

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HISTORY WORKSHOP



STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF APARTHEID

6 - 10 February 1990

AUTHOR: Christopher Saunders

TITLE: South African Strategy and Namibian Decolonisation

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SOUTH AFRICAN STRATEGY AND NAMIBIAN DECOLONISATION

Christopher Saunders

As Namibia becomes independent, it is timely to reflect on the reasons why South African policy towards that territory changed over time and what led to the decision to bring seventy-five years of rule to an end. The events and calculations of 1988, when that decision was taken, cannot be understood without tracing the background, and in particular the South African decision in 1978 to accept a settlement under United Nations (UN) auspices. In surveying key issues in South African policy to Namibia since the early 1970s, this paper inevitably traverses some ground covered in works by Du Pisani, Katjavivi and others, [1] but does so to highlight why South African strategy in relation to Namibia changed over time. Any attempt to examine this must be more or less unsatisfactory until the release of evidence explaining why key decisions were taken. It is, however, not likely that such records will be made available in the near future, and in the meantime we can identify the main questions to ask, and by contextualising what we know, and examining the available evidence as critically as possible, we may get some way towards answers.

Gone with the Windhoek[2]

Separations are never simple, not even Rhett Butler's from Scarlett O'Hara. Namibian decolonisation differs in many ways from other cases of African decolonisation. Namibia's 'metropole' was not a distant European country, but the neighbour next door, and Namibia's special international status helped produce a pre-independence election monitored by the UN. But there are some parallels: like the French in Algeria and the British in Kenya, the South Africans fought a war to retain their control of the territory in the face of popular resistance. As in those other cases, the white settlers and their allies were in effect ditched when the costs of retaining possession became too high, and in the face of international demands for withdrawal. In Namibia as elsewhere, war radicalised the nationalist movement, and that radicalisation for a time reduced the likelihood of the withdrawal of the colonial power. When the idea of withdrawal was accepted, the departing colonial power hoped the successor regime would be a semi-captive, neo-colonial one. In the Namibian case, especially, where the 'metropole' had a stranglehold over the ex-colony's economy, political independence could not mean economic independence from the ex-ruler. Despite this, the South African government for long refused to withdraw, then rather unexpectedly decided to do so.

Why?

Let us first notice that the issue of Namibian independence would probably not have arisen had Smuts, an ardent imperialist, got his way and formally incorporated the territory in South Africa itself, as he tried to do on two occasions. After the First World War he was foiled in his annexation plans by the very mandate scheme for the former German colonies which he had helped devise; he had not expected it to be applied in the case of South West Africa. After the Second World War, having played a major part in creating the UN, he decided he should ask it to approve annexation. The UN did not only reject his request; it demanded that South West Africa become a UN trust territory. South Africa rejected that out of hand, Namibia remained as much a South African colony as it had been between the wars; in terms of the mandate granted in 1920, South Africa was allowed to rule South West Africa as if it were an integral part of South Africa itself. Until the early 1970s, South Africa moved ever closer to ruling the territory as a de facto fifth province. As Smuts said of it in 1946: 'We have the fullest authority and we have exercised it and whether you call it sovereignty or not seems to be just a juggling with words... The facts are quite clear: we have the power.' [3] And for a long time what was all-important was that power, which came from ruling the territory, not whether or not it was formally part of South Africa. In the long run, however, the fact that the territory had an international status, and was not part of South Africa, was crucial in determining its future.

Afrikaner nationalists had opposed the initial conquest, because they were against South African participation in what they regarded as Britain's war; for them the Germans were not enemies. But when an Afrikaner nationalist government took office, it was as determined as its predecessors to retain control of the territory. After all,

- white South Africans had been settled in South West Africa, and they looked to Pretoria for support;

- the territory was a possible springboard from which South African could move further into Africa: the Caprivi Strip extended to the Zambesi River;

- that the territory was rich in copper and diamonds was known before South African conquest, and the cost of ruling - the administration established was a minimal one - was far outweighed by the profits South Africans, and others, derived from their investments there, in the mining sector, which remained dominant and diversified over time, in the fishing industry and in commercial farming;

- and no South African government wanted to contemplate the possibility of the territory north of the Orange falling under a hostile government.

There was, too, unwillingness to withdraw from a territory ruled since 1915. South Africa was to concede in principle the idea of Namibian independence in the early 1970s, but its

military presence greatly increased in the 1970s and early 1980s as the border war with SWAPO was carried deeper and deeper into Angola. The lives lost in that war did not make it easier for a South African government to give up the territory. As recently as 1987, the South African Minister of Defence stated that his government was not prepared to see a SWAPO government in Windhoek. This was not just because of opposition to what was seen to be a Marxist organisation, friendly to the Soviet Union and Cuba, coming to power in a territory ruled by South Africa; SWAPO's armed struggle against South Africa could not be seen to have succeeded. Yet, despite the fact that on innumerable occasions over the years representatives of the South African government had castigated and denounced the UN, and decried its bias, that government had in 1978 agreed to a plan for a UN-monitored election in Namibia. In 1988 it agreed that that plan should be implemented, which meant an election which SWAPO won, and an end to South African rule of the territory in 1990. What produced so remarkable a change in policy?

From Defiance to Concessions

It was in 1950 that the International Court of Justice at the Hague delivered an opinion that, while not requiring South Africa to make South West Africa a UN trust territory, as the General Assembly wanted, nevertheless accepted that that Assembly had taken over the supervisory role which had belonged previously to the League of Nations. As is well known, South Africa totally rejected the numerous resolutions of the General Assembly - 73 between 1950 and 1965[4] - calling on it to withdraw from the territory and transfer authority to the UN. But as decolonisation was completed in tropical Africa, and advanced to the borders of South Africa itself with the independence of the High Commission territories, Pretoria came under increasing international pressure to withdraw from Namibia. In 1966 the International Court refused to judge whether or not South Africa had violated the spirit and terms of the mandate, and the General Assembly voted to revoke the mandate and assume direct responsibility for the territory. In itself that was yet another impotent gesture. But when the Security Council recognised that decision, declared the continued presence of South Africa in the territory illegal and called on all states to act accordingly, and more especially when in June 1971 the International Court delivered its opinion that South Africa had to withdraw, and all members of the UN had to recognise the illegality of the South African regime north of the Orange River, Pretoria decided that it could not afford to ignore international opinion.[5] South Africa's chief trading partners were, after all, permanent members of the Security Council, which could institute mandatory sanctions.

The Court's 1971 Opinion that South African rule was illegal helped precipitate Namibian resistance in the form of a large-scale Namibian contract workers' strike, which probably helped persuade Prime Minister Vorster to begin, hesitantly and ambiguously, to move in the direction the UN wanted. Though by 1973 it appeared that there was deadlock, with the UN demanding South African withdrawal and South Africa proposing to lead

portions of the territory to Bantustan independence on the model then being evolved in South Africa itself, with hindsight we can see that South Africa began to make important concessions in the early 1970s. In February 1971, the South African government suggested to the International Court that they jointly supervise a plebiscite of all the inhabitants of the territory on whether South African rule should continue.[6] That Vorster was prepared to discuss the future of the territory with the UN Secretary General and his representative in 1972-3 implied an acknowledgement that the UN might play some role in the independence process. Vorster's statements after these visits were open to the interpretation that he had abandoned the idea that South Africa might someday annex all or part of the territory, and that if its inhabitants wished it might, as one unit, be led towards independence.[7] A pragmatist in external policy, Vorster set much store by his 'outward policy', his attempt to break the increasing isolation of the apartheid regime by winning friends and influencing leaders in black Africa. But speaking of eventual independence, and creating an advisory council for the territory as a whole, albeit it of ethnic representatives, was one thing; to Vorster the idea of SWAPO - especially after it was recognised, by a General Assembly angered by its impotence, as 'the sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people' - taking over in Windhoek was anathema. The armed struggle launched in 1966 posed no threat at this stage, and if anything reinforced Vorster's determination to ensure SWAPO's elimination; the general strike of contract workers which followed the International Court's Opinion may have helped persuade Vorster that what Du Pisani has called 'controlled change' was necessary north of the Orange River.[8]

After the Lisbon coup of April 1974 Vorster realised that Angolan independence would greatly increase pressure for change in Namibia, and so summoned the Turnhalle constitutional conference, hoping that it would devise a way for South Africa to transfer power to an anti-SWAPO party, which would then invite the South African army to remain until such time as it could itself deal with any military threat from SWAPO. Such an 'internal settlement' - a misleading name, in as much as it would be arranged in Pretoria - would be a form of decolonisation which would ensure that Pretoria retained real influence in the territory after independence, so that its interests would be safeguarded. But how to find collaborators, the majority of whom would have to be black, with significant support? The Turnhalle, composed of ethnic representatives, unsurprisingly produced an ethnic constitution. SWAPO would have nothing to do with the Turnhalle and in response intensified the war on the northern border from the new bases it was now able to establish in Angola.[9] The UN Security Council's response was resolution 385 of January 1976, which called for an election in Namibia under UN auspices.

By the mid 1970s, the UN had taken part in a number of peacekeeping operations, in the Congo in 1960, in Cyprus and in the Middle East. The closest parallel to what was now proposed for Namibia was its operation in West New Guinea, where in the early 1960s it acted as temporary executive authority for eight months, and later supervised a plebiscite, in which the voters of

that territory had decided they wanted to remain under Indonesian administration. [10] In Namibia, unlike New Guinea, the UN had a special claim to be a transitional authority; by virtue of its own resolutions, it was already the government of Namibia. Resolution 385 seemed to require - though this was not spelt out - the withdrawal of South African military forces and administration, leaving the UN as the sole authority during the transition period in which the election would be held.

Early in 1977, knowing Pretoria would not contemplate such a withdrawal, and fearing that it would instead go ahead with an internal settlement - holding an election in terms of the Turnhalle constitution and then transferring power to the victor - the Western Five Contact Group, led by the representative of the new Carter administration in the United States, began negotiations with both Pretoria and SWAPO to get them to agree to a common formula which would not run counter to resolution 385 yet would provide for a form of transition which both could accept. To Pretoria, the Contact Group offered the idea of a UN-monitored election held during a transition period in which there would be a UN military presence but in which the South Africans would continue to be responsible for law and order and would continue to administer the territory.

The Contact Group was able to confront Pretoria with two facts: firstly, that an internal settlement excluding SWAPO would mean that the war in the north, then increasing in scale, would continue. Some said there was the possibility of a repetition of the Rhodesian situation, where the guerrillas had taken over large parts of the country, and that the Cubans in Angola might intervene south of the Cunene River in support of SWAPO. The second fact was that no government which emerged as a result of such an internal settlement would receive international recognition. A UN-monitored election, on the other hand, could mean an end to the war and international recognition for the new government. Vorster saw the logic of these arguments and took seriously the threat which accompanied them: that if Pretoria did not accept the deal, the Western countries might be unable to resist the mounting pressure in the Security Council for the imposition of mandatory trade sanctions on South Africa for its failure to comply with the UN's resolutions on Namibia. The South African government therefore accepted the plan for a UN-monitored election. After that, the UN Secretary-General made proposals for implementation, which involved the establishment of a UN Transitional Assistance Group. His report was approved in Security Council Resolution 435 of September 1978. 'Resolution 435' then became accepted shorthand for the entire plan for transition via a UN-monitored election to an independent Namibia.

Why 435 was not implemented for a decade

Pretoria's April 1978 decision to accept the plan did not mean that the South African government was now prepared to see an election take place which SWAPO would be likely to win. When he accepted the plan in principle, Vorster almost certainly hoped SWAPO would reject it; the brutal South African Defence Force

raid on the SWAPO base at Cassinga, in which a large number of civilians were killed, was probably launched in part to ensure such a rejection.[11] But though SWAPO strongly disliked the proposed transitional arrangements, it was persuaded by the Frontline states to accept the plan: as SWAPO claimed overwhelming support in the country, and the UN was to certify the election free and fair, it could hardly reject the plan outright. When SWAPO accepted and said it was ready to observe a cease-fire, Pretoria continued administering the territory almost as if the plan did not exist; the coming to power of P.W. Botha represented the triumph of the military, who after the failure of the invasion of Angola in 1975-6 had become committed to the notion of 'total strategy' in the face of the 'total onslaught'. [12] They believed they could defeat SWAPO on the battlefield and through a 'hearts and minds' campaign in the north, and that toughness, not concessions, should be the name of the game. International condemnation of the internal election held in December 1978 was brushed aside, and Pretoria now raised problem after problem with the proposed way in which the Western plan was to be implemented, while also questioning whether the UN could in fact be an impartial monitor of the election.

Various possible scenarios presented themselves to the South African government: given time, perhaps SWAPO could be marginalised and an anti-SWAPO coalition be built with sufficient support to enable it to win a UN-monitored election. Or the UN plan could eventually be bypassed and power transferred to a non-SWAPO government, which might be able to achieve a measure of international recognition. For some months in 1979 it seemed that the Muzorewa government elected in April that year as the result of an internal settlement might win such recognition. It did not, in the event, and in the election held in terms of the Lancaster House agreement early the following year Mugabe's ZANU swept to power, which suggested that SWAPO would probably do the same in any UN-monitored election in Namibia. Despite Mugabe's reconciliatory attitude to white Zimbabweans after his election, the South African government made clear that its 'bottom line' was 'no Moscow flag in Windhoek', Fik Botha, the Foreign Minister, told an American envoy in December 1981.[13] The DTA, victor in the internal election of 1978, had been installed as the government in Windhoek the following year, but its base of support remained narrow and Mudge, its leader, seemed unlikely to do better than Muzorewa. In 1983, therefore, Pretoria took power back into its own hands, then forged a broader anti-SWAPO coalition, the Multi-Party Conference, which included, along with the DTA, breakaway fragments from both SWAPO and SWANU. Members of the Multi-Party Conference were then installed in office as the so-called Transitional Government of National Unity in June 1985.

Meanwhile, between 1978 and 1982 the Contact Group had made concession after concession to try to get Pretoria to agree to the implementation of resolution 435. The plan accepted in 1978 was in outline form only. As the details were filled in, and South Africa raised objections, the plan was revised in a number of instances to meet those objections. SWAPO's bases in Angola and Zambia were to be monitored, while nothing more was said about SWAPO bases within Namibia. The constitutional guidelines

of July 1982, concerning the form of government after independence, were designed to give protection to minorities. This addendum to resolution 435 required that the constitution be drafted by the 72 member Constituent Assembly should be adopted by a two-thirds vote of that body. Again, the Frontline States, impressed with Mugabe's victory in Zimbabwe, persuaded SWAPO to agree to this major concession. After that, Pretoria said that its concerns about resolution 435 had been met, but only because by then it had a new reason for delaying implementation of resolution 435. The Reagan administration, more concerned about what it saw as the threat of the spread of communism than the independence of Namibia, wanted the Cubans out of Angola, and Chester Crocker, the new Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, said Pretoria's 'security concerns' had to be recognised. More generally, he believed that positive inducements would be most likely to make Pretoria co-operate; constructive engagement meant in practice that Pretoria could act as it wished in the region, while in the idea of linkage, the American administration gave the South African government grounds to refuse to implement resolution 435.

The most frequently heard argument against linkage was that Namibian independence had nothing to do with the presence of the Cuban troops in Angola. But it was the Cubans who maintained that their presence there was a response to South African interventionism, though there is considerable evidence that Cuban combat troops were being readied for Angola before the South African invasion in October 1975.[14] The destabilisation of Angola was not in itself the prime reason for South African intervention; even Operation Savannah, the abortive invasion of 1975-76 to prevent the MPLA coming to power, was undertaken primarily because it was known that such a government would support SWAPO.[15] The relatively small - compared to what came later - Cuban force in Angola in early 1976 had begun withdrawing as the South Africans withdrew, but the Cuban withdrawal had been stopped when the South Africans began overflying Angola and as the South-African backed UNITA insurgency grew.[16] The Cubans remained in Angola chiefly as a counter to continued South African intervention, but also to deal with the threat posed by UNITA. So they could not withdraw until Namibia was granted its independence. Pretoria, on the other hand, insisted that they withdraw before implementation of resolution 435.

After P.W. Botha assumed office as Prime Minister in 1978, South African intervention in Angola steadily escalated, from cross-border raids to wipe out SWAPO bases, to deeper incursions and the occupation of large parts of the southern third of the country from 1981 on.[17] In February 1984, after the number of national servicemen casualties had risen sharply in Operation Askari, Pretoria signed an accord with Luanda by which its forces were to withdraw from southern Angola, but hardly had they done so than those who wanted to take strong action to counter the activities of the ANC and SWAPO again gained the upper hand in the South African State Security Council. Not only was a South African Defence Force commando caught attempting to blow up oil-storage tanks at Cabinda in the far north of Angola but soon SADF involvement in southern Angola was greater than ever, and now was not mainly to destroy SWAPO bases - SWAPO was no longer a

military threat - but to save UNITA from defeat in the first of a series of tank-led, dry-season offensives launched against it by FAPLA, the Angolan army.

In the face of this massive South African intervention, it was hardly surprising that neither the Angolans nor the Cubans would consider the withdrawal of the Cuban military contingent, though in these years it remained away from the frontline and did not directly engage the South African forces. Crocker continued to believe in linkage, not just because it would remove what the Reagan administration saw as a Soviet proxy force, but because he believed that such a quid-pro-quo was essential to make Pretoria agree, ultimately, to Namibian independence, and he saw Cuban withdrawal as necessary to bring about an end to the Angolan civil war.

The result was that in middle 1980s few held out any hope that resolution 435 would ever be implemented. When he went to Europe in 1984, before the start of the revolt in the townships, F.W. Botha made play of the financial burden on his government of continuing to rule Namibia, and suggested that the Western powers should take over the territory, but the offer was not taken seriously. The Transitional government installed in 1985 appointed a committee to draft a new constitution, and again some kind of internal settlement seemed likely. The Contact Group gave up trying to achieve implementation and, by the end of 1986, direct American mediation had collapsed. Because the Reagan administration's decided to supply UNITA with arms (again possible, following the repeal of the Clark amendment, this step was taken to ensure that UNITA was not defeated by Angolan forces now massively armed by the Soviet Union and to make UNITA less dependent on the South Africans), the Angolan government broke off negotiations with the Americans. And Pretoria, for its part, was much angered when the United States imposed, at long last, limited sanctions, not because of South Africa's continued occupation of Namibia but because of the harsh way in which the uprising of 1984-6 was suppressed. The uprising in the townships helped focus attention on South Africa rather than Namibia. Nujoma was quoted as saying that he did not expect Namibian independence until it was granted by President Mandela.

Though constructive engagement had failed to achieve anything on the Namibian issue, the United States continued to veto sanctions against South Africa at the UN on the grounds that Pretoria had not rejected resolution 435, and might still agree to implementation, and, secondly, because once the Security Council had imposed mandatory sanctions only it could remove them, which would give the Soviet Union a veto over American foreign policy. During these years, Newmont mining continued to own a thirty per cent share of the Tsumeb mine - American Metal Climax (AMAX) sold its thirty per cent stake to Gold Fields South Africa in 1982 - and shareholders in Rip Tinto Zinc and De Beers did well from Rössing Uranium and Consolidated Diamond Mines.[18] But were the long-drawn out Contact Group negotiations on Namibia, followed by the negotiations by the Americans, never a sincere attempt to achieve independence, but just a smokescreen, to provide an excuse for not taking action against South Africa? It is true that the Western powers involved - the US, the UK,

Germany, France and Canada - all had economic interests in the territory, and that none welcomed SWAPO's radical rhetoric. But the smokescreen argument implies a degree of conspiracy and deceit among a group of nations involved collectively in diplomacy over many years which is difficult to imagine. The charge against the Western countries is not that they negotiated in bad faith, but that they did not use all the means at their disposal, including sanctions, to try to bring about a settlement of the Namibian issue by a certain date. The result was the prolongation of South African occupation. There was little urgency in the negotiations; as Marianne Spiegel has shown, the Contact Group itself was responsible for long delays.[19]

The advent of the Transitional government in 1985, and with it a slight relaxation of the harsh repression against oppositional politics in Namibia, enabled such politics to revive: the Mineworkers Union of Namibia was launched and the National Union of Namibian Workers reorganised in 1986, rallies were held, and numerous school and youth groups, under the leadership of the Namibian National Student Organisation, staged protests which were clearly influenced by the challenge to state power in South Africa at this time. The claim that such resistance, together with the armed struggle, played a major role in bringing about Namibian independence, is true only in an indirect sense: as we shall see, neither SWAPO's armed struggle nor internal resistance was primarily responsible for persuading Pretoria to decide to agree to implementation of the UN plan. Had SWAPO's armed struggle been more successful, indeed, Pretoria might have been less inclined to have allowed independence: it agreed to the implementation of resolution 435 in part because it could argue that the armed struggle had failed. But this 'failure' was in terms of the military threat it posed; the armed struggle was always - at least for those not in the People's Liberation Army of Namibia [PLAN] - only one element of SWAPO's strategy, not likely to achieve a transfer of power on its own. Though defeated in the field in northern Namibia, SWAPO always had new recruits to train, so the war continued, and in that sense the armed struggle was successful, for in the long run it helped wear down the South Africans and raised the cost of ruling Namibia to a level which Pretoria finally found unacceptable.[20]

Why South Africa agreed to the implementation of 435

In the early and middle 1980s, a few far-sighted commentators predicted that when South Africa, Angola and Cuba had exhausted themselves on the battlefield, and decided that the cost of continuing the war was outweighed by the benefits that would accrue from a settlement, there would be a settlement.[21] No-one could, however, predict the fortuitous combination of events which brought the parties together in 1986, and led to the agreement to implement resolution 435. Before turning to those events, and the calculations which persuaded the South African government to accept Namibian independence, let us first note that by the end of 1987 various developments had taken place which made a negotiated agreement of the issues of Cuban

withdrawal and Namibian independence more likely than previously.

Firstly, the international climate had undergone a remarkable change, following Gorbachev's rise to power in the Soviet Union. He realised that he could not both restructure the domestic economy and finance foreign adventures - in 1987 the Soviet Union supplied an estimated \$1 billion of military hardware to Angola - and he wished to improve relations with the United States. For both these reasons, he set out to do what he could to resolve regional conflicts.[22]. The Angolan/Namibian issue was discussed at the superpower summit at Reykjavik in October 1986, then in July 1987 between Crocker and his Soviet counterpart, Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin; then again in Washington in December 1987. By the end of 1987, the Soviet Union was committed to pulling out of Afghanistan and had made it clear that it was in favour of a negotiated settlement in Angola/Namibia. No longer anticipating imminent change in South Africa itself, the Soviet Union accepted that concessions would have to be made to the apartheid regime in order to bring about Namibian independence. For its part, the Reagan administration, which was to leave office in January 1989, was very keen to show something for the years of constructive engagement. A foreign policy success would also help boost George Bush's chances of succeeding as president.

In South Africa itself, by the end of 1987 the uprising in the townships had been suppressed and it was clear to all observers that the state was not likely to come under serious threat for a long time to come. At the same time, the financial sanctions imposed in the wake of President Botha's Rubicon fiasco - the decision by creditor banks not to roll over short-term loans and not to grant further loans - greatly increased the government's concern about the enormous and ever growing cost of the war in Angola - one estimate is that by 1987 this was R1,500 million a year - on top of the cost of administering Namibia, where since 1980 Proclamation AG 6 had spawned an even more bloated and corrupt set of bureaucracies than the tricameral system in South Africa. With little growth in the Namibian economy, tax revenues had fallen and demands for direct transfers from the South African treasury - over R300 million in 1987 - had increased. The sanctions which Congress imposed on South Africa, over a presidential veto, in the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986 applied to Namibia as well, because it was under South African occupation. Rössing Uranium, which contributed over 26% of Namibia's revenue by 1987, found it increasingly difficult to market its product, as Britain, France, Japan and other countries came under pressure not to renew contracts. Independence for Namibia would mean the end of such sanctions. From that point of view, Rössing in particular stood to benefit from it.

The Transitional government, though more clearly 'multi-racial' than its DTA predecessor, had proved no more successful in showing its independence of the South African administration by bringing about the kind of change which might have begun to win it a broad measure of legitimacy: schools remained firmly segregated and - the most cited example of its impotence - the name of the airport at Windhoek remained J.G. Strijdom. The South

African administration, still fearful of white reactions both in Namibia and in South Africa, refused to abolish the ethnic structures of AG 8, which suggests that even into early 1988 it did not think that resolution 435 would be implemented in the near future. It continued to believe that domestic political considerations - the reaction of its electorate and that of the oppressed majority in South Africa itself - ruled out implementation.

And there was war-weariness in both Angola and Cuba by late 1987. Angola had been engulfed in war since before independence. The offensives launched against UNITA had all, thanks to South African intervention, failed. Over forty percent of state expenditure was going on the war in the south, and leading members of the government were eager to begin the reconstruction of the country, which seemed to require membership of the International Monetary Fund and the aid which the Americans, who still refused to recognise the government, might supply. The numbers of Cubans dying in Angola increased greatly in the mid 1980s, and some of those returning did so with Aids. Castro did not share the disillusionment of leading members of his forces in Angola,[23] but he had to recognise that Gorbachev might not be ready to continue underwriting the cost of the war indefinitely.

It was, however, Castro who did more than anyone to precipitate the events leading to the Accords signed in 1988. Angered at the way that South African intervention (Operation Modular) had once again defeated the FAPLA advance against UNITA, he agreed, meeting with Dos Santos in Havana in November 1987, to escalate Cuban involvement.[24] He not only ordered his forces to engage the South Africans directly, but also sent another 15,000 crack troops from Havana direct to the front lines in southern Angola.[25] At Cuito Cuanavale, where the FAPLA/Cuban/PLAN forces were challenged strongly by South African and UNITA troops in a series of battles in early 1988, there was no victor:[26] the massive bombardment by the G-5 and G-6 cannons of the South African artillery consumed R200m worth of shells but the town did not fall.[27] The South African airforce lost dominance of the air, because of the highly sophisticated radar air defence system now in place, and because the Cuban and Angolan pilots could fly their MiG 23s from new airstrips built at great speed at Cahama and Xangogo, which were much closer than Cuito Cuanavale to the Namibian border. A decisive victory by the one side or the other at Cuito Cuanavale would have made a settlement unlikely; but the SADF found itself in a situation from which it could not easily extricate itself without intervening on a much larger scale, which might cost hundreds of conscript lives and immense expenditure. Because of the arms boycott, any planes the Air Force lost were extremely difficult to replace. Within South Africa there was now more questioning of the war than ever before. The Dutch Reformed Church expressed concern at the deaths of young South Africans in a foreign country and asked, in effect, what South Africa was doing fighting on behalf of UNITA.[28]. So the military agreed to what the Department of Foreign Affairs had always wanted: the use of diplomacy rather than military might to achieve South Africa's objectives.[29] For a decade, South Africa had projected an aggressive image in the

region at little cost in white lives, and when the regime was under challenge from within it could not be seen to be retreating; now, with internal resistance crushed, it was no longer so important that that image be sustained.[30]

Cuba not only upped the military stakes in early 1988; at the same time, it offered, together with Angola, new terms for peace. In talks with the Americans in Luanda in January, Angola and Cuba not only in effect accepted linkage, but also suggested, for the first time, that they might agree that all Cuban troops might be withdrawn if Namibia were given independence. There was no question of a deal involving merely a South African withdrawal from Angola, as in early 1984. Now the Cubans and Angolans would only negotiate over the terms for implementing resolution 435. Namibian independence, not the end of apartheid, would now be Castro's justification, along with the repelling of South African aggression, for Cuban sacrifices on the Angolan battlefield.

While the formal negotiations, which began in London in May 1988, continued in Brazzaville and then Cairo, the Cubans increased the pressure on the South African forces in southern Angola. They moved their 5th division to within 20kms of the Namibian border, so for the first time posing a serious military threat to South African forces, both those now almost encircled at Cuito Cuanavale and those in northern Namibia itself. Angolan and Cuban planes now began to overfly Ovamboland from the new airstrips in Cunene province. Castro even made plans to destroy the Ruacana hydro-electric scheme, and to launch air-strikes in northern Namibia were the South Africans to launch a major attack on his forces.[31] On 26 June, South African troops close to Calueque did attack some Cubans nearby; Castro himself gave orders that Cuban MiG 23s should be launched against the South African positions the following day, and in that raid twelve South African national servicemen were killed.[32] That was further evidence for the South Africans of what lay in store for them if they chose to pursue a military option. So that option was ruled out, and the various parties, meeting in New York in July, agreed to a set of principles for a settlement.

The negotiations, which then continued in Geneva and Brazzaville in the following months, might still have broken down had it not been for the skilful and active mediation of Crocker,[33] and the behind-the-scenes role played by the Soviet Union, which could exert influence because it supplied Angola with military hardware and kept Cuba afloat with massive subsidies.[34] The United States and the Soviet Union together suggested that it would be appropriate to implement resolution 435 in September 1988 on the tenth anniversary of its passage.[35] Despite the clash of late June, as the negotiations continued each party seems to have accepted that the others sincerely wanted a settlement, and realised that a settlement could be reached from which they all stood to derive benefits - as Crocker often said, there need be no losers - while failure of the negotiations would probably mean great costs for all involved. There were pressures on the South Africans to settle before the American presidential election in November 1988, because Dukakis promised to reject linkage and end military aid to UNITA. The South Africans also knew that even a Bush administration was less

likely to be as supportive as the Reagan administration had been. After Dukakis lost, the Cubans realised they could not hope for a change in American policy in their favour, and agreed to sign the tripartite agreement on 22 December.

While the changed balance of military forces in southern Angola pushed the South Africans into the negotiations, they were able to extract terms which they considered acceptable. The Cuban military contingent was to be redeployed north and withdrawn from Angola in stages. But this withdrawal was not to be completed before the withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia, as the South Africans had wanted initially, nor over a seven month period, paralleling South African withdrawal, nor over two years, as the South Africans demanded at the outset of the talks. It was to take place over twenty-seven months, which meant that Pretoria had to accept that there would still be 25,000 Cuban troops north of the 13th parallel in Angola when the last South African troops withdrew after the Namibian election, and some Cuban forces would remain in Angola until mid 1991. The Cuban withdrawal was to be monitored by a UN team, however, and a joint commission, including the United States and the Soviet Union as observers, was established in part to help ensure that the timetable was observed.[36]

That the Angolan government agreed to close down the ANC's military training camps in central and northern Angola was seen in Pretoria as a major victory in its long-standing attempt to prevent Umkhonto we Sizwe from operating from nearby states. The ANC had to relocate its camps in Tanzania and countries even further from South Africa. And Pretoria took satisfaction from the fact that the agreement to implement resolution 435 was made in negotiations from which SWAPO was excluded; this despite the fact that one of the matters discussed and agreed upon by the parties was the displacement of SWAPO forces. SWAPO's exclusion could be cited as evidence that its armed struggle had not succeeded. South Africa insisted, as it had all along, that there should be no recognition of SWAPO bases in northern Namibia, for that would imply that SWAPO had gained territory during the war. In terms of the Geneva Protocol of August 1988 Angola and Cuba were to use their good offices to ensure that all SWAPO's fighters were to be confined to bases north of the 16th parallel in southern Angola.

The South African government hoped that SWAPO could be prevented from getting the critical two thirds vote which would enable it to write the independence constitution on its own and not have to bargain with other parties and make compromises. In terms of the revised UN plan, the Administrator-General controlled the whole electoral process, which meant that there was a lot of scope for weighting that process against SWAPO. The administration need be restrained in its attempt to influence the result only because the UN Special Representative had to certify the election was free and fair. The Namibianisation of the armed forces - the growth of the South West African Territory Force since 1980, and, more especially, the creation of the Koevoet counter-insurgency unit[37] - put the administration in a much stronger position during the transitional phase than would have been the case a decade earlier. Koevoet could be integrated in

the South West African Police, and so need not be disbanded.[38] The UNTAG military component, to be cut from the original figure of 7500 to 4650, did not have enforcement powers in the territory, and could do little more than passively monitor the South African troop withdrawal.

Though attempts could be made to influence the election, [39], however, the South African government knew that it was likely that SWAPO would win. In 1988 that was not as unacceptable in Pretoria as it had been previously. With linkage in place, there was little likelihood of a SWAPO government inviting in Cuban troops, or providing the ANC with military bases. Marxist governments elsewhere were retreating from ideology to pragmatism, and in the Gorbachev era even the South African Minister of Defence came to acknowledge that Marxism was no longer the danger it had been. The South African government had found itself able to live with a socialist Zimbabwe for almost a decade, and it realised that any Namibian government would be far more dependent on South Africa than Zimbabwe was: ninety per cent of the country's food and manufactured goods came from the Republic, as did the coal for its electricity; the railways were integrated with the South African system, and alternative transport routes would require a vast investment and take a long time to complete. Privatisation measures adopted before implementation began would help circumscribe any new government. Above all, South Africa controlled Walvis Bay, the only deep water port along the Namibian coast, through which 85% of the country's exports passed, and the centre for processing fish caught in its waters. Western aid, much needed, would only be forthcoming if the new government's policies were judged acceptable. If a SWAPO government were to act in ways Pretoria disliked, enormous pressures could be applied, including support for ethnic armies to destabilise an independent Namibia, as had happened in both Mozambique and Angola. Few in Pretoria doubted that a SWAPO government would in practice have to accept an essentially neo-colonial position vis a vis South Africa.

By signing the Accords, Pretoria expected to derive a range of extraneous benefits. The Accords themselves would suggest that constructive engagement and negotiations had worked, and therefore that further sanctions should not be imposed on South Africa. At a minimum, Pretoria hoped for a relaxation of pressures while the independence process was unfolding, because no-one would want to put that at risk. There was, too, the expectation that the Accords would lead to new opportunities for meetings between South African leaders and the leaders of African states to the north, meetings which could be exploited to try to break down South Africa's diplomatic isolation. And Namibian independence might provide South Africans with opportunities to bypass sanctions, once the limited sanctions imposed on Namibia because of South African occupation had been lifted.

From Pretoria's point of view, then, settling was a risk, but the benefits which might be derived from it were likely to outweigh the certain costs of not settling. The Pretoria decision-makers realised that Namibia was not, in the last analysis, crucial to the maintenance of white power in South Africa itself. At the crucial cabinet meeting in April 1988, it

was probably argued that South Africa's continued rule there had become a liability, and that giving Namibia its independence would serve to entrench white power in the Republic, for with the Namibian issue out of the way the task of restructuring in South Africa might proceed more easily. Facing many pressures, the government probably decided that it was overextended, and could no longer afford the cost of remaining in Namibia. Neither South Africa's economic nor its security concerns seemed threatened. Trade would continue, and it seemed unlikely that SWAPO would nationalise any assets in which South Africans had a stake. The buffer Namibia had provided had been useful, as had the experience of warfare for the army and for Armscor, which could advertise its wares as battle-tested, and the use of the Caprivi Strip had given the SADF striking power deep into Africa. But none of this was essential for South African security; the Orange River was an easier border to defend than the Cunene. And by 1988 the government's fear of the far right in South Africa exploiting a settlement in Namibia, by saying that the government had sold the whites of Namibia down the river and endangered South Africa's security, had declined.[40] The National Party could present the agreement as a diplomatic triumph and therefore an electoral asset; Namibia was, Fik Botha repeated often, a different country, and its people must decide their own future. Nor did Pretoria expect that its oppressed majority would be able to exploit the issue: Namibia was too remote from the lives of most South Africans, and the state of emergency remained firmly in place to deal with protest politics.

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If the aim of South African policy in Namibia was to prevent a SWAPO government coming to power, it failed. That PLAN had been a military failure - as stressed by Steenkamp, for example [41] is partially true - for it posed no military threat in the north of Namibia in the last years of the war, and was fighting far into southern Angola - but it was still in being, and continued to draw support from the people of the north in particular. The attempts to suppress SWAPO there had involved years of brutal repression,[42] and that rendered worthless such efforts as had been made to win 'hearts and minds'. The people of Ovamboland wanted an end to the war above everything, and only a victory by SWAPO could guarantee that. Outside Ovamboland, the attempt to marginalise SWAPO and establish an effective anti-SWAPO coalition had more success.

It is at least possible that had South Africa withdrawn from Angola and implemented 435 in 1979 rather than 1989, Cuban combat troops would have been withdrawn from Angola long since. As a direct result of continued South African involvement in Angola, their numbers increased from 19,000 in 1979[43] to 31,000 in 1984 and to 50,000 by early 1988. By aiding UNITA against FAPLA, Pretoria in effect entered into competition with the Soviet Union in the supply of effective weaponry. It could not win such a competition: not only could it be outspent, but, given the arms embargo, South Africa could not possibly keep up with the advances in weapons technology on the other side.

It may be that the ten years of delay in the implementation of resolution 435 formed a transition period of multi-racial government sufficient to make those whites who stayed in Namibia prepared to accept even a SWAPO government. The addendum to resolution 435 accepted in 1982 helped make SWAPO accept the idea of a multi-party democracy. Against such advantages of delay have to be set the costs of a decade of war. These included the devastation of much of southern Angola and well over ten thousand South African and Namibian lives.[44] Ultimately, the decade of delay in Namibian decolonisation was an attempt by the apartheid state to ensure that the people of Namibia did not vote into office a government which would seek to escape from the South African embrace. The extent to which an independent Namibia will be able to escape that embrace remains to be seen, as does whether a peaceful transition to majority rule in Namibia will promote a similar transition in South Africa itself.

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1. E.g., A. du Pisani, SWA/Namibia. The Politics of Continuity and Change (Johannesburg, 1986); F. Katjavivi, A History of Resistance in Namibia (London, 1986).

2. Taken from Joel Mervis's column in Sunday Times, November 1989.

3. J. Barber, South Africa's Foreign Policy, p. 280.
(London, 1973)

4. C. Coker, The United States and South Africa, 1966-1985 (Durham, N.C., 1986), p.242.

5. The fundamental work on the legal status of the territory remains J. Dugard, ed. The South West Africa/Namibia Dispute (Berkeley, 1973).

6. Cf. Dugard, pp.450-1. Dugard suggested the UN supervise a plebiscite with South Africa: p. 541.

7. Cf., e.g., UN Institute for Namibia, Namibia. Perspectives for National Reconstruction and Development (London, 1986), p. 49.

8. Cf. A. du Pisani, 'Namibia: From Incorporation to Controlled Change', Journal of Contemporary African Studies 1, 2 (April 1982); 'Beyond the Transgariiep: South Africa in Namibia 1915-1989', Politikon, 16, 1 (June 1989).

9. Cf., e.g., D. Soggot, Namibia. The Violent Heritage (London, 1986) on these events.

10. Cf. I.J. Rikhye, M. Harbottle and B. Egge, The Thin Blue Line (New Haven, 1974), esp p.159.

11. For W. Steenkamp's evidence that the raid had been planned

for months see his Borderstrike! South Africa into Angola (Durban, 1983).

12. See esp. R.Davies and D.O'Meara, 'Total Strategy in Southern Africa: An Analysis of South African Regional Strategy Since 1978', Journal of Southern African Studies 11, 2 (April 1985).

13. C.Legum, The Battlefronts of Southern Africa (London, 1988), p. 219, quoting from leaked State Department documents.

14. Cf., e.g. F.Bridgland, 'Angola and the West' in A.Venter, ed., Challenge (Gibraltar, 1988).

15. The South Africans also intervened because the Americans asked them to, and they hoped to derive benefits from helping the Americans.

16. See e.g. J. Marcum, 'Africa. A Continent Adrift', Foreign Affairs 68 (1988-89), p.161.

17. For the fullest account of the military operations see esp. W.Steenkamp, South Africa's Border War (Gibraltar, 1989).

18. Cf. Allan D. Cooper, Allies in Apartheid, p. 188.

19. M.Spiegel, 'The Namibian Negotiations and the Problem of Neutrality', in S.Touval and I.W.Zartman, eds., International Mediation in Theory and Practice (Boulder, 1985), pp. 130-1, 135.

20. On the liberation war see, e.g. F.Katjavivi, Resistance in Namibia, esp. ch.14.

21. E.g. J.Barratt, The Namibian Dilemma. Factors Preventing a Settlement (Johannesburg, 1982); W.Thomas, Independence and Beyond (Stellenbosch, 1981).

22. Cf. esp. S. Macfarlane, 'The Soviet Union and Southern Africa', Problems of Communism March-June 1989.

23. The head of the airforce in Angola defected in 1987 because the war was going nowhere: F.Bridgland, 'Angola and the West' in A.Venter, ed., Challenge (Gibraltar, 1989), pp. 140-2.

24. Cf. esp his speech to the Cuban Council of State, for which see Cape Times and Weekend Argus, 24 July 1989; also Savimbi's remarks on SATV, 23 March 1989.

25. See the vivid footage on this in the Cuban video 'Response to the South African Escalation'; also New York Times, 28 June 1988.

26. The SADF claim that the Angolans and Cubans were defeated is apparently supported in H-K Heitman, War in Angola (Gibraltar, 1989).

27. See, e.g., 'Response' and the eyewitness account by a Cuban soldier in New Nation, 16 February 1989, reprinted from Cuban International.

28. Die Kerkbode, 8 June 1988 cited in F.Vale, 'Diplomacy and Delusion: the Bothas in Search of Africa', Reality, January 1989.
29. The South African army was never committed on a large scale in Angola; only 3,000 troops fought there in 1987-88.
30. Cf. R.Davies, 'After Cuito Cuanavale' in M.Orkin, Sanctions Against Apartheid (Cape Town, 1989), p. 198.
31. Weekend Argus, 29 July 1989: speech by Castro.
32. New York Times, 27 and 30 June 1988.
33. The role of diplomatic ploys is stressed by G.Berridge in 'Diplomacy and the Angola/Namibia Accords', International Affairs July 1989.
34. Castro was no puppet: the decision to send troops to Angola in 1975 was taken on his own initiative.
35. New York Times, 6 June 1988.
36. Agreements for Peace in Southwestern Africa, p.3: Brazzaville Protocol.
37. Cf. J.Hooper, Koeyoet! (Johannesburg, 1986).
38. It was used extensively in the north to harass, hunt down and, especially in the first week after implementation began, to kill SWAPO members and supporters.
39. These were to be co-ordinated by the State Security Council until March 1989: D. Lush, 'Namibian Elections - Some Misgivings', Reality, July 1989.
40. The 1989 election campaign showed this to be correct: Namibia was not a major issue.
41. W.Steenkamp, 'South Africa's Border War' in A.Venter, ed., Challenge, pp. 219ff.
42. This is most vividly captured in the photographs of John Liebenberg, but also see D.Herbstein and J.Evenson, The Devils Are Among Us (London, 1989), esp. chs. 3 and 4.
43. ISSUP Strategic Review, University of Pretoria, June 1985.
44. Steenkamp estimates that 715 South Africans and 12,000 SWAPO died between 1966 and 1988: Border War, p.135.