²⁵⁰ was specifically associated with the Franciata. When El Supremo became El Difunto (the dead one) in 1840, Paraguay gradually began to abandon its self-isolation. The new ruler, Carlos Antonio Lopez, a "much milder despot" than his predecessor, opened up the country to foreigners and international trade. While anxious to pull his nation into the nineteenth century, Lopez was constrained by the ingrained Paraguayan distrust of foreigners, in which he too was steeped. During his 22-year tenure, Lopez nonetheless established diplomatic relations with a number of countries, including the United States, thus obtaining *de jure* recognition of Paraguay's independence.²⁵¹

Carlos Antonio Lopez was succeeded as dictator of Paraguay in 1862 by his son, General Francisco Solano Lopez. The latter's tenure is best remembered for the disastrous War of the Triple Alliance into which he led Paraguay. Tiny Paraguay faced the combined might of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay. The protracted war, in which the Paraguayans fought valiantly, came to an end with the death in battle in 1870 of their President. Paraguay was then occupied by the victorious allies until 1876.²⁵² This "ruinous involvement in the international affairs of the Plata Basin" of course stood in stark contrast with Francia's policy on non-involvement in foreign issues.²⁵³

Since the restoration of its independence in 1876, the history of Paraguay has, in Snow's words, generally consisted of "periods of firm personalized rule alternating with intervals of instability, *coups d'etat*, and revolutionary activity".²⁵⁴ The year 1954 saw the beginning of a new era, when General Alfredo Stroessner seized power. He was deposed only in 1989, thus setting an all-time Paraguayan record in political longevity. In the course of the Stroessner dictatorship, Paraguay began encountering heavy weather internationally. Stroessner's authoritarian policies at home led to Paraguay being subjected to some degree of ostracism.²⁵⁵ The contrast with Francia's isolationism is not as profound as it may appear, however, since the extent of Paraguay's international integration has always been rather limited. The constraining factors include the country's relative unimportance in geostrategic terms, its lack of power, and remnants of traditional Paraguayan isolationist sentiments.

SOUTH AFRICA²⁵⁶

It is sometimes asserted that the Afrikaner people have historically tended to isolate themselves from other groups and that this isolationist legacy – or laager mentality – still influences modern South Africa's international relations. David Vital, for instance, referred to "a somewhat sentimental and puritanical withdrawal from a hostile world which must be kept at bay".²⁵⁷ If there is indeed such an isolationist orientation, South Africa's international position cannot simply

be attributed to externally imposed ostracism but must also be explained in terms of voluntary seclusion. Put differently, South Africa's international image should then not only be that of a pariah state, but a mixture of pariah and hermit. How valid are such contentions about Afrikaner self-isolation?

In looking at Afrikaner history, it is rather difficult to distinguish between isolationist and nationalist traits. Initially, the two may well have been inseparable and mutually reinforcing, one a condition for the other. And then there is also the fact of geographic isolation from the European mother countries. Within the first few decades of the Dutch East India Company's presence at the Cape (established there in 1652), colonists increasingly moved into the unknown interior where they developed, through their physical isolation, an own way of life.

Isolated from their cultural and historical *heimat* and preoccupied with existential matters on the frontiers of the colony, the white settlers began losing their feeling for, or attachment to, their European countries of origin and were fused into a new identity. By the end of the 18th century, they no longer regarded themselves as Dutchmen, Germans or French, but rather as Afrikaans, a term by then commonly used. The second British occupation of the Cape in 1806²⁵ strengthened isolationist traits as the Afrikaners were then in a cultural sense effectively cut off from the Netherlands. British attempts to anglicise the Afrikaners forced them to close communal ranks even tighter in order to preserve their cultural identity.²⁵⁸

The Great Trek of 1838, a mass migration of Afrikaners from the Cape colony into what later became known as the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal, is often portrayed as a movement into self-isolation. The reasons were however more complex. Du Toit and Giljomee explained the Trek in terms of a lack of security experienced by the settlers on the Cape colony's eastern frontiers. The first was general insecurity due to a lack of order and control over the indigenous population; the lives and properties of the colonists were under constant threat. Economic insecurity was brought about by a crisis in the region's agriculture. Finally, there was psychological and status insecurity, caused by British policies that contradicted the Afrikaner's racial attitudes. It was by then an ingrained belief that slaves, Khoikhoi and Xhosa – all black peoples – belonged in a civil and legal category completely different from and inferior to that of Whites.²⁵⁹ Remnants of such views would, in the second half of the twentieth century, cause South Africa's ostracism from the international community.

While determined to shed the yoke of British control, the Trekkers at first had no notions of a manifest destiny, of drawing analogies with the Israelites' exodus from Egypt to claim the promised land. Instead, they depicted their emigration as a painful and disturbing experience compelled by circumstances; the Trekkers had no firm ideas on forming a new society or an independent state. Only in the course of the Trek did a more positive orientation develop, including definite ideas about the Trekker's rights, as a free and independent

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How isolated were these Boer republics? The Trekkers did not create self-contained Afrikaner communities in the interior. Coloured servants from the Cape had accompanied them on the Trek and they also employed local Blacks in their new settlements. This master-servant relationship was also embodied in the political processes of the Boer republics, which were the exclusive preserve of Whites. These segregationist-cum-discriminatory policies and practices could be seen as a form of internal self-isolation on the part of the Afrikaners. Elements of political and cultural isolationism could also be found in the ZAR's treatment of the so-called outlanders, specifically Britons. The republics were, however, not averse to recruiting clergymen, teachers, lawyers, journalists and traders from abroad, including the Netherlands and Scotland, as well as from the Cape colony.²⁶¹

There is also other more substantive evidence that the Boer republics did not try to cut themselves off from the outside world. Both the ZAR and OFS maintained formal contact with foreign states, colonies and leaders. The ZAR had official representation in the British colonies of the Cape and Natal, Britain itself, Mozambique, the Netherlands, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium and Italy, as well as formal ties with a number of indigenous black chiefs. Several foreign countries were in turn represented in the ZAR. The OFS had consular representation in the Netherlands, Britain, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, France, Italy and the United States of America.²⁶²

The Boer republics failed to maintain their sovereign independence in the face of British imperialism and succumbed to British domination after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Afrikaner nationalism and the striving for independence however survived. After the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, this found expression in a drive for the independence of South Africa from the British Crown. Domestically, Afrikaner nationalists for a time after 1910 preached a so-called two-stream policy - or cultural segregation - between Afrikaners and English-speakers. This form of cultural isolationism was designed to preserve the Afrikaners' cultural identity against the older, richer and more powerful British traditions.²⁶³ Isolationist features were of course much stronger in dealing with the Union's black population, but this applied equally to the policies pursued by the governments of generals Louis Botha and Jan Smuts and to those advocated by their Afrikaner-Nationalist opponents.

The National Party's electoral triumph of 1948 gave the Afrikaners exclusive political control of South Africa. It was only in 1961 that a cherished ideal of Afrikaner nationalism - the establishment of a republic - was realised. For many ardent Nationalists, it was a bonus that the republic was outside the Commonwealth, thus free of the long-disputed British connection. Prime Minister HF Verwoerd had, however, reluctantly broken with the Commonwealth in 1961. It was a case of withdrawal under duress, Verwoerd realising that South Africa may well in the near future be expelled from the association because opposition to apartheid would only mount as the Commonwealth's composition changed with the admission of newly independent 'non-white' states. This was in fact to become a pattern in South Africa's foreign relations: withdrawal from international organisations to prevent expulsion. One might refer to this as enforced isolationism, paradoxical though it is. But whether self-initiated or imposed from outside, the effect was the same: South Africa was becoming systematically isolated against its will.

There is ample evidence that South Africa's National Party rulers after 1948 consciously sought to expand the country's international relations. Soon after taking office, the Party abandoned its earlier advocacy of neutrality and made an advance commitment to support the West in any future war with communist powers; a military agreement was maintained with Britain; South Africa extended its diplomatic network abroad, and diversified its foreign trade relations. These efforts at international integration, we have already noted, soon met with external resistance as the world community began to take a stand against apartheid.

Prime Minister Verwoerd already in 1962 acknowledged that South Africa "has differences of opinion with many nations if not with most of them, regarding our colour policy". South Africa could not submit to the demands of other states in this regard, because that would spell doom for Whites. Taking his cue from Dutch statesman Abraham Kuyper, Verwoerd asserted: "In isolation in the sphere of colour policy lies our strength!" He insisted that isolation in one area did not mean general isolation. "In most spheres of life", Verwoerd went on, "we are popular partners and friends in the community of nations".²⁶⁴ Practice, however, showed that such internal self-isolation could not readily co-exist with external participation. The international community would simply not accept South Africa's right to turn its back on the world in dealing with its racial problems. In this sense, the hermit was very much against its will made into a pariah. Or to put it differently, internal isolationism produced external ostracism.

OTHER ISOLATIONIST NATIONS

The nine case studies of course do not cover the entire spectrum of self-isolated countries, past or present. In this final section, brief reference is made to some further examples of isolationism so as to gain a better appreciation of the incidence of this phenomenon.

Tibet, before it was forcibly incorporated into China in 1950, could look back on a flourishing ancient civilisation with an unbroken history of over one thousand years. The new communist masters of Tibet did their best to destroy the proud nation's culture. And the Tibetans learned, too late, that "a claimed 'independence' not based on an extension of international intercourse but on a policy of isolationism, and not based on formal recognition as a sovereign state but on *de facto* autonomy", was regarded by other states as a "constitutional fiction". This isolation had been partly endowed by nature and partly by human fiat. In 1793, for example, the authorities at Lhasa introduced a policy of excluding aliens from their territory. By the end of the nineteenth century, Fleming wrote, "Tibet was the only region of the world to which access was all but impossible for white men". In 1903-4, the British despatched the Younghusband mission to Lhasa, one its aims being the familiar one of compelling the Tibetans to open their country to "free trade". The other aim was to counter suspected Russian influence in Lhasa. Tibet was inevitably drawn into the rivalries between surrounding powers, namely the British in India, Russia and China. They nonetheless gave tacit recognition to Tibet's autonomy and permitted it to maintain much of its earlier seclusion - until it was conquered and absorbed by the Chinese.²⁶⁵

Forty years earlier, the British had acted to pre-empt any Chinese advance beyond Tibet by concluding an agreement with the neighbouring Himalaya kingdom of Bhutan. The treaty among other things provided that the Bhutanese government would in its foreign relations be guided by the advice of the British government, while the latter undertook not to interfere in Bhutan's domestic affairs. In practice, British guidance meant very little, since Bhutan had virtually no external relations. This non-involvement in international affairs dates back to the nineteenth century when Bhutan, in response to the expansion of British and Chinese power in the region, went into voluntary isolation. Prior to that, Bhutan was actively engaged in Himalayan diplomacy and also embroiled in frequent military confrontations.²⁶⁶

After independence, India took over Britain's role *vis-à-vis* Bhutan under an Indo-Bhutanese Friendship Treaty signed in 1949. This brought little change to Bhutan's seclusion. When Prime Minister Nehru of India became the first modern day foreign head of government to visit Bhutan in 1958, he found a country in which there were no radios, postal services, newspapers, secular schools or hospitals, not to mention motor vehicles and airports. Bhutan was indeed "the last physically isolated state in the modern world, the only political entity that was almost totally ignored by that world".²⁶⁷

Nehru's visit reflected the countries' growing concern that China would follow an aggressive regional policy endangering their security. The upshot was that Bhutan partly abandoned its isolationism in favour of a degree of dependence on India that is virtually without comparison in modern times. Bhutan's very sovereignty could indeed be called into question.²⁶⁸

Since the 1970s in particular, Bhutan has been acquiring the typical external trappings of sovereignty. It joined the United Nations and various of its specialised agencies, the IMF and the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Bhutan is also a committed member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Since the late 1970s Bhutan has cautiously begun to take positions on international issues that "take account of those of India but are not necessarily identical to them". Even so, many isolationist features remain. Formal diplomatic relations have been established with only 15 countries. Foreign tourism, which has only been allowed since 1974, is still strictly limited: a mere 2524 foreign visitors were recorded in 1987.²⁶⁹

Nepal offers another example of dual isolation, where geographic remoteness is combined with man-made seclusion. This Himalayan kingdom is one of the oldest nations in Asia and its frontiers have remained roughly the same since 1769. Until the nineteenth century, high mountain ranges and the lack of access routes ensured Nepal's isolation. Its economy was almost fully autarkic and there was very little foreign trade. From the second half of the nineteenth century, Nepal's foreign policy fell largely under the control of British India, although this did not mean the loss of its *de jure* independence. In an effort to prevent a similar loss of control over Nepal's domestic affairs, its rulers tried to exclude alien influences. The country was closed to the outside world, and not even British viceroys were allowed into Kathmandu. This seclusion could, however, not insulate Nepal from the political ideas and ferment in neighbouring India. Nepalese domestic politics have been profoundly influenced by India, particularly since the latter's

independence. In the realm of foreign affairs, Nepal adhered to its "voluntary subjection to Indian dominance" until the ascendance of the People's Republic of China changed the regional power equation.²⁷⁰

There were clearly narrow limits to Nepal's voluntary isolation. And with technological advances, particularly in the military sphere, Nepal's geographic seclusion no longer afforded it the security of yesteryear. Nepal's security in fact became more dependent on the state of Indo-Chinese relations than on its geographic features. For its part, Nepal tried to foster an evenhanded relationship with the two mutually antagonistic neighbouring powers; this meant the end of the earlier subservience to India and accorded Nepal "a new independence".²⁷¹ Nepal also had compelling economic reasons to abandon isolationism. As one of the least developed countries in the world, it is heavily dependent on foreign aid. The extent of its international integration can also be seen in the fact that Nepal had established formal relations with 88 states by 1986, although only 18 maintained embassies in its capital. Reference can also be made to the encouragement of foreign tourism: in 1984, over 175 000 foreigners visited Nepal.²⁷²

The three Southeast Asian nations of *Vietnam*, *Cambodia* (*Kampuchea*) and *Laos* provide examples of historical and contemporary self-isolation, the latter combined with some measure of enforced isolation.²⁷³ It will suffice to confine our notes to the contemporary situation of the three nations after the end of America's war in the region in the mid-1970s.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, formally inaugurated in June 1976, was born out of the unification of North and South Vietnam under communist leadership. A process of socialist transformation was immediately set in motion in the south and between 1975 and 1982 an estimated 65 000 suspected opponents of the communist government were executed.²⁷⁴ The new state nonetheless received economic assistance from several West European countries and international agencies, as well as from the Soviet Union. Vietnam's international fortunes however began to decline in the wake of its invasion and occupation of Cambodia in 1978. Global reaction to the offensive was distinctly hostile. The United States imposed a ban on trade with Vietnam and several other states suspended or reduced their aid to Vietnam. The five ASEAN nations (Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines), who were particularly perturbed by Hanoi's actions, initiated UN resolutions condemning the invasion.²⁷⁵ The continuing presence of Vietnamese troops in Cambodia remains a serious obstacle to the normalisation of Vietnam's foreign relations and leaves the state ostracised to some degree. Several Western powers, for instance, still maintain an economic boycott against Hanoi.²⁷⁶

Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia dislodged the government of Democratic Kampuchea, the state established under Khmer Rouge leadership in 1976. The new client state created by Vietnam in 1979 is known as the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). The PRK is still an ostracised state, with many countries continuing to recognise the deposed Democratic Kampuchean government under Pol Pot as the legitimate government. Several states accredited ambassadors to a Democratic Kampuchean government-in-exile and Democratic Kampuchea continued to occupy the Kampuchean seat in the UN General Assembly. The united armed forces of Democratic Kampuchea are also engaged in guerilla warfare against the Vietnamese presence.²⁷⁷

During its brief existence, Democratic Kampuchea practised rigid isolationism. The communist leadership's principal slogan was: "Building and development with our own resources".²⁷⁸ The methods were singularly harsh: society was transformed on the basis of military style cooperatives and work collectives. In the systematic elimination of alleged class enemies and the cultivation of a "new man" wholly subservient to the "proletarian dictatorship", the Pol Pot government exterminated between 1,2 and 2,5 million people (out of a total population of 7,7 million in 1975).²⁷⁹ This must rank as one of the most brutal examples of the repression that so frequently accompanies isolationism. In 1978, Democratic Kampuchea's Foreign Minister defended the closing of his country to the outside world after the Khmer Rouge victory "because otherwise we would have had a civil war" and even more people would have died because of "our complexities and difficulties".²⁸⁰ Given the enormity of the genocide, this statement is at best highly cynical. Nonetheless, because the situation had become "better", Democratic Kampuchea launched a diplomatic initiative in the latter half of 1978 to seek wider international recognition and indeed respectability.²⁸¹ Within months, however, the Vietnamese invasion ended Khmer Rouge rule.

In the Lao People's Democratic Republic, proclaimed in 1975, the main thrust of Communist Party policy has likewise been socialist transformation - under the watchful of 45 000 Vietnamese troops stationed in the country. Although Laos also entered a period of revolutionary isolationism after the communist takeover, its seclusion has not been as comprehensive as Kampuchea's, nor has its policies produced anything like the international opprobrium experienced by Vietnam and Kampuchea.²⁸² Insofar as Laos today still experiences isolation, it is more the isolation of ignorance or indifference on the part of the international community, than either isolationism or ostracism.

The Asian communist states mentioned in this study are not the only communist countries to have resorted to isolationist policies. It is in fact a universal feature of communist societies that they seclude themselves to a greater or lesser extent, particularly in the early years of communist rule. Isolationism is typically accompanied by repression as the new leadership - which invariably imposed itself by force - tries to consolidate its power and remould society along socialist lines. This period of pronounced self-isolation is usually accompanied by some degree of ostracism as Western powers specifically express their opposition to the new rulers. The Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic and Cuba, are among the many other examples.

Contemporary isolationism is by no means confined to communist nations, however. Many other authoritarian countries have also tried to seal themselves off. Iran, after the Islamic revolution of 1979, entered into a period of revolutionary seclusion combined with a degree of international ostracism. Another lesser known example is that of the African state of Equatorial Guinea. We are told that in 1976, remnants of the civil service petitioned President Nguema "for a relaxation of the country's total isolationism that had feudalised society".²⁸³

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the case studies, it is possible to compile an inventory of the main characteristics of isolationism:

- The essence of self-isolation is that the particular state cuts itself off, to a greater or lesser extent, from the outside world. This is done in the first instance by restricting externally directed actions; a minimum requirement of isolationism is the avoidance of military alliances. Foreign commitments are kept at a very low level. Abstentionism is usually accompanied by exclusionism, that is, the inward flow of actions and transactions is also controlled, thus reducing external penetration. The selection of particular isolationist measures – specifically to regulate the ingress dimension – will be influenced by the nature of the government concerned. The more authoritarian it is, the stricter the exclusionist measures are likely to be, thus encroaching on civil liberties.

- Isolationism can manifest itself in several spheres, whether singly or in combination: the political/diplomatic, economic, military and socio-cultural fields. The extent of seclusion may also vary considerably from one area to the other, since isolationism may be easier in some spheres than in others. To be politically isolated, a state should not influence power relationships or be influenced by them; such a state would have little need for a foreign policy. Today, such a situation is virtually impossible. Self-isolation in the other areas may be more feasible, but of course not in an absolute sense. Isolationism is therefore a relative phenomenon, a case of more or less and not all or nothing.

- Isolationism usually has domestic roots. Such nations withdraw into themselves in order to protect national security, political or economic independence, or to preserve certain values in the face of corrosive influences from abroad. In the case of revolutionary isolationism, a new sociopolitical order is safeguarded through seclusion. Where cultural values are at stake, isolationist nations typically display attitudes of superiority towards alien cultures and wish to preserve the purity of their own.

- These protective features of isolationism spring from some perception of outside threat, whether political, military, economic or cultural in nature.²⁸⁴ In the case of authoritarian isolationist states, external threats are commonly believed to be related to perceived domestic threats directed against the rulers, their policies or the very existence of the state.

- Nationalism thrives in situations of isolationism. Pride in the nation's cultural heritage and achievements, often coupled with notions of threat to the nation, provide a fertile climate for the blooming of nationalist passions.

- Self-isolated states believe or hope that they can be largely self-sufficient in material and spiritual terms. It is not only large states that can meet the requirement of economy self-sufficiency. In fact, most modern isolationist states are or were small. The point is that basic needs should in reasonable measure be met from the state's own resources. A common consequence is that self-isolated states have tended to be rather under-developed. The United States and Britain were notable exceptions.
- Isolationism is more often than not accompanied by and indeed related to a set of geographic features that not only facilitate seclusion but make it quite natural. For many states, natural isolation has been an essential component of their voluntarily chosen isolation. It is no coincidence that many self-isolated states were located on the geographic periphery of the international affairs of the day, removed from the centres of world power.²⁶⁵
- Isolationism is usually associated with a particular international power configuration. A diffuse structure of power, characterised by shifting alliances, has traditionally been beneficial for isolationism. In a hierarchical structure of power, self-isolation would be possibly only if the central unit lacked the power to exert effective control over all vassal countries. Ancient China's relations with its surrounding nations fall into the latter category. A polar system, in which all states, voluntarily or through coercion, join forces with a bloc, would obviously not be conducive to isolationism.²⁶⁶
- A state can be only as isolated as others would permit it. Neighbouring and more powerful countries should be prepared to accept or at least tolerate another's seclusion. The refusal of foreign powers to do so, led to the involuntary abolition or at least modification of a number of countries' isolationism. This phenomenon was described as enforced integration.
- In earlier centuries nations experienced lengthy periods of seclusion, often a hundred or more years. The number of isolationist countries has sharply declined as the twentieth century wore on. Countries that have in recent decades tried to seclude themselves, have usually limited both the duration and scope of their isolationism. Recent instances of self-isolation typically followed in the wake of major political changes, such as communist takeovers. The ensuing seclusion has been termed revolutionary isolationism.
- A number of states that have in recent times opted for isolationism, had in their past also experienced self-isolation. The circumstances under which contemporary isolationism was introduced - usually after a communist takeover - differed so profoundly from the conditions of traditional isolationism that the "return" to seclusion was little more than a historical coincidence.

- There is some correlation between isolationism and authoritarianism. We should not be dogmatic about the link, since not all isolationist countries are or were authoritarian, nor are all authoritarian nations isolationist. Our case studies nonetheless suggest that repression can be rife in conditions of international seclusion. It is a moot point whether repression is an instrument of isolationism or vice versa.
- The isolationism practised by modern authoritarian governments has commonly been combined with elements of enforced isolation.
- Apart from the potential or real benefits, self-isolation also holds disadvantages for a country. For a small underdeveloped nation, seclusion may further retard economic development and increase military vulnerability. Cultural impoverishment is another possible (but not inevitable) consequence. When the costs of isolationism are thought to outweigh the benefits, a nation may decide to embark on a process of international (re)-integration. Such a reorientation may be facilitated if a new government or leader takes power in the isolationist country.
- The nature of a reorientation, that is, a state's post-isolationist orientation, can range from internationalism or globalism (e.g., the United States) to dependence on another country (e.g., Nepal).
- Finally, there may be powerful incentives for a state to pursue a policy of self-isolation, the practical difficulties notwithstanding. Such a policy does not mean that a state is indifferent to its external environment; on the contrary, seclusion may be based upon a realistic assessment of the state of international affairs. States that are well removed from areas of conflict and enjoy a degree of relative economic and military self-sufficiency but fear that external commitments may endanger their political, economic and social values, may find in isolationism the best way to uphold their values and realise their aspirations.²⁸⁷ For this to find practical expression, the conditions mentioned earlier need to obtain.

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- * A hereditary office in the Tokugawa dynasty since 1603. Although Shogun was a military title (akin to general), the incumbent was the de facto ruler of Japan; the Emperor (mikado) reigned.
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