

4-1-1990

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Recommended Citation

El-Khawas, Mohamed (1990) "SOUTH AFRICA: From Confrontation To Cooperation," *New Directions*: Vol. 17: Iss. 2, Article 7.

Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol17/iss2/7>

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SOUTH AFRICA

From Confrontation to Cooperation

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By Mohamed El-Khawas

(First of two parts)

In the 1990s, unlike many previous decades, Southern Africa appears to be inching closer to an era of peaceful co-existence.

At long last, South Africa appears to be shifting from a confrontational stance to that of cooperation with its neighbors, particularly Angola and Mozambique. But this has not always been the case. On the contrary, South Africa's destabilization campaigns, which began in the mid-1970s, have wreaked havoc in the region. As you will read in this two-part series—the first part on Angola/South Africa conflicts, and the second part on Mozambique/South Africa conflicts—it was a no-win situation for South Africa from the start.

South Africa embarked on a destabilization campaign in several of its neighboring countries by the early 1980s. Pretoria's goal was to slow, if not halt, the liberation struggles within its own borders and in Namibia. The destabilization campaign was designed to pressure neighboring governments to withhold assistance from the liberation movements, namely South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) and Namibia's South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO). At the time, these movements had established camps within the borders of several neighboring front-line countries and were using these bases to launch their armed struggles.

South Africa's aggressive stance paid off in Swaziland and Lesotho, two landlocked nations that rely on South Africa for economic survival and for contact with the rest of the world. Using its military and economic power, Pretoria forced these vulnerable governments to oust South African refugees suspected of being ANC fighters.



The neutralization of these two countries left Mozambique and Angola as the only routes to South Africa and Namibia open to the liberation movements, with Zimbabwe already having decided to halt ANC military operations out of its territory. Consequently, Mozambique and Angola bore the brunt of South African military actions.

A detailed examination of the record of South Africa's destabilization of Angola and Mozambique reveals the considerable extent of this activity during the last several years.

In this two-part analysis, each country is singularly dealt with because Pretoria's relationship with Angola and Mozambique differed in style and substance. South Africa's hostility toward Angola dates back to the 1975-1976 civil war, for example, while its destabilization campaign against Mozambique did not begin until 1981.

The destabilization campaign itself was multifaceted, ranging from direct military intervention and the backing of anti-government insurgency, to outright economic warfare.

South Africa and Angola

South Africa has been Angola's bitter enemy ever since the *Movimento Popular de Libertacao de Angola* (MPLA) came into power in 1975 when Angola became independent from Portuguese colonial rule. South Africa's goal was to deny any kind of governing power to the MPLA. It did not work, mainly because the new Angolan government, under the banner of the MPLA, fought back.

With the support of the United States, South Africa opposed the MPLA's socialist ideology, its close ties to the Soviet bloc, and its commitment to majority rule in Southern Africa. The plan was to install pro-Western factions in power in Angola, namely the *Frente Nacional de*

Libertacao de Angola (FLNA) and the *Uniao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola* (UNITA).¹ Both South Africa and the U.S. believed a friendly regime would protect Western interests in the region; halt growing Soviet influence in Africa; and slow the tide of liberation that was rapidly approaching the borders of Namibia and, indeed, South Africa.

A civil war engulfed Angola shortly after its independence and continues to this day. But following early MPLA victories, with the support of Cuban troops and a massive Soviet arsenal, South Africa initiated an aggressive stance directed at Angola. In December 1977, South Africa's Prime Minister John Vorster announced his country's plan for military intervention in the form of "large-scale, pre-emptive, and follow-up strikes."² Shortly thereafter, South African forces raided a SWAPO base at Cassinga, in southern Angola, and kidnapped 145 Namibian refugees. And in March, 1979, South African planes bombed an ANC military training camp inside Angola.³

Two years later, Pretoria had become even more aggressive toward Angola, with the occupation in 1981 of a substantial area of southern Angola.⁴ This was done ostensibly to halt SWAPO's infiltration across the border and, in turn, to cut the level of its activities inside Namibia. The European Economic Community (EEC) reported in 1981 that South African troops were "involved in nearly 2,000 operations inside Angola" and their aggression "caused nearly \$7 billion in damage and displaced 13,000 persons between 1975 and 1980."⁵

South African invasions and bombings in southern Angola have been coupled with South African support for Angolan rebel forces. Pretoria has continued to provide financial and material assistance

for UNITA's protracted war. It also has allowed UNITA to use South Africa's broadcasting facilities to spread anti-government propaganda in Angola.⁶ In addition, Black members of the South African Army joined UNITA forces during some of its operations.⁷

UNITA's leader, Jonas Savimbi, has acknowledged his connection with South Africa, an arrangement that has enabled him to sustain the civil war since 1976. As Robert I. Rotberg put it: "South African air cover, logistical and refueling support and, at times, direct military intervention have been critical in the growth of UNITA as a formidable fighting machine."⁸

With Pretoria's material and physical backing, UNITA has conducted a campaign designed "to grind the Angolan economy down, to halt development, and destroy agriculture." Such a campaign has had damaging effects on Angola's economy, "rendering the diamond mines unprofitable, . . . destroying the food exporting sector, . . . and forcing suspension of most development projects."⁹ It has made it unsafe for foreigners to work in the mining sector and has shut down the Benguela Railroad which, prior to independence, took in as much as \$100 million a year from transporting minerals from Zambia and Zaire to Atlantic coast ports.

Also, UNITA's insurgency has succeeded in disrupting the economy and in diverting national resources away from needed economic development. About 75 percent of the Angolan national budget is taken up by military expenditures; the country has spent \$2 billion on Soviet weapons in two years, for example, to shore up its military capabilities to fight both UNITA's insurgency and South Africa's undeclared war.¹⁰

South African forces have repeatedly intervened militarily on UNITA's behalf

28 when the going got rough. In September 1985, for instance, when the Angolan Army captured Cazombo and was preparing to attack Savimbi's headquarters in Jamba, South Africa's heavy air strikes saved UNITA.¹¹ Four months earlier, Angolan and Cuban forces had foiled an attack on Chevron oil installations in Cabinda by South African commandos.¹²

Thus, UNITA has been able to expand its destabilization campaign because of South Africa's assistance—a campaign that has been directed against Angolan civilians, foreign technicians, and economic targets.

UNITA's destabilization campaign, coupled with South Africa's military intervention, have made Angola's security heavily dependent on Cuban troops. Cubans have enabled Angolans to fend off repeated South African military incursions, which had increased in frequency and intensity since 1981. In addition, Cuban forces freed the Angolan Armed Forces to meet threats posed by UNITA's campaign in southeast Angola.

As noted before, Pretoria's support for UNITA and its periodic invasion of Angola were "aimed at toppling the MPLA government and installing a more sympathetic regime."¹³ Thus far, however, this strategy has been a failure.

The Namibia Factor

Angola, from early on, has been pursuing a negotiated settlement for the conflict in Namibia. And it was responsive to Western initiatives on this matter—initiatives spearheaded by the United States under the Carter administration. The Angolan government was also instrumental in obtaining SWAPO's approval for the Western plan for Namibia's independence from South Africa's military occupation, which was also approved by South Africa and embodied in the U.N. Security Council Resolution 435 in 1978. That

The Angolan government showed some flexibility by publicly committing itself to the removal of Cuban troops.

plan called for a cease-fire and U.N.-supervised elections for a National Assembly that would draft a constitution leading to independence.¹⁴

In the 1970s and well into the 1980s, South Africa showed no intention of implementing the Western plan, apparently out of concern that SWAPO would win at the ballot box. Pretoria, with the encouragement of the Reagan administration, demanded the removal of all Cuban troops from Angola as a precondition for Namibia's independence.¹⁵

Angola's immediate reaction was to refuse to negotiate the withdrawal of Cuban troops as part of the parcel for Namibia's settlement. Lucio Lara, then secretary-general of Angola's ruling party, asserted that "these are two entirely different problems." He added that Cuban troops "have been staying in Angola at the request of the Angolan government."¹⁶ [It should be noted here that the Cuban presence was critical to

Angola, especially to its ability to defend itself against South Africa's continuing aggression and to combat the insurgency efforts of UNITA. Southern Angola, for instance, was occupied by South Africa at one time for up to two years.]

The Angolan government through Paolo T. Jorgo, then foreign minister, made it clear that "when the threat from South Africa disappears—and we believe it will with the independence of Namibia—then we won't need the Cuban presence here."¹⁷ This was largely because Namibia likely will serve as a buffer zone between Angola and South Africa. Furthermore, independent Namibia, under SWAPO, will not likely allow UNITA to operate out of its territory. It is expected that, under these conditions, UNITA's insurgency would wither away.

As the stalemate over the linkage of Cuban withdrawal and the independence of Namibia continued, South Africa unleashed its military might against Angola. In December 1983, South Africa invaded Angola; its artillery and bombers struck about 200 miles deep into Angola in a bold attempt to cripple SWAPO operations.

South African officials argued that "the operation is designed to increase pressure on the Angolan authorities to withdraw their support from SWAPO, just as South Africa is seeking to persuade Mozambique to disown the ANC."¹⁸ Ironically, this South African invasion of Angola "coincided with a U.S.-sponsored effort to foster warmer relations between South Africa and Mozambique."¹⁹

When the South African operation continued for several weeks, Moscow, in an unusual diplomatic move, asked Pretoria to get out of Angola. The Soviets made it clear that "South Africa's continued occupation of part of Angola is unacceptable."²⁰

To save its policy of "constructive engagement," the U.S. moved to reduce tensions between South Africa and Angola. At the end of January 1984, Chester A. Crocker, then assistant secretary of state for African affairs, was able to persuade South Africa to begin pulling out its troops. His effort led to: the signing of a cease-fire between South Africa and Angola; the withdrawal of South African troops from southern Angola; and the establishment of a joint commission, including American observers, to monitor military disengagement along the Angolan-Namibian border.²¹

Encouraged by the cease-fire agreement, Pretoria launched its own initiative to settle the outstanding issues in the region. In March 1984, Foreign Minister Roelof F. Botha proposed the convening of a regional conference to solve the remaining problems in Namibia and Angola. He called for a meeting of South Africa, Angola, UNITA, SWAPO and Namibia's internal parties to discuss their problems and to reach a broader regional settlement. Angola, however, rejected Botha's proposal. The Luanda government had objections to sitting down with UNITA or with Pretoria to discuss its internal affairs.²²

On the Cuban troops issue, the Angolan government showed some flexibility by publicly committing itself to the removal of Cuban troops from Angola. In a joint communique in Havana in March 1984, Angola's President Jose Eduardo dos Santos and Cuba's President Fidel Castro proposed a gradual Cuban withdrawal from Angola provided the following conditions were met:

- A unilateral withdrawal of South African soldiers from Angolan territory.
- The acceptance of [the] United Nations ruling calling for the with-

In August 1988, Crocker succeeded in getting South Africa to withdraw its forces from southern Angola.

drawal of South African troops from Namibia and its "true" independence.

- The cessation of all acts of aggression against Angola by South Africa, the United States and its allies, and an end to aid for "counter-revolutionaries."²³

The first two conditions were easy to meet because the withdrawal of South African troops from Angola was already underway and was expected to be completed by mid-April if Angola fulfilled its pledge to halt SWAPO's infiltration across the border. In addition, Pretoria had publicly committed itself to implementing the 1978 U.N. Security Council Resolution 435 once an agreement was worked out for the withdrawal of the Cuban troops. As for the third condition, there seemed to be no problem since South Africa had signed a non-aggression pact with Mozambique.²⁴ The key question hinged on whether Pretoria was in

fact using the Cubans as a pretext to further delay Namibia's independence.

A Stumbling Block

The Angolan government tried again to break the stalemate over the Cubans, which had become a stumbling block in the way of Namibia's independence. In October 1985, dos Santos reiterated his offer to negotiate the withdrawal of Cuban troops from his country. He proposed a phased withdrawal of 20,000 Cuban soldiers while keeping about 12,000 in the capital and around Cabinda²⁵ to protect Chevron's oil installations, which generate as much as 90 percent of Angola's foreign exchange earnings. But another hitch developed. The Reagan administration aligned itself with South Africa by insisting that UNITA be included in "a national reconciliation government."²⁶

In response, Angola's foreign trade minister, Ismael Gasper-Martins, said in Washington, in January 1986, that his government had no intention of forming a coalition with UNITA, which Angola viewed as a South African proxy. He warned that U.S. aid to Angolan rebels was "bound to have a negative impact on the U.S.-brokered negotiations between his government and South Africa for the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and the independence of Namibia."²⁷

Despite this warning, the Reagan administration resumed covert military assistance for UNITA,²⁸ assistance which had been cut off in 1976.

Pedro de Castro Van-Dunem, Angola's minister of energy and petroleum, denounced the Reagan administration's renewed support for UNITA's Savimbi. He said his government was firm in its "refusal to negotiate a political settlement with [Savimbi]." Van-Dunem also noted that U.S. military assistance for UNITA would force Luanda to seek additional

³⁰ military aid from the Soviet bloc; it would also increase Angola's dependence on Cuban troops.

Angola's immediate answer to the resumption of U.S. military aid to UNITA was to suspend its participation in U.S.-sponsored talks on the withdrawal of Cuban troops and the independence of Namibia. This boycott lasted for more than a year. But in April 1987, Angolan and American officials met in Brazzaville, Congo, and agreed to resume negotiations.²⁹

Although more talks formally opened in Luanda in July 1987, no progress was made. American officials elected to wait until Angola submitted new proposals to break the stalemate over the Cuban troop withdrawal.

In response, dos Santos met with Castro in Havana in August and expressed his readiness to be more flexible in negotiations. The U.S. welcomed the statement but asked for more specific proposals on the issue.³⁰ No progress was made and the Angolan government embarked on a military solution for the civil war in 1987. It launched massive offenses to attempt to wipe out UNITA's

forces by destroying its supply and communications lines, and by capturing its headquarters in Jamba. But a swift military intervention by South Africa saved UNITA, again.³¹

In response to the rising tensions between Luanda and Pretoria, dos Santos made a request for additional Cuban troops to shore up Angola's defenses. Consequently, between 10,000 and 15,000 new Cuban troops arrived in 1988, bringing the total to 50,000. The Angolan authorities resolved to deploy Cuban troops in the south, raising the possibility of a military confrontation with South Africa. In addition, new airfields were opened at Cahama and Xangongo, giving the Angolan Air Force new capabilities to challenge South Africa's violations of Angola's southeastern airspace.³²

The Botha government was faced with a dilemma. It knew it would be costly to try to push the Cuban troops away from the border with Namibia. Also, it knew this would probably result in higher numbers of casualties among white South Africans. Consequently, the South African military concluded that there was a need for a negotiated settlement to get the Cubans out of Angola and to scale down Pretoria's military involvement in Southern Africa.

A Final Settlement

In May 1988, the U.S. tried again to find a broader settlement for the conflicts in Southern Africa. The adversaries were ready to move forward this time because Washington and Moscow pressured them to find political solutions.

In August 1988, Crocker succeeded in getting South Africa to withdraw its forces from southern Angola. He then continued his mediation efforts toward an agreement on the Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola, as well as for Namibia's independence. His efforts paid off.

After several meetings at five locations between South Africa, Angola, and Cuba, under U.S. auspices—in London, Cairo, New York, Geneva and Brazzaville—two agreements were signed on December 22, 1988. Consequently, Cuban troops were phased out of Angola starting in April 1989, with total withdrawal expected to be completed by July 1991.

As for Namibia, South Africa reduced its forces to 1,500 in the territory by July 1989. This was accompanied by the deployment of a U.N. peace-keeping force in the territory. And in November 1989, the U.N. supervised a historical election for a Constituent Assembly.

The Assembly's adoption of a new constitution put Namibia on the road to independence—on March 21, 1990.³³

These developments have left UNITA out in the cold. South Africa has pledged

to halt its assistance to UNITA. This does not mean that the civil war in Angola has come to an end, however, because President Bush has assured Savimbi that American military assistance will continue and his administration will withhold recognition of the Luanda government until a settlement is reached. American officials have urged African governments to pressure both sides in the Angolan conflict to form a government of national reconciliation.²⁴

African mediation has resulted in the signing of the Gbadolite Accord on June 22, 1989. Both dos Santos and Savimbi have agreed on an immediate cease-fire and have accepted Zaire's President Mobutu Sese Seko's mediation to prepare the implementation of the national reconciliation plan.²⁵ Since then, however, violations of the cease-fire have been frequent. And Savimbi has not shown up for scheduled meetings in Zaire. This has cast doubts over the possibility of ending the civil war in Angola in a speedy fashion.

Nevertheless, the dramatic developments within South Africa lately, among them the unbanning of the ANC and the release of ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, from prison, may well halt South Africa's support for UNITA. □

Next: South Africa and Mozambique.

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