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# Crossing the Rovuma, Over the Maputo and Down the Slippery Slopes Towards the Benguela: The 1985-86 United States/South African Collaborative Intervention Into the People's Republics of Angola and Mozambique

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CROSSING THE ROVUMA, OVER THE MAPUTO AND  
DOWN THE SLIPPERY SLOPES TOWARDS  
THE BENGUELA: THE 1985-86 UNITED  
STATES/SOUTH AFRICAN COLLABORATIVE  
INTERVENTION INTO THE PEOPLE'S  
REPUBLICS OF ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE

a paper for the

April, 1986  
SOCIALIST SCHOLARS CONFERENCE

New York, N.Y.

by

Prexy Nesbitt  
April 19, 1986

April 1986  
Prexy Nesbitt

Sometimes you have to do it to the children to make the adults talk. There was a 12-year-old boy. We wanted to know what was going on. We wanted his mother to talk, so we tied him up like a chicken with his wrists behind his back, strapped to his ankles. Then we played water polo with him, put him in this kind of dam and pushed him about, let him sink. Every so often we took him out. He wouldn't cry. He just wet himself. The mother didn't tell us anything. In the end we just left him in the water and he drowned.

--Trevor Edwards, a British mercenary on operations for the South African Army in Angola (Guardian, 29.1, 1981)

That South Africa is one of the world's most violent societies is now indisputable. One facet of its violence is derived from the deep structural inequities and repression of the system. It is the violence to people's lives that emanates from situations like those identified in a recent Carnegie Corporation-financed study entitled, "The Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty in Southern Africa." Among the study's findings were the following:

- a) the number of people made destitute by landlessness and unemployment had increased between 1960 and 1980 from 4.9 million to 8.9 million;
- b) that the migratory labor system destroys family life. One-third of the migrant male workers of several villages interviewed spent only one month per year with their families;
- c) on the white-owned farms, black laborers earned as little as \$10 a month and 63% of the men were underweight; and
- d) some black rural areas had one doctor for every 174,999 people.

Nineteen eighty-five has made it patently clear that the major trademark of the Pretoria government is violence. In the last nineteen months, a minimum of 1,400 people have been killed in South Africa, an average of five/day, is what the Institute of Race Relations called it, the majority as a result of police bullets. As many as 23 major leaders of the country's largest legal opposition, the United Democratic Front (with over 1.5 million members), have been killed or are missing under suspicious circumstances.

Additionally, there is a clear pattern of vigilante and death squad violence in South Africa. The methods used by the groups vary from harassment to acid in the eyes of activists' children to murder and mutilation. Some acts are directed at little-known activists, others, like the 1980 slaying of black attorney Griffiths Mxenge and the 1985 slaying of his wife, lawyer Victoria Mxenge, are directed at prominent leadership. According to Africa News, some 800 incidents are known to have occurred since 1965.

Another aspect of the violence in South Africa is the violence of a totally militarized society. It is rooted in the two to three million dollars per day which the South African Defence Force (SADF)

expends today in Namibia and in South Africa itself. It is in the "total strategy" all-out-war mentality manifesting itself widely in South Africa and, as well, in Namibia. The "total strategy" was articulated first in a 1977 Defence Department White Paper on National Security. Today, it is the South African polity's new and revised bible. Drafted shortly after the 1976 Soweto uprising, the total strategy argues that South Africa is engaged in a war against a multi-dimensional campaign which Russia (and its allies like the World Council of Churches, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the Congressional Black Caucus, TransAfrica and the American Committee on Africa) is waging against the West. It is a campaign with a goal, according to a 1982 government commission on the media, "of nothing less than the political and moral subversion of the white man and his replacement by a black majority government . . . . It is therefore essential," argues the 1977 White Paper, " that a Total National Strategy be formulated at the highest level. The defence of the Republic of South Africa is not soley the responsibility of the Department of Defence. On the contrary . . . (it) is the combined responsibility of

all government departments. This can be taken further--it is the responsibility of the entire population, the nation and every population group."

Thus, it is that South Africa today is really run by the semi-secret State Security Council (SSC), chaired and dominated by President Botha, former Minister of Defence, and staffed by military officers. As the Washington Post noted as early as 1980, "in many ways the State Security Council is already an alternative cabinet by virtue of the decisions it makes."

But there is another aspect to the violence of apartheid, one which receives scant attention in the U.S. press. It is the violence which manifests itself in the brutal, nearly bi-monthly destabilization raids and actions which South Africa and its surrogate forces (UNITA in Angola, the MNR in Mozambique, and similar formations in Zimbabwe and Lesotho, e.g., the Lesotho Liberation Army) conduct upon the neighboring countries of Angola, Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana and Zambia. <sup>The South African</sup> These raids include the May 4, 1978 Kassinga,

Angola invasion (800 women and children killed); the January 12, 1981

*If it is a violence which is new for the Portuguese colony was an experience too consistently of violence as the novel Mayombe points out so graphically.*

from Windhoek Advertiser

April 8 1986

"  
US Aid to Robert

and FNLA"

Group of retired military men are <sup>Civilian Military Assistance (CMA)</sup>

providing \$200,000 to Roberto

in "non-lethal equipment and supplies"

The group is <sup>headquartered in</sup> ~~based out of~~ Decatur

Alabama according to

Spokesman

Mr. James Kent

Facts w Reports 16<sup>th</sup> Vol No H

Matola Mozambique raid on an ANC home (13 killed); the May 23, 1982 attack on Matola and bombing of Maputo factories (19 Mozambican citizens killed); the December 9, 1982 invasion of Maseru, Lesotho (42 South refugees and Lesotho citizens killed); the June 14, 1985 invasion of Gabrone, Botswana (16 killed, one of them a six-year-old girl); the January 1, 1986 South African economic blockade of Lesotho; ~~and~~ the January 20, 1986 South African-sponsored coup d'etat of the Jonathan Leabua government in Lesotho. In Angola alone the damage done by South African invasions and sabotage of Angolan industrial installations (e.g., the June 1985 attempted sabotage of Gulf Oil's facilities in Cabinda, Angola) since 1975 is conservatively estimated at ten to twelve billion dollars. In the four-year period between 1981 and 1985 South Africa carried out 4,000 invasions of Angolan airspace, 168 bombing raids, 234 airborne troop landings, 90 strafing incidents, 74 ground attacks and four naval landings. Since 1975 South African army forces and the South African-backed UNITA force have killed and wounded thousands of Angolan civilians and Namibian refugees. The lives of hundreds of thousands more have been disrupted

*the May 1986 invasions of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana*



by the constant state of war which the Angolan people have experienced, starting with the struggle against Portugese colonialism in 1961.

Mozambique has suffered in the same way as Angola from the brutal policies of aggression and destabilization which Pretoria pursues throughout the region. Samora Machel, President of Mozambique, noted in a 1984 speech that:

*their  
cattle  
stolen +  
killed,*

Our people had their property looted, their houses destroyed, their granaries looted, their crops pillaged and flattened, their tools burnt and destroyed. The communal villages and cooperatives, the schools and clinics, the wells and dams built by the people with so much effort and sacrifice became targets for the enemies' criminal fury. The systematic destruction of economic infrastructure, bridges and roads, shops and warehouses, sawmills, plantations, agricultural and industrial machinery, electricity supply lines, fuel tanks, lorries and buses, locomotives and carriages has prevented the implementation of economic development projects of the utmost importance for the well-being of the Mozambican people.

840 schools have been destroyed or closed, affecting more than 150,000 schoolchildren. Twelve health centres, 24 maternity clinics, 174 health posts and two centres for the physically handicapped have been sacked and destroyed. Nine hundred shops have been destroyed, hampering marketing and supplies for about four and a half million citizens.

It is the final point in the Machel selection above which illustrates the most basic trait of the South African government raids (or those of its surrogates, UNITA and MNR) which should be highlighted.

As is the case with U.S. aggression against Nicaragua, the primary objective of South African/MNR/UNITA attacks is the population itself of the countries involved. True, often it is the infrastructure targets--bridges, highways, water stations, power installations--in Angola and Mozambique which are attacked. But increasingly it is schools, hospitals, marketplaces, churches supportive of government policies, e.g., the Methodist Church in Angola and its outspoken bishop, which are the targets. The goal of the attacks is beyond the mere physical destruction of a facility or institution. Rather, it is to make the general population lose its faith and belief in the ability of the government to govern; it is to undercut the legitimacy of an Angola, Mozambique or Nicaragua by destroying the people's will to believe in the dream and participate in the building of the new society. President Jose Eduardo dos Santos described the South African/UNITA attacks as aiming at "weakening the (Angolan) economy and wiping out the social achievements won by the workers." World-renown scholar John Saul, in his brilliant November 1985 paper on South African aggression, prepared for the

But let us place <sup>the nature of aggression in Southern Africa - a real terrorism, if ever there has been one -</sup> ~~this~~ on a broader plane. Samora

Machel captured the essence of what is fearful about the angolas, cubas, nicaraguas and mozambiques of the world when he said:

"We provide another model of the organization of society, a non-racialist vision.."

Because we follow socialism as a path to development, we are the targets of criminal actions unleashed by imperialism. Those actions are manipulated directly by the Pretoria regime which finances and arms bandits. . . . Economic, political and social destabilization is the central and fundamental objective of racist South Africa when it sends into our country gangs of loyal servants to carry out its orders. 102

As President Machel put it, South Africa "is attacking our decision to defeat underdevelopment":

The Pretoria minority regime is afraid of our victory over underdevelopment. They are afraid that success in this decade will demonstrate the superiority of the socialist system. The South African regime is afraid that the consolidation of our development will accelerate the dynamic of the economic liberation of Southern Africa, that it will be a stimulus for the total liberation of the peoples of the region. 103

The South African regime, a few days ago, alleged that Mozambique threatened it by concentrating sophisticated arms on its frontiers. What are the arms to which they refer? Neither economically nor militarily do we represent a threat to anyone. No reasonable person can think that an underdeveloped country as poor as we, still bloodied from the wounds of war, can pose a threat to the sovereignty, and territorial integrity, the stability of another state, particularly one as powerful as South Africa. In fact, the only thing that the regime can fear is our example of creating a non-racial society. (President Samora Machel quoted in Noticias, August 24, 1982)

The key speech the core to understanding the situation from F Saacaran, Allen, "Mozambique: Digging at the chains of dependency" in Bender, ed, African Crisis Areas, and US Foreign Policy

It's this that scares the s\_\_\_ out of the South African government and its allies and leads them to take the path which Basil Davidson has described in the following way:

The result of all this becomes clear enough. What we have seen in action is a South African policy of unlimited confrontation - whether by political, economic, or military means - with every trend that works or speaks for the development of African progress and the post-colonial restructuring of African economies. Along this route - however interrupted by 'truces' or manoeuvres undertaken for temporary or tactical reasons - there appears ahead only widening poverty, political instability, and moral confusion throughout the sub-continent; and the further ravages are likely to be measured in terms of still greater misery and despair. I doubt if there are words to convey the depths of disintegration, and the consequent spread of an uncontrollable violence, that could be expected to ensue.

African Studies Association, called the types of attacks currently being conducted by South African-backed MNR efforts to eclipse the popular enthusiasm of the Mozambican people for their FRELIMO government.

*Incent*

In some respects, South African aggression against Mozambique and Angola, against the frontline states generally and especially against the effort for regional unity, S.A.D.C.C, is not new. The verses may be different but the refrain is the same.

STOP

Throughout the 1960s South Africa and the U.S. were the iron fist and velvet glove duo in terms of political, economic and military support to Portugal as it desperately sought to maintain its overseas colonies in Africa. South African troops fought side by side with the Portugese in both Angola and in Mozambique. At various points during the war, South African helicopters flew supply and reconnaissance missions. In Bie Province, South African soldiers guarded the Kassinga iron mines. In 1969 South Africa joined Portugal in the Cunene River development scheme not only to get a cheap source of electricity for South Africa but also to bolster the already-

flagging Portugese resolve to remain in Angola. In December 1971, President Richard Nixon followed up his 1970 U.N. sanctions-violating contribution of 22 Cessna duo-purpose light planes to the South African military wiht what he called a Christmas gift of \$436 million in economic assistance to Portugal--all part of the Azores Pact between Portugal and the U.S.A. (The Azores Pact was incidentally a supplement to the over \$320 million in direct military assistance given to Portugal during 1950-1970, the military training programs, the Boeing 707s and the regular shipments of napalm and herbicides.)

Rambo Rides Silver Towards the Benguela:  
the 1985-86 U.S. intervention into Angola

What is new in the current situation of the South African/U.S. offensives against the frontline states, especially Angola, is the intensity and scope of the Reagan Administration's intervention to destroy the People's Republic of Angola. Let us review briefly some of the more recent developments:

\*From the inception of the Reagan Administration in 1980, conservative forces mobilize against both Angola and Mozambique, e.g., Senator Richar Lugar opines in the December 15, 1980 Washington Star that it is urgent to help UNITA stem the tide of 1980s-style Soviet "white European imperialism in a Black African nation";

\*In July 1985, the Clark Amendment, originally passed in 1976 prohibiting covert or overt U.S. assistance to rebels fighting in Angola, is repealed by the Congress;

- Throughout 1985 the conservative lobby led by organizations like the Conservative Caucus, the Heritage Foundation and the American Security Council and by individuals like Senators Jesse Helms, and Representatives Jack Kemp and Claude Pepper mobilizes to: 1) attack Gulf/Chevron for continuing to do business with Angola (Gulf is the key purchaser of Angolan petroleum which provides most of Angola's revenue); and 2) to project Jonas Savimbi and UNITA as true anti-communist freedom fighters. The latter effort climaxes in a highly publicized tour of the USA by Savimbi and the hiring of a Reagan-related US publicity firm, Black, Manafort, Stone and Kelly for \$600,000/year to do public relations for UNITA and Jonas Savimbi. During the tour Reagan says "We want to be very helpful to what Dr. Savimbi and his people are trying to do;"
- In early 1986 an allegedly nationwide coalition of prominent conservatives called the RAMBO (Restore a More Benevolent Order) kick off a campaign of letter writing, returning credit cards, and demonstrating to protect Gulf/Chevron's operations in Angola. At the same time the US Commerce Department began actively discouraging trade with Angola despite the fact that Angola is the third largest trading partner in Africa;

- On March 25, 1986 UNITA announced that it had "bombed and dynamited oil installations owned by Gulf/Chevron in Cabinda, northern Angola. Questioned about the attack a State Department spokesman said the US would condemn any attack on American lives or property, no matter who was doing it;"

Meeting in \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, 1986 the Organization of African Unity (OAU) condemned the Reagan administration for deciding to forward military assistance to Savimbi and UNITA.

- In April 1986, 6 US Congressmen file a lawsuit to prevent the US Export-Import Bank from extending \$101.6 million in loan guarantees <sup>to Angola</sup> a program designed to facilitate foreign customers purchasing US manufactured goods;
- In early April 1986, shipments of Stinger anti-aircraft weapons and anti tank guns sent by President Reagan implementing an executive order begin arriving in Southern Angola--presumably via Zaire. In doing this, Reagan ignores and bypasses a Congressional debate raging over whether or not to allow covert or overt assistance to UNITA. President dos Santos of Angola reacts quickly, declaring that the US can no longer be a mediator in the region; he asks that the UN mediate instead. In the process he reveals a hitherto secret agreement called the Mindelo Act. Signed by the US and Angola in January 1984, the agreement provides for the US to cease "acts of aggression against Angola and support for Savimbi's UNITA."

Why? What's behind the new and renewed embracing of their "out-of-Africa" boy by Reagan administration?

On one level it is part of the Reagan doctrine of the quick American projection of power. US intervention into Angola is one staging point of the LIC's (low intensity conflicts) which are meant to be carried out by non-Americans, i.e. no spilling of "good 'merican peoples' blood."

As Time magazine succinctly put it:

"American boys should not be seen dying on the nightly news. Wars should be over in three days or less, or before the Congress invokes the War Powers Act. Victory must be assured in advance and the American public must be all for it from the outset."

On another level, US intervention into Angola could not be better timed in terms of rescuing South Africa. (It's like Matt in 'Gunsmoke' coming into the reservation to save wounded Chester surrounded by the hostiles.) Every dollar which South Africa does not have to give to UNITA means funds released for South Africa to contend with the growing crisis inside South Africa itself. **US** assistance also comes at a



point when the FAPLA forces of Angola had conducted increasingly successful campaigns against UNITA. In fact, during the fall of 1985, it was only direct South African military intervention which saved UNITA's southern headquarters from being decisively overrun. Finally, it is hoped by Rambo and his sons and daughters that the projection of Savimbi in the USA and of UNITA's struggle as being the major struggle in Southern Africa can serve to confuse and thwart the escalating anti-apartheid movement inside the US itself. As the Washington Office on Africa recently pointed out:

"By pushing for US aid to UNITA, South Africa's allies within the administration and Congress hope to regain the ground they believe they have lost and are losing to the anti-apartheid movement. In building support for UNITA they know they will be strengthening apartheid within Pretoria's own borders and throughout southern Africa. US assistance to South Africa's agent UNITA will help Pretoria militarily intimidate and destabilize Angola, prolong South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia and aid it in its war against SWAPO. If the US assists UNITA, South Africa can then divert more of its financial resources towards strengthening its internal security force's crackdown on anti-apartheid opponents."

Conclusion ①

~~Conclusion~~  
~~Analysis~~

What are some of the implications of this too-brief analysis? ~~What should some of our tasks~~  
~~What are the implications of these observations for our work in the USA against racism? <sup>and</sup> against apartheid?~~

~~work be in the period ahead~~

What are some of the tasks for anti-apartheid ~~and~~ activists and the progressive community in general ~~in the~~ during the period ahead?

I have written elsewhere that aid to UNITA "would open the floodgates for the CIA, mercenary, private, corporate and ultra right forces to pour in aid for both UNITA and the MNR." IF Now that the Right has outorganized us, ~~is critical that we mobilize~~ Now that the Stingens

~~are there~~ have reached Southern Angola, it is critical that we <sup>organize</sup> mobilize <sup>the yellow brick road</sup> and further stepping down ~~the~~ ~~importance~~

to try and prevent further assistance ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~importance~~ we need to educate and mobilize for getting support to material and non-material and Mozambique, work <sup>via</sup> in the People's Republic of Angola, ~~and~~ which <sup>is</sup> the progressive

We can support for example various legislative initiatives to prohibit further aid to UNITA and/or MNR. Additionally, however,

- Save for a brief but critical period in 1995-96-

~~the~~ US community, ~~has~~ never done all that well why not? Maybe Angola has raised too many → or that consistently. Let me illustrate this point.

even deeper intervention

difficult, thorny, complex questions of class, race, ideology, questions  
that demanded serious and sustained deciphering and analysis.

Not ~~the~~ long ago <sup>UNITA - lowing</sup> ~~is~~ a conservative force, <sup>like the Conservative Caucus or the Armed Forces</sup>  
~~(perhaps aided by the government of Morocco, friendly to Savimbi, and other~~  
 forced a Washington DC public relations firm, Gray  
 and Company, to stop representing the government of Angola  
 after only two months of a one year contract. Allegedly,  
 the firm was also pressured to drop the contract  
 after the government of Morocco, <sup>like Zaire,</sup> long time ally ~~of~~  
~~do Savimbi~~ <sub>2</sub> ~~or~~ South Africa's Savimbi, announced it was  
 going to terminate its annual contract with Gray and Company.  
 What this means is that there is a tremendous job to be  
 done of projecting the true situation not only about  
 Angola but also about Angola's long, long years of  
~~its~~ concrete contribution to the struggle of both  
 SWAPO and the ANC. How many average, work-a-day  
 Americans today, black, white, ~~or~~ brown, red or yellow, male  
 or female, would know today that the government of  
 Angola helps SWAPO to care for and protect some  
 100,000 Namibian ~~or~~ refugees in southern Angola?

This is where we in the progressive community need to be today.

For too long the movement in our country has been organized on simply an anti-apartheid basis. This is no longer sufficient for our tasks in the period ahead. The terrain has changed too much and too drastically. We ~~must~~ <sup>are now compelled to</sup> go ~~even~~ <sup>beyond</sup> ~~being~~ <sup>divestment</sup> to de-mystifying liberation movements and the progressive, <sup>radical</sup> socialist countries of Africa. ~~The~~ Angola and Mozambique <sup>and their difficult roads to socialism are</sup> ~~need to be embraced by us~~ <sup>are</sup> roads which we both need to better understand and to embrace. We must go from being merely anti-apartheid to being supportive of the national liberation movements, the ANC, ~~SWAPO~~ in South Africa and SWAPO in Namibia, and the progressive front line states standing shoulder to shoulder with them in their quest for the total destruction of apartheid and the creation of "new social +

(4)

economic order in Southern Africa.

~~For too long we have~~ <sup>Those of us</sup> in US <sup>Southern Africa</sup> solidarity groups and  
the general anti-apartheid movement have ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> been keeping up  
with language changes <sup>and the slogans</sup> in Southern Africa.

Years ago they said in Angola "A luta Continua -  
A Vitoria é certa!" [translation: "The struggle  
continues - victory is certain"] Today, in the latter  
half of the Rambo years, they say "A Vitoria  
Continua - A luta é certa!" [translation: Victory is  
continuous ~~process~~, a process - struggle is certain  
a definite part of it] Today in Southern Africa  
as Amílcar Cabral used to say,  
"They tell no lies, claim no easy victories." We too ~~must~~  
acknowledge. we need to  
need to pick up the heavier loads.