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Brian Wood

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Preventing the Vacuum: Determinants of the Namibia Settlement*

BRIAN WOOD
(London School of Economics, London University)

This paper examines the political, military and economic factors behind the diplomatic agreements which led to the withdrawal of South Africa's colonial occupation of Namibia in 1989-90, and it identifies some of the major constraints which Pretoria placed upon the independence of the new Namibian state. The view that the South African government withdrew from Namibia — but not Walvis Bay — because of military defeats in Angola during 1988 is rejected. It is argued that explanations for the settlement given by US diplomats, Chester Crocker and Charles Freeman, do not take into account key variables such as the underlying economic imperatives, South Africa's state and party building strategy in Namibia, and the political actions of the Namibian people themselves. Such determinants have also been ignored or obscured by most of the radical literature on South Africa's destabilisation of the sub-region. It is argued here that Pretoria's attempts to consolidate stable conditions for a semi-colonial state on its borders through military and other means was the key determinant in the diplomatic process over Namibia in the 1980s. These attempts were underpinned by the increasing long-term need of South Africa's dominant business interests to expand into, and create, new African markets at home and abroad. Eventually, in 1988, prompted by the rapprochement between the USA and USSR, financial crises and political and military stalemate amongst the military protagonists, Pretoria was forced to proceed with its project to graft an ideologically reformed and deglamourised Swapo leadership on to its new state 'in waiting'. F. W. de Klerk's government then acted quickly to minimise the domestic impact of Namibia's UN-supervised, non-racial elections to a constituent assembly.

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Determinants of the Namibia Settlement

Introduction

Of course, there are certain matters that have to be dealt with even before the country’s independence so as to prevent the vacuum the day it becomes independent.

(Mr Pik Botha, South African Foreign Minister, speaking in Windhoek, 19 October 1989)

A major shift began to take place in Pretoria’s regional policy during the course of 1988-9. Central to this was the process leading to Namibia’s independence on 21 March 1990. Coupled with its military withdrawal from Angola and the ending of its illegal rule of Namibia, the South African government also began in July 1988 to revive the 1984 non-aggression accord with Mozambique which it had covertly breached from the outset, and it renewed attempts to jointly mediate power sharing agreements in Angola and Mozambique. Pretoria’s officials spoke of their desire to convene a regional security conference with the neighbouring states and foresaw an expanded role for South Africa in the economic development of the region.

Political commentators began to view such changes as dramatic confirmation that P.W. Botha’s heavy reliance on military means to ensure South Africa’s regional dominance during the 1980s was being replaced by F.W. de Klerk’s greater use of economic and diplomatic means. Indeed, the shift was officially confirmed by De Klerk’s Director of Foreign Affairs, Mr D. Auret:

A question which frequently arises, is what the position of the government of an independent Namibia vis-a-vis South Africa and also within the regional context will be ... there are a number of considerations... But it is in the field of economic policy and its future links with South Africa that the real test will lie.¹

De Klerk’s reform programme for South Africa itself, which was launched in February 1990, added weight to the general thesis. But what exactly did this shift involve and how did it come about?

What follows is an exploration of the determinants of South Africa’s withdrawal from Namibia and, by implication, some of the constraints which Pretoria has placed upon the independence of the new Namibian state. The popular notion that South Africa withdrew because it suffered a military defeat in Angola is rejected as being too simplistic. So too are the explanations given by participant Western diplomats, Chester Crocker and Charles Freeman, even though they do attempt to take into account some of the wider political factors. Existing literature on the South African destabilisation of the sub-region is also inadequate. Both this literature and the accounts by Crocker and Freeman neglect the conflicts and

¹ D. Auret, ‘The Settlement Plan for Namibia: A South African Perspective’, address to Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, 3 August 1989. The need for the shift away from dependence on military means of control has been propagated for some time by one of the South African government’s leading academic consultants on foreign policy, Deon Geldenhuys. See, for example, The Diplomacy of Isolation: South African Foreign Policy Making (New York, 1984).
struggles amongst the Namibian people themselves and the state restructuring necessary for Pretoria to indirectly control such forces.

It is argued here that an essential precondition for the implementation of the United Nations' plan for Namibia's independence was the South African regime's prior consolidation of the conditions for a stable semi-colonial state. This coincided with the increasing need of South Africa's dominant business interests to expand into, and create, African markets both at home and abroad. However, this new reality did not mean that military means of control, and direct colonial means of control, would be completely discarded. Instead, such controls would be latent or limited. Finally, it is argued that, although the racially exclusive South African government is compelled to protect the interests of its white electorate, it is increasingly interested in co-opting non-tribal black political forces. To do this, Pretoria's rulers must differentiate socialist rhetoric from real challenges to their authority by the subordinate class forces in the region. Failure to understand this will lead to misjudgments about the pace and nature of change in South Africa itself.

Cuito Cuanavale and Mono-causality

Judging by the many statements made to this author by those in the anti-apartheid movements during 1989-90, the following account of the events leading to Namibian independence — encouraged as it was by assumptions in Western media reporting — had become popular orthodoxy in much of the sub-region:

In 1988 the joint Angolan and Cuban forces defeated the South African-Unita forces in a major battle at Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola. South Africa's defeat at Cuito Cuanavale weakened the (Pretoria) government's bargaining power in southern Africa and the South Africans were forced into a settlement on Namibia. Coupled with this was the internal struggle of the black majority in South Africa for an end to exploitation and oppression.  

The misapprehensions implied by this view of events will hopefully become evident below. Before proceeding, however, it is worth wondering why such a widespread triumphalist view excludes any reference to human agency within Namibia itself. Even the most die-hard military opponent of Namibian independence, the Chief of the South African Defence Force (SADF), General Jannie Geldenhuys, had to acknowledge just before the Namibian independence elections in November 1989 that: 'South Africa has lived with Frelimo (in Mozambique) and now also with the MPLA (in Angola). It can also live with Swapo'. This, of course, begs a further question: will Pretoria unleash in Namibia the kind of depredations it has sponsored in Mozambique and Angola, designed as they were to destabilise and even overthrow the Frelimo and MPLA governments?

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2 New Nation, 24-30 August 1990.
3 General Geldenhuys was quoted in Janes Defence Weekly, 18 November 1989. For the latest count of Pretoria's death and destruction in the surrounding states, see Inter-Agency Task Force of
One cannot answer such a question simply by an account of military affairs and external relations, however sophisticated that might be. For a start, popular notions, such as those described above, as with all ‘common sense’ notions, exclude concepts of state, government, party, ideology and other essential tools of social analysis. Without such conceptual tools, it is impossible to explain fundamental political change. Moreover, the empirical boundaries of relevance to the Namibia settlement are much wider. As will be argued below, certain military considerations in Angola — but not exclusively those at Cuito Cuanavale — were essential factors in the political choices which led to the Namibia settlement. So too was mass resistance to apartheid inside South Africa, or, to be more accurate, the timing and consequences of such resistance. But impinging upon these choices were also conjunctural political developments world-wide and in Namibia itself, as well as underlying questions of resources and conflicts of material interest — not only in southern Africa but in those states which have substantial economic ties in the region.

A fairly rounded literature already exists explaining how, with prompting from the Reagan administration, Pretoria’s strategists developed — in fits and starts since the signing of a security pact with Swaziland in 1982 — an increasingly differentiated policy towards the various Frontline States. Our task should be to build upon and develop such analyses in the light of experience. Unfortunately, this literature is of little direct help in the analysis of the Namibian settlement.

That the multifaceted dimensions of Pretoria’s regional strategy and tactics have been intimately linked to its struggle to retain white supremacy in one form or another is not in dispute. But how this intimate link was played out in white South Africa’s attempts during the 1980s to hang on to its Namibian ‘fifth province’ remains a mystery. One would have thought that successive South African governments have engaged in such elaborate political and social engineering in Namibia since the collapse of Portuguese colonialism in Angola and Mozambique, and expended so much military and diplomatic effort to retain the colony, that no serious analysis of the South African state could afford to ignore this. Sadly, though, the dominant literature on the South African state and its regional strategy has tended to by-pass or downplay the Namibian experience, with the partial exception of military studies. This does not make it easy to unravel the

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5 The link between South Africa’s foreign and domestic policy in the 1980s is summarised by Elling Njal Tjonneland, Pax Pretoriana: the Fall of Apartheid and the Politics of Regional Destabilisation (Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Discussion Paper 2, Uppsala, 1989).

6 Such literature is too extensive to list here, but examples of those that tend to by-pass Namibia in their analyses are: Joseph Hanlon, Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa
key events, structures and processes which during the 1980s changed the shape of Namibia’s relations with its former colonial master.

In the following attempt to help bridge this gap, space does not allow an outline of the history of the Namibian people’s long struggle for independence. Readers will have to consult a separate literature. Nor, unfortunately, does space allow a comprehensive account of the year-long, UN-supervised transition itself, although the lessons from this transition do underpin the discussion here of why the settlement was agreed upon in the first place.

Creating a ‘Buffer State’?

Political forecasting in the world’s major capitals is a highly complex and risky business. The 1988 edition of the prestigious Economist Intelligence Unit’s Country Report on South Africa predicted that ‘an Angola-Namibia settlement is unlikely’ and that ‘Namibian independence cannot now be expected before majority rule inside South Africa itself’. Not all observers were so naive, but after the heady days of the 1984-6 uprisings in South Africa many anti-apartheid supporters in North America and Europe joined Western and African politicians in the view that ‘the ending of apartheid in South Africa was of such transcendent importance that

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other objectives, including the release of Namibia from South Africa’s grasp, seemed diversionary'.

Chester Crocker, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs between 1981 and 1989, and the architect of US policy towards southern Africa since 1981, held no such illusions. For him, the goal of securing a deal for the independence of Namibia linked to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola, was the first step in negotiating Lancaster House-type solutions for both South Africa and Angola. The Western media accorded Crocker the main credit for brokering the eventual deal to implement the UN plan on Namibia. But how accurate is his account of the Pretoria government’s behaviour?

Crocker recently described the set of trilateral agreements between Angola, Cuba and South Africa which culminated in the December 1988 treaty signed in New York, as a ‘peace without losers’. Based on the premise that ‘South Africa would not become free through revolutionary violence’ and on the Western powers’ need to end the ‘parallel form of regional madness’ which flourished during the height of internal unrest and violent repression in South Africa in 1986-7, Crocker saw the main determinants of the peace deal in terms of the motives of the superpowers and their allies. He wrote afterwards that:

The Soviets and Cubans eventually recognised that you get what you pay for when seeking to project military power far from home: their Angolan stronghold, acquired on the cheap 14 years ago, ultimately proved to be a political and strategic quagmire, costing more to maintain that to acquire. The Frontline states learned that, however vulnerable and isolated South Africa may be, their own vulnerabilities practically rule out a physical test of wills. There are better ways to engage a dominant neighbour. Black opposition leaders in South Africa learned again the futility of confronting Pretoria by force, where the latter is strongest. For its part, the Botha government learned that each time it crushes them physically, black nationalist organisations emerge stronger from the ordeal. It also learned the hard way that its obvious capability to take military actions with impunity in the region does not by itself translate into successful strategy; when misused, this tool only increases South African exposure and risk.

Here Crocker is confining himself to the same ‘common sense’ notions as those described above. His rather subjective presentation of the historic compromise as a ‘learning experience’ amongst vaguely-defined actors, does not begin to tell us what caused the changes in early 1988. Nevertheless, Crocker’s principal Deputy between 1986 and 1989, Charles Freeman, has provided a more cogent Western diplomatic view of the settlement. Freeman agrees with Crocker that the US helped to broker the settlement by ‘identifying common interests’ among Angola,
Cuba and South Africa which 'these countries themselves did not recognise'. But he has outlined US 'realpolitik' regarding Namibia and Angola more concretely.

'Luanda's desire for freedom from South Africa's direct intervention could be answered' writes Freeman, 'by the creation of a buffer state in the form of an independent Namibia between Angola and South Africa, from which the South African military had withdrawn'. This could be achieved by implementing UN Security Council Resolution 435 of 1978 and the subsequent amendments to it.12

Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola would constitute a gain for South Africa sufficient to justify its actually implementing Resolution 435. Angola and South Africa would gain the security from external threats that they sought; Cuba would be credited with having compelled South Africa to yield the independence it would otherwise not grant to Namibia. The Soviet Union would gain a reduction in East-West tensions, some easing of its relationship with the United States, and relief from the expense of financing a seemingly endless war in an area not of vital interest to it. Unita would gain the withdrawal of the Cubans, and increased pressure on the MPLA to make peace, as Luanda lost its Cuban backing.

Here Freeman has been somewhat disingenuous about Angola 'gaining security from external threats’ since his own government refused to stop military supplies to the Unita rebels as part of the deal. But even if one were to accept Freeman’s argument about a growing recognition amongst the conflicting parties of certain overlapping interests, why was a peace deal only reached in 1988? Freeman explains the causes largely in terms of a general re-evaluation of security interests by P.W. Botha’s government. This government, he argues, was made up of civilians and security personnel ‘who often work at cross purposes’.

President Botha’s decision-making was eased by the existence of an almost unprecedented consensus between his chief military and diplomatic advisers. This consensus began with agreement on the fruitlessness of continued engagement in southern Angola once the Cubans had positioned themselves to respond with attacks on north western Namibia. Dislodging this impressive new Cuban presence in the Angolan south [about 15,000 fresh reinforcements were brought in through the southern Angolan port of Namibe in early 1988 — BW] would have required a politically unpopular mass mobilisation of South African forces and a bloody counter-escalation. The alternative, a negotiated Cuban withdrawal from southern Africa, thus became an even more important objective for South Africa than before. Heavily front-loaded Cuban withdrawal and rapid redeployment out of southern Angola came to be seen as likely to favour Unita in its struggle for power-sharing with the MPLA. Implementation of Resolution 435 could also reduce friction between South Africa and the international community, including the Frontline States and other African nations, thus buying more time for Pretoria to address its internal problems and freeing resources for it to do so. Finally, a sober re-

Determinants of the Namibia Settlement suggested that its dependence on South Africa would indeed compel it to function as a non-threatening buffer state between South Africa and Angola from which both the Cuban and African National Congress guerrillas had withdrawn.

Again, let us first tackle Freeman on his own ground. One may accept such an account of the emergence of a new policy perspective in Pretoria, but why was an escalation of the fighting on the Angola-Namibia border politically unacceptable in South Africa? Freeman mentions 'white casualties', but what does this mean exactly? And why was there a need for Pretoria to divert resources away from the war? Freeman cites 'the rising cost of subsidising their ungrateful Namibian colony', but in what sense could this be true when, as argued further below, there was a net financial drain out of Namibia to South Africa during the 1980s? Moreover, why was a 'sober re-evaluation of the probable stance of an independent Namibia' [read a Swapo government] really necessary after all Pretoria's strategic planning over Resolution 435?

Although Freeman also notes the security re-evaluation on the Angolan and Cuban side following the MPLA's mid-1987 offensive against Unita, the resumption of open US military supplies to Unita in February 1986, and the effects of the Angolan economic crisis, his arguments are so general and patchy that they beg more questions about the 1988 peace deal than they answer.

There is also a propaganda element to Crocker and Freeman's accounts. The Reagan government avoided being a party to the non-aggression agreements so that US military aid could continue, via Zaire, to Unita. Its aim, defined by Crocker and Freeman, was clearly to encourage Savimbi's soldiers to continue to wage war after the cease-fire between the other parties was sealed. George Bush announced a continuation of this policy immediately he was elected President. Both Freeman and Crocker argue that this was the price the MPLA had to pay to end South African support for Unita. But they do not explain why the peace accords did not include a cut-off of US military supplies to Unita in return for the MPLA's compliance with the Cuban pullout and an agreement to enter into peace talks. Instead, they assume that the US aim of a negotiated 'power-sharing' arrangement between Unita and the MPLA in Angola was impossible without their efforts to escalate the war, including incidentally the terrible costs to Angolan civilian lives.

To justify US military aid to the rebels, Crocker and Freeman attempt to differentiate Unita from Renamo. This was necessary for them because of criticisms in 1988 of Renamo as a terrorist organisation by other US government officials — itself an unstated contributory factor in the pressure on Pretoria to seek a peace deal. Without citing any evidence, Crocker designates Renamo as 'externally guided', whereas he sees Unita as leading a 'genuine civil war'. Turning the available historical evidence on its head, Freeman argues that, in 1975, 'Unita had been the only one of three Angolan liberation movements to mount a sustained
insurgency against Portuguese rule'.\textsuperscript{13} Such weak rationalisations of US policy underscore the need to treat the accounts of participant diplomats with extreme caution.

**Actual Interplay of External Variables**

More interesting, perhaps, is Crocker and Freeman's failure to mention South Africa's loss of air superiority in southern Angola and their omission of any factors involving popular resistance by Namibians or South Africans. By January 1988, it was common knowledge that South Africa's ageing Mirage fighter aircraft could not effectively penetrate Angola's newly revamped ground to air missile and radar systems, and were outgunned by new Cuban and Angolan piloted MiG-23/Su-22 jets. The available evidence suggests that the UN Security Council's mandatory arms embargo adopted in November 1977, despite its loopholes, had rendered the SADF vulnerable by the time it initiated a conventional war in support of Unita at Mavinga in October 1987, and then again during its failed attempts to capture the strategic town of Cuito Cuanavale for Savimbi between November 1987 and April 1988.\textsuperscript{14} Crocker and Freeman's record of opposing effective sanctions, and of supporting the Reagan Administration's policy of supplying dual-purpose equipment to South Africa, may be the reason for this serious omission in their account of events.

Even more decisive in bringing Pretoria to accept a cease-fire, particularly one which would be linked to Pretoria's implementation of Resolution 435 in Namibia — unlike the cease-fire agreement in February 1984 — was the military retreat of the SADF in Angola's Cunene Province during May 1988. From November 1987, the Cuban government began landing the first of 15,000 fresh reinforcements, including its best pilots. About 12,000 of these reinforcements, partly deployed in three heavily armed battalions which were mixed with Swapo combatants, fought their way to within 40 kilometres of the Namibian border. This left about 4,000 SADF troops stranded in the proximity of Cuito. The latter were bogged down in a futile artillery bombardment of Cuito Cuanavale, which may have only displayed the weakness of the Olifant tanks and G-5 field guns. The SADF command appeared to be surprised by the pincer movement. The Cubans then began building a fortified airbase at Cahama and another at Xangongo in early June close to the Namibian border. It was not long before a flare-up occurred near the Calueque Dam in southern Angola in late June which left 12 white SADF soldiers killed by a

\textsuperscript{13} For evidence which flatly contradicts Freeman's assertion, see William Minter, *Operation Timber: Pages from the Savimbi Dossier* (New Jersey, 1988). See also the testimony of Colonel Jan Breytenbach in *Namibia Report*, 1, 5 (June 1990).

single Cuban missile. In other words, the argument that the battles around Cuito Cuanavale were themselves the turning point in the war cannot be sustained.

But it was not only these military set-backs for the SADF that precipitated an agreement which included Namibian independence. First, the death of white soldiers led to an outcry against Botha’s war in Angola by South Africa’s Dutch Reformed Church. This, in turn, increased the strength of the white anti-conscription movement, already receiving some sympathy from skill-starved employers. Secondly, and absent from all published accounts of the war and its related diplomacy, were the two largest ever worker stairways in South Africa (6-8 June) and Namibia (20-21 June). Both stairways were accompanied by student boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience. The latter was particularly relevant in Namibia, directed as it was against the presence of SADF bases, and following on the mutinies by several hundred black Namibian troops of Pretoria’s South West Africa Territorial Force who apparently became aware that they were being used as cannon fodder in southern Angola. The stay-away in South Africa, linking up the Cosatu and Nactu federations for the first time, involved almost two million workers in defiance of official restrictions. This was indeed dramatic confirmation for Botha’s government that its repressive measures were radicalising the mass movement at home.

Given this propitious timing, it was hardly surprising that, while the tripartite talks had begun in London in May with a fairly low-level South African delegation, it was at the ministerial-level negotiations in Cairo at the end of June that Crocker could announce: ‘What has been accomplished here is to define the parameters of a settlement’.

Within two weeks, technical teams had completed the drafting of ‘Fourteen Principles’ which linked the implementation of Resolution 435 to an unspecified, but total, Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola and to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of each state. The latter provision added another ‘trade off’ to Crocker’s linkage between Resolution 435 and Cuban withdrawal, i.e. that Pretoria stop supporting Unita in return for the Angolan government’s removal of ANC military bases from its territory. The Principles were initialled on 13 July in New York and were soon followed by an unpublished cease-fire agreement, namely the Protocol of Geneva of 5 August. To the relief of P.W. Botha, this enabled the SADF to pull its 4,000 troops safely out of southern Angola by 1 September. The South African Broadcasting Corporation, to a largely disbelieving audience, proclaimed them as ‘winners’.

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15 Agreement between the SADF and the Cuban account of the military push south is strongly implied by the editorial comment on the republication of Simon Barber’s article from Business Day, 27 July 1989, in the South African armed forces journal, Paratus, September, 1989, which quotes from Fidel Castro’s speech to the Cuban Council of State on 9 July 1989. For a short summary of the battles, see Herbstein and Evenson, The Devils Are Among Us.


But these deals did not mark the end of the Botha government’s concessions. At the start of the talks, Pretoria had been demanding that all Cuban troops be out of Angola by the time of the Namibian elections (that is, within seven months). By the end of September at the Brazzaville talks, Pik Botha was backing Crocker’s position of a two-year withdrawal. Finally, in mid-November Pretoria had to settle for a 27-month timetable for Cuban withdrawal and deployment northwards. Again, the South African regime’s climb-down was not simply a response to its military set-backs. It came after the disastrous showing of its black collaborators in the October municipal elections in South Africa and after further developments in Namibia which will be looked at in greater detail below. By mid-November, the Angolan-Cuban position on troop withdrawal had also come down from a four-year schedule which had been put forward in September. The most significant intervening factor in this bargaining process was the election in early November of George Bush to the US Presidency and his immediate public commitment to continue military aid to Unita. These conjunctural factors have been overlooked in almost all writing on the diplomacy.\(^{19}\)

A key determinant which all authors and commentators mention, was Gorbachev’s determination to reduce the USSR’s exposure in remote regional conflicts. This exerted pressure of the Angolan and Cuban governments and came as a relief to Pretoria. Details on the sequence of events vary, but all writers agree that the ‘thaw’ in the Cold War which developed from 1986, began to have a real effect in southern Africa by late 1987 and early 1988. Although Botha’s security establishment seriously misjudged the Soviet and Cuban military commitment to Angola in 1987, by March 1988 Anatoly Adamishin, the Deputy Soviet Foreign Minister, was talking with Crocker about a linked peace deal, and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze followed this up in May with US Secretary of State Schultz. Freeman recalls that at the London talks in May, ‘South African dialogue with the Soviets helped to convince both of them that a settlement was indeed possible. With behind the scenes help from the Soviets, who talked to parties and kept the US delegation apprised of the results, the United States pushed the parties to hammer out an agreement in principle on a settlement based on the linkage concept that Crocker … had formulated eight years before’.\(^{20}\)

By November, the most tangible evidence of this new superpower collaboration was the agreement to set up a semi-permanent trilateral Joint Monitoring Commission to oversee compliance with the accords. The formal members of the Joint Monitoring Commission were Angola, Cuba and South Africa, with the USA and USSR as ‘observers’. But it was the Soviets who had to concede the overall direction to Washington. Meeting monthly, the Commission was defined in

\(^{19}\) Only de Beer, ‘Negotiations on Namibia’, and Herbstein and Evenson, The Devils Are Among Us, have mentioned Pretoria’s retreat on the Cuban timetable. They relate it to the threat of economic sanctions. No one relates the diplomatic events to political struggle inside South Africa.

such a way as to enable Washington and Pretoria to use it to determine the direction of both the UN’s implementation of Resolution 435 in Namibia, as well as the UN’s verification of the Cuban pullout. During the tragic cease-fire breakdown in Namibia in April 1989, the Commission was used highly effectively to isolate Swapo and marginalise the UN. Pik Botha even admitted in the South African Parliament on 11 April that: ‘In fact, the Joint Commission was so effective that we were able to pre-empt the Security Council of the UN’. It is also worth noting here that, following Namibia’s independence in March 1990, its government joined the Commission as a full member, and was thus bound by the mutual non-aggression agreements previously worked out by South Africa, Angola and Cuba.

To these precipitant factors, should be added a number of conjunctural economic influences which impinged on the minds of the decision makers. Most writers mention the increasingly burdensome economic costs of the war to both Angola and South Africa, and some add, more vaguely, the economic burden on Cuba and the USSR. Unfortunately, in most instances, the urgency of paying these costs during 1988 is not made clear, except in the case of South Africa.\(^{21}\) There, in the context of serious foreign exchange shortages, it was widely recognised that a very large foreign debt repayment (about US$3 billion out of a debt of US$22 billion) was due in 1990-1 unless Western bankers would agree to a further rescheduling arrangement. With additional tough sanctions measures being tabled in the US Congress, and being threatened by Presidential candidate Michael Dukakis, an international peace agreement must have been seen as a sorely needed bonus for the treasury in Pretoria. But the Angolan government too was under increased financial pressure after the oil price collapsed in 1986 and serious drought began to affect its southern provinces.\(^{22}\) In addition, Cuba’s economic growth suffered an unprecedented decline in 1987 and its main creditors, the Paris Club, refused to provide fresh money and grace periods. It was therefore, particularly vulnerable to Soviet and East European cutbacks.\(^{23}\)

**State Restructuring for Power-sharing**

The most forgotten determinants in the published accounts so far of the 1988 peace accords were those emanating from the actions of the Namibian people — themselves at the geopolitical centre of the conflict. Such actions should include those of the Namibian nationalist movement, in which Swapo was overwhelmingly predominant, as well as those of the colonial forces and its allies...

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\(^{23}\) *South*, June 1990, London.
in Namibia who were opposed to Swapo. Their significance should be measured in relation to South Africa’s overall socio-political project in Namibia. It will be argued below that this omission leaves some of the central dynamics of the settlement out of the picture.

Whenever the costs to South Africa of holding on to colonial Namibia are mentioned, writers have failed to relate the economic burden to the anti-colonial war waged by Swapo’s combatants — the People’s Liberation Army of Namibia (Plan). Although Plan’s relatively small armed units could not match the conventional capacity of the huge South African army of occupation, many writers, particularly those in South Africa subject to a censored media, probably underestimate the extent of Plan’s success against the SADF.24 Despite an almost continuous SADF presence in southern Angola, and frequent air raids during the 1980s in which the SADF repeatedly purported to have ‘broken Plan’s back’, the Plan units were, despite severe losses in previous years, centrally involved (some say far more involved than Fapla) in the May 1988 Cunene offensive. They conducted raids into northern Namibia during the fighting around Mavinga and Cuito. Plan combatants were also among those who received medals for their defence of Cuito Cuanavale.

What about the nature of ‘the economic burden’? By 1988, business leaders in Namibia were aware of the debilitating effects of the war on the local economy. The Windhoek Chamber of Commerce and Industries, for instance, told all its members in July 1988 that ‘for obvious reasons like the increased military activity at the Angolan border and senseless bomb attacks, the business mood should not remain positive for the time being’.25 The militarisation of Namibia’s economy which took place in the early 1980s had contributed to falling investment and higher costs.26 Special risk insurance rates in Namibia were, for example, two to three times higher than in South Africa.27 The colonial administration’s expenditure as a share of total GDP rose from an average of only 13 per cent in the 1970s to 27 per cent in 1987. It actually exceeded 50 per cent in 1983-4. Such wasteful outlays were largely intended to sustain Pretoria’s ethnic homeland administration, to buy off small groups of aspirant black Namibians and to sustain the war effort. Lack of business confidence in Namibia led to a growing net outflow of finance to the South African financial markets during the 1980s, perhaps reaching as much as half of Namibia’s GDP in 1986. Domestic investment in Namibia dropped from about 34 per cent of GDP in the 1960s to only 20 per

24 Writers depending solely on South African and Western media coverage of the late colonial war in Namibia become automatically confined to South African Defence Force or SWA Territory and Police Force war reporting. Not surprising, a scholarly account of the war which looks seriously at evidence from Swapo combatants is yet to be written. Meanwhile, more balanced accounts of the war in Namibia up to 1988 can be found in Herbstein and Evenson, The Devils Are Among Us, Cawthra, Brutal Force, and The Resister.


cent during 1980-7. The result was that real GDP was lower in 1988 than in 1977.28

Some writers have mentioned that, try as it may during the 1980s, the Botha government could not establish a stable government from the ranks of its ethnically-based, client parties in Namibia.29 But those who have documented the failed attempts — begun in 1975-6 after the defeat of Portuguese colonialism in Angola — have never clearly shown how Pretoria’s strategies in Namibia were not simply about government, but about state building itself.30 After all, Namibia was not just any colony. It was geographically contiguous with the colonising power and ruled almost as if it were a special Afrikaner province. Not surprisingly, the first precautionary step taken by Vorster to develop a new neo-colonial relationship was to remove Walvis Bay from the territory in August 1977, but this was only the most visible restructuring of the colonial state.

By the time the major Western powers, under the liberal leadership of the Carter and Callaghan governments, had obtained Vorster’s consent for their Settlement Proposals in April 1978, Pretoria had embarked in all but name on the construction of a local army, local police force, and the staged transfer of government departments from Pretoria to Windhoek.31 P.W.Botha’s unilateral installation of the tribally-based Democratic Turnhalle Alliance as a nominal ‘central administration’ after the staged December 1978 ‘elections’, was as much about playing for time to state-build as it was about forming an anti-Swapo political party credible enough to eventually govern. But the urgency of building up the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance as a party had split the old white settler SWA National Party, much as its parent body was to split over the tri-cameral parliament some years later.

Similarly, when South Africa’s Administrator General told the ill-fated UN Pre-Implementation Conference in Geneva in early 1981 that ‘we need more time’, it was as much to do with training the newly created South West Africa Territorial Force and SWA Police (SWAPOL) as it was to do with trying to attract support to the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance. These combined, yet conflicting, processes of coercion and legitimation, while characteristic of all states, were sharply contradictory in colonial Namibia.32 To a great extent, the supposed ‘success’ of

29 Herbstein and Evenson, The Devils Are Among Us, give a fairly detailed summary of these attempts. However, Diana Cammack, ‘South Africa’s War of Destabilisation’, mentions them only in passing.
31 Some early details of the process can be traced in André du Pisani, SWA/Namibia: The Politics of Continuity and Change (Johannesburg, 1985).
the South West Africa Territorial Force and of SWAPOL became the downfall of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance. This was particularly true for the terrorism of the special counter-insurgency unit, Koevoet (Crowbar in Afrikaans) which first became known of in 1980 after an anti-Swapo death list was found. The unit was secretly created in 1978 by General Magnus Malan, then chief of the SADF, and its brutal methods against civilians did much to convince the black population that the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance was unfit to govern.

As this multi-layered political process was pursued inside Namibia using the crude security and ideological criteria of P.W. Botha’s ‘Total Strategy’, the Department of Foreign Affairs had to devise ways of dragging out the negotiations with the Western Contact Group while avoiding sanctions. The election of the Thatcher government in May 1979 undoubtedly made this much easier for the Department. But circumstances changed and so did the strategy. Between 1977 and 1980, it was based on the assumption that the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance could be helped to eventually form the core governing party of a non-unitary state. After that, it was increasingly questioned. Until the Muzorewa election debacle in February 1980, Botha’s government appeared to believe that the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance might eventually win a UN-supervised election — if it came to that. But when the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance losses in local ethnic elections later that year were added to the Mugabe election victory, the Pretoria regime’s basic assumption had to be modified.

Constant hints by Botha’s security officials, including General Jannie Geldenhuys, indicated their awareness of the extent of Swapo’s political support. Foreign Minister Pik Botha seemed to know that eventually, his government would have to implement the Western-based UN independence plan or something very similar. By 1982, to allow for the dire possibility that Pretoria might ultimately have to deal with the Swapo leadership, or at least some of it, Botha succeeded in convincing the Western powers (mainly through Crocker) that a two thirds majority rule was necessary for the adoption of the future constitution by the assembly elected under the UN Plan. The Swapo leadership was also asked, through the Western Contact Group, to agree to a Bill of Rights which included Lancaster House-type property guarantees. The implicit assumption behind these measures was that the Swapo leadership, or part of it, would be co-opted at some point in the foreseeable future.33 Thereafter, Pretoria’s strategy for an ‘independent’ Namibia became to bolster the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance with whatever new alliances it could forge so that it was at least capable of securing a blocking third vote in the constituent assembly should the UN plan ever have to be implemented.

The corollary of this party-building strategy was to expand the massive support which the SADF had already given to Unita since 1975 and to further extend the indigenous militarisation programme in northern Namibia. Koevoet was seen as a transitional terror squad to be eventually disbanded and withdrawn much like the Selous and Grey Scouts in Rhodesia were. Promises made to Koevoet members

33 An account of Chester Crocker’s diplomacy is given in Alfred Moleah, Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation (Delaware, 1983).
that they could resettle in South Africa after independence indicated as much. In contrast, the South West Africa Territorial Force was viewed by Pretoria’s military strategists as the essential basis for the creation of a neo-colonial state. It was no accident, that during the UN supervised transition itself in 1989, the SADF military command were able to defy the letter and spirit of the UN Plan by keeping all the South West Africa Territorial Force’s 21,900 members on full pay, retaining its command structure (through the Administrator General’s creation of a Department of Defence Administration) and ensuring that the SWAPOL granted gun licences to most of the South West Africa Territorial Force’s ‘demobilised’ members. In September 1982, the chief of security force operations in Namibia, Major General Charles Lloyd (later to become secretary of Botha’s State Security Council), had admitted that:

the demobilisation of South West Africa Territorial Force [as required by the UN plan] is a temporary phase that should last only for the duration of the election campaign ... Personal weapons will not be handed in and UNTAG will not take control of arms and ammunition handed in ... the South West Africa Territorial Force is part of the SWA independence process [and] ... South West Africa Territorial Force should form the basis of the defence force of the new state.34

While General Lloyd’s 1982 prediction about South West Africa Territorial Force and the new state was not fulfilled in the way he had imagined, the final outcome was not so far off his target. It is true that, after Swapo’s election victory, Plan combatants began to be recruited to the new Namibian army in more numerical strength than ex-South West Africa Territorial Force soldiers. But Western strategists knew that the final weight given to Plan and South West Africa Territorial Force in the new Namibia Defence Force would be left dependent on the election outcome. According to informal statements made to this author by British Foreign Office officials in 1981, this Zimbabwean-style scenario had been agreed informally between the Western powers and Pretoria as part of the settlement plan. Unlike the Lancaster House agreement, the understanding was never spelled out in the provisions of the UN plan because of the complicated legalities of the Namibian case. In both cases, however, the amalgamation exercise was supervised by special training units of the British army.

As part of the same offensive, General Lloyd and his commanders adopted what local commentators called ‘the Israeli tactic’ in south Lebanon. This involved the establishment of a semi-permanent occupation of over 40,000 square kilometres of territory in southern Angola in order to help Unita’s claims and also to try to prevent Plan combatants infiltrating into Namibia. The tactic only partially succeeded, particularly along the north eastern frontier. Nevertheless, the Reagan election victory enabled Crocker’s linkage policy to be used as an excuse for the

34 The Windhoek Advertiser, 13 September 1982. Details of Pretoria’s manipulation of the UN Plan to avoid the scheduled demobilization of its armed forces in Namibia are given by Colin Leys, in The Namibian, 6 October 1989. See also: Report of the Commonwealth Mission to Namibia, October 1989.
SADF’s forward thrust, and it allowed South Africa’s Department of Military Intelligence to establish an understanding with US security officials centred on mutual aid to Savimbi’s forces.\(^{35}\)

By 1984, however, Pretoria’s tactics regarding the UN plan had changed. Secure in the revival of this cosy collaboration with Washington, in the breakup of the Western Contact Group, which had its last meeting in October 1983, and in some sign of internal strife within Swapo, P.W. Botha and his advisers convinced themselves that it was possible to reach a Namibia settlement which could be acceptable to the Western powers, but without the difficulty of the UN Plan. This was a risky idea given the amount of Western diplomatic capital that had been invested in Resolution 435. Nevertheless, the convening of a ‘Multi-Party Conference’ in Windhoek in November 1983 had attracted some of Namibia’s small centrist parties. This held out the hope of broadening the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance base, and it was followed with enthusiasm in Bonn by members of Helmut Kohl’s governing party.

Once the limited cease-fire accord between Angola and South Africa was signed in Lusaka on 16 February 1984, President Kaunda of Zambia was persuaded to hold an all-party conference on Namibia in May.\(^ {36}\) Swapo attended only reluctantly because the conference was held without the involvement of the UN. South African government propaganda again emphasised that the world body had been blatantly biased towards Swapo. All the small political parties from Namibia attended the Lusaka meeting and South Africa’s Administrator General even acted as the joint chairperson with Kaunda. Pretoria’s tactic seemed to be to coax a break-away section of Swapo to join in a power-sharing arrangement with the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance similar to what was envisaged for Unita and the MPLA. This, it was hoped, would increase pressure on the West to do a deal without the UN. However, the plan backfired when Swapo’s leadership remained intact and most of Namibia’s centrist parties sided with them to demand ‘Resolution 435 now’. They totally rejected Crocker’s linkage policy. Not surprisingly, the subsequent ‘interim government’ formed in Windhoek in June 1985 was doomed before it began. Virtually all that was left was Pretoria’s military might.

P.W. Botha’s strategy towards Namibia then drifted aimlessly. South Africa’s township rebellion consumed his government’s attention and paralysed any notion of withdrawal. The admission by the Swapo leadership in 1986 that its security department was holding some 100 suspects as spies, one of whom was said to have died in detention, was perhaps an indication of why Botha was playing for time.\(^ {37}\)

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\(^{37}\) The extent of detention by the Swapo security department in the 1980s was much greater than its political leadership admitted. Reasonably reliable evidence of the Swapo security department’s alleged ill-treatment, torture and killing of hundreds of detainees amongst Swapo’s membership in Angola, and to a lesser extent, Zambia, emerged publicly during the United Nations’ transition period in Namibia in 1989. Until then, the truth of most allegations could not be verified by impartial observers. There is insufficient space here to recount the known claims about the saga;
But it became apparent to most that the ‘interim government’ in Windhoek could still not make inroads into Swapo’s populist base of support, especially in the north and the major townships. The upsurge of resistance in South Africa had inspired a new generation of student and worker activists in Namibia and during 1987 the new industrial unions and workers’ committees of the National Union of Namibian Workers and the Namibia National Student Organisation were leading a growing series of strikes, boycotts and public protest.\(^{38}\)

Why then, in April 1988, with the SADF in increasing difficulty in Angola, did P.W. Botha give his Administrator General in Namibia powers to oppose the ‘interim government’s’ majority proposals to scrap AG8, the law which established the eleven unpopular and wasteful ethnic and racial administrations? Some commentators believe this indicated how out of touch with events P.W.Botha really was.\(^{39}\) With the pronouncement of further ethnic elections in Namibia, it may also have been a last ditch effort to resurrect support for the ex-Democratic Turnhalle Alliance Ovambo leader, Peter Kalangula, as well as to co-opt other dissident ethnic leaders such as Justice Garoeb of the Damara Council. However, these politicians had ambitions of their own and a history of defiance of Pretoria. And their support base was too small to fuel an ethnic government capable of turning the tide against Swapo.

A more likely explanation for Botha’s policy was that, in the face of growing worker and student unrest in Namibia, the South African government had covertly decided at the end of 1987 or early 1988 that it would finally have to implement

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\(^{39}\) This view is taken by Brendan Seery, op. cit.
UN Resolution 435, and that the retention of the eleven ‘second tier’ authorities would considerably help the anti-Swapo, ethnically-based parties during the transition, as well as undermine the likely Swapo government following the election. Although many Democratic Turnhalle Alliance leaders were still clinging to the hope that the UN plan could be avoided altogether, they were warned by the Administrator General that it might come like ‘a thief in the night’. With the Swapo detainee issue increasing ethnic fears in domestic Namibian politics, the South African government and military leadership appear to have relished the opportunity to ‘deglamorise’ the Swapo leadership in an open electoral contest, hoping again for a split.40

Equally important, Pretoria’s security establishment appeared to have given up any hope during 1987 that the SADF could wipe out Swapo’s mobile armed forces by attacking their main supply bases near Lubango in Angola’s Cunene Province. Such an operation would have cost too many white casualties inflicted not only by Swapo, but by the reinforced airpower of the Angolan government forces and their Cuban allies. The SADF’s alternative option, an offensive to back Unita in the eastern provinces using artillery, airpower and black Namibian troops, became more of a last ditch effort to bolster Pretoria’s renewed diplomatic efforts to secure the removal of the Cubans than a serious effort to create a non-Swapo Namibia. The shocking news in early 1988 of mutiny and desertion from the South West Africa Territorial Force in Angola, coupled with reports of increasingly successful Swapo military actions against the SADF in northern Namibia using more sophisticated anti-tank missiles, compounded the need for a deal in terms of the UN plan.41

Finally, the more far-sighted leaders in ruling Afrikaner circles must surely have been impressed by the Swapo leadership’s overtures to business leaders in Namibia from 1986 onwards. In August of that year, the first group of white farmers, businessmen and academics travelled to Lusaka to attend the tenth anniversary of the UN Institute for Namibia where they met Swapo leaders. By mid-1988, the Swapo leadership was making public statements to allay fears about nationalisation and calling for white Namibians to demand the implementation of Resolution 435. Large meetings were held by Swapo with business leaders, first in Stockholm in June, then in Lusaka in November, where clear commitments were made to a Zimbabwe-style mixed economy and retention of white farms.42 Seen in the context of increasingly difficult labour relations, the idea of a moderate Swapo government shackled by financial and transport dependence on South Africa could not have been viewed by Pretoria with much fear.43

If one accepts this broad account of the Botha government’s changing strategy and tactics, a most essential precondition for Pretoria’s implementation of the UN

40 See note 36 above.
41 *International Newsbriefing on Namibia*, Nos 57-59, April to June 1988, London
Determinants of the Namibia Settlement

plan was the regime’s prior consolidation of a semi-colonial state apparatus, material base and ideology in Namibia itself. In other words, the fulfilment of Pretoria’s 1982 demand that the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola be linked to Namibian independence was not a sufficient precondition for a settlement. Nor were the private property guarantees and one-third blocking vote proposals by the Western powers which Pretoria and Swapo accepted in 1982 as part of the UN plan. P.W. Botha’s State Security Council first had to be convinced that the Swapo leadership would not renege on these agreements and provoke a mass white Afrikaner exodus from Namibia which would fuel the right-wing campaign of Andries Treurnicht’s Conservative Party within South Africa. The State Security Council had therefore to wait until the colonial army was sufficiently battle-hardened (unlike Muzorewa’s auxiliary units in Zimbabwe), and until the majority of whites in Namibia had enough faith in the small emergent black middle class in Namibia to accept black majority rule. The latter was not simply a prerogative of the colonial power, although it did much during the 1980s to create a black salariat, but became an accepted task of the liberation movement leadership itself.

By 1988, these preconditions had been prepared as far as it was politically possible. For Botha, the only way to reverse the atrophy which had set in from 1986, was the deeply unpalatable option of co-opting the Swapo leadership. Once the military set-backs described above were at their height in early 1988, the issue of whether the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance and its allies could obtain the blocking third vote or not, had to be an important, but secondary consideration for Pretoria. In any case, P.W. Botha’s most senior advisers, Pik Botha, Gerrit Viljoen and Jannie Geldenhuys, who travelled to Windhoek with him, must have known that the public row with the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance over the retention of AG8 would do it no harm.

Underlying Economic Considerations

Adequate measures to ensure that South African capital would continue to dominate the Namibian economy were also an essential part of Pretoria’s strategy for a settlement. Most observers appreciated that, particularly with the removal of the Cubans, a Swapo government coming to power through the UN Plan would have to retain the essentially capitalist nature of Namibia’s dependent economy, something the Swapo leadership did not disguise in the late 1980s. But the Botha government was still worried that in the longer term South African business interests might be discriminated against by Swapo relative to those of other Western states. Pretoria and its Western allies were also concerned to ensure overall financial and commercial stability. P.W. Botha’s government had, therefore, to get the balance right.

The main bargaining instruments identified to further South African interests in the immediate post-independence period, judging retrospectively, were Pretoria’s public finance controls and the threat to Namibia’s trade and fisheries through its retention of control of the enclave port of Walvis Bay. At independence, the port still handled 90 per cent of Namibia’s sea-borne trade and was the centre of the
potentially lucrative fishing industry. That it could be used by Pretoria as an instant ‘choke point’ to subdue a Swapo government is acknowledged by most authors, and few disagree that Pretoria’s Western allies devised Security Council Resolution 432 of 1978 in such a manner as to legitimise continued colonial control of the enclave for an indefinite period following Namibia’s independence.\footnote{The relation of the Walvis Bay Enclave and Namibia’s twelve off-shore islands to the provisions of the UN settlement plan is outlined in Brian Wood, ‘Introduction’, in \textit{Namibia: Essential Documents of the United Nations’ Independence Plan, 1976-89}. Background to the dispute over Walvis Bay can be found in Lynn Berat, \textit{Walvis Bay: Decolonisation and International Law} (New Haven and London, 1990), or summarised by Gavin Evans, ‘Walvis Bay: South Africa, Namibia and the question of sovereignty’, \textit{International Affairs}, 66, 3 (July 1990).}

Nevertheless, for the South African regime to actually resort to trade manipulation via Walvis Bay and other means was in the end a questionable, if easy, option. At first sight, its power to do so was overwhelming. In 1989, South Africa was the source of 90 per cent of Namibia’s imports, and, although it only consumed about 9 per cent of Namibia’s exports, it handled over 70 per cent of Namibia’s exports through Walvis Bay and other transport routes. Moreover, the Namibian economy was extremely trade dependent, with 80 per cent of its output (almost all primary produce) exported and 60 per cent of goods consumed imported.\footnote{First National Development Corporation, \textit{Development and Investment} (Windhoek, 1989).} Not surprisingly, Windhoek was extremely dependent on revenue from South Africa related to Pretoria’s estimates of the territory’s share of customs and excise. However, with the Swapo leadership finally willing to administer a free-market ‘mixed economy’, there was a diplomatic danger for the South African government in being seen to deliberately and adversely manipulate post-independent Namibia’s commercial markets. In the early 1980s, Pretoria had done precisely that with the markets of other neighbouring countries. But the international political situation had changed, and the diplomatic gains of the Namibia settlement — which included a repeal of sanctions measures in the West — might have rapidly melted away for Pretoria if this option was used too early and too drastically. In the end, the threat had to remain, by and large, a threat, albeit a very real one.

Instead, the invisible world of public finance appeared to be the lever chosen by the Pretoria government, through its Reserve Bank, to test the new Swapo government’s commitment to continued South African financial flows. Official figures released at the end of 1989 had indicated that the South West Africa Administration’s debt to banks in South Africa might have fallen to about R500 million from an estimated R892 million, or 21 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, the previous year. These figures were questioned by Sam Nujoma’s Swapo government-in-waiting.\footnote{Namibia Communications Centre, News Release, London, January 1989.} But there was no outright repudiation of the colonial debt by the Swapo leadership even though it had stated in August 1989 that, in line with international law, the debt was South Africa’s responsibility and not that of the Namibian people. The Reserve Bank of South Africa, Swapo said, had broken international law when acting as Namibia’s central bank, and was the legal
guarantor for all such loans. At the time, most governments were thought likely to support Swapo’s position, and it even received sympathy from International Monetary Fund officials. But the US and British governments indicated that a Swapo government would have to negotiate repayment responsibility with Pretoria as ‘one of a number of issues’. This obviously gave the initiative to Pretoria to hold Namibia in what one author has called ‘debt peonage’ for a good deal of time to come.47

This outcome made it extremely unlikely that Pretoria would ever agree to hand over Namibia’s fair share of accumulated foreign reserves. No reliable records appear to exist for these, but, arguably, they could have been calculated on a GDP-related formula from 26 October 1966, the date South Africa’s League of Nations’ Mandate to rule Namibia was revoked by the United Nations. Aware of its strong position, the South African Reserve Bank made the granting to Namibia of some foreign exchange reserves dependent on acceptance by the new Namibian government of responsibility to repay the colonial debt. There were even indications by early March 1990 that Pretoria was attempting to make such transfers dependent on Western power co-operation to reschedule South Africa’s own debt.48

As details of Namibia financial dependency unfolded, it became evident just how manipulative the South African government had been. In February 1990, Swapo’s new Finance Minister, Dr Otto Herrigel, admitted that his government would have to create its own central bank, currency and customs control if it wished to control its own national wealth and he welcomed International Monetary Fund and other assistance to this end. Until this was possible, he said, Namibia would have to remain a member of SACU and the Common (Rand) Monetary Area. But Herrigel also pointed out that ‘Namibia’s independence was, in effect, the best business transaction ever entered into by South Africa’. He argued that foreign currency injected by new loans and grants, including the UN’s R400 million expenditure during the transition, had accrued mainly to the Reserve Bank of South Africa. Herrigel also condemned ‘the plunder’ of the public service pension fund. Its privatisation in 1989 had led, he said, to at least R700 million leaving the country.49 Fortunately, this was the only major capital flight.

Such skirmishes over public finance should not, however, detract attention from an underlying trend whereby South African companies were viewing Namibia as a possible springboard for opening trade and investment to African countries. Early in 1990, the Windhoek company registrar stated that 535 foreign and local firms had opened files at his office in the first eleven months of 1989. This was nearly double the 276 registered during 1988 when the war still raged. There was little

47 This term was used by Keith Gottschalk, ‘South African Strategy: from colonialism to counter-revolution’, in Brian Wood (ed.), Namibia 1884-1984. Western policy on the debt negotiations is set out in British and US government correspondence with Oxfam (UK) and Episcopal Churchpeople for a Free South Africa, New York, during 1990.
48 Valerie Jensen, notes on a conversation with Mr John Sunde of the Office of South African Interests in Windhoek, 3 March 1990
49 Namibia Report, 1, 2 (March 1990).
doubt that most of the new ventures were linked to South African financial capital, a pattern already well established in the Namibian economy. The Anglo American Corporation (mainly via De Beers, Gold Fields of South Africa and First National Bank), the South African Mutual (Barlows, Liberty Life, Standard Bank and Nedbank), Sanlam (Gencor), Rembrandt (Volkskas) and Anglovaal dominated Namibia’s mining, banking, insurance and construction sectors. This was hardly surprising since these financial conglomerates probably controlled 80 per cent of the South African economy itself.

In addition, South African parastatal corporations such as ISCOR, South African Railways and Harbours (or later SATS and then Transnet), South African Electricity Supply Commission and South African Airways were all still contracted by their Namibian counterparts in a number of different ways. There were also, of course, many small- and medium-sized businesses in Namibia which were owned independently by whites who had retained their South African citizenship. These included over 3,000 ranches, many of which were dependent on South African credit institutions, and the Cape fishing interests which were entrenched in Walvis Bay. Given this overwhelming predominance, the somewhat smaller shares of German, British, other European, and North American capital, could not realistically have been expected to replace South African capital despite the predominance of West European capital in Namibia’s Rössing uranium mine which accounted for up to one third of the country’s GDP.

South African capital was thus well placed to expand into Africa from Namibia. To take one illustration from many, if improved marketing and upgrading of facilities of Namibia’s 77 hotels, motels and pension houses, and its 44 guest farms, were to enable the country to compete for business conferences and travellers from Europe and North America — as the Chair of the Namibian Association of Hotels said at its annual congress on 9 April 1990 — it would be South African businesses and tourism that would be first to take advantage of such a development.

Another example was given by the managing director of Namibia’s parastatal Water and Electricity Corporation. He said on 20 May 1990 that the Namibian and Angolan governments would discuss establishing a new hydro-electric scheme at Epupa on the Cunene River which would supply twice the power of the existing Ruacana scheme. The excess capacity would be sold to South Africa’s grid. Likewise, if new tarred road links through Gobabis to Botswana, the Caprivi to Zimbabwe and Zambia, and through Oshakati to the Angolan port of Namibe were constructed, South African business interests in Namibia would be quick to use them to open up new markets.

It is worth noting that such projects were priorities for the anti-apartheid Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference and for Western donor aid. Of course, they would, if implemented, be of benefit to many Namibians too, but who would reap the main benefit is a moot point. It was not a question of motives, but of a structural economic dependency in

50 Southern African Dossier, Maputo, October 1989.
51 Namibia Report, 1, 5 (June 1990).
52 Namibia Report, 1, 7 (August 1990).
which Namibia, and its highly differentiated reward system, had been historically placed and which had its own self-perpetuating dynamic.\footnote{53 For recent data on inequalities, see UNICEF Namibia, \textit{Summary of Main Results of the Household Health and Nutrition Survey (Ovambo and Katutura)}, mimeo, 6 August 1990.}

Throughout its colonial rule, representatives of the South African state had to cope with the contradictory social pressures on the colonial administration in Windhoek from the subordinate classes and its white constituents. Its senior officials understood to a certain extent the dilemmas which the new government would face over income distribution and had therefore made some preparations to anticipate the new situation after independence. An example of this was the Administrator General's establishment in February 1987 of the Wiehahn Commission of Inquiry into Labour Relations in Namibia. There is little doubt that Professor Wiehahn, renowned for the industrial relations reforms in South Africa, was brought in to stem the rising tide of NUNW-inspired labour militancy in Namibia. By 1989, the NUNW could claim about 75,000 members out of a permanently paid workforce of 185,000, quite an achievement for such an economy, and its radical socialist propaganda appeared quite a threat to many South African businesses there. Nevertheless, the Wiehahn Commission's two reports, submitted to the Administrator General during the early months of the UN transition period in 1989, recommended minimalist advances in statutory working conditions, a collective bargaining system which was biased towards arbitration and severe restrictions on the right to strike. The unstated assumption appeared to be that an incoming Swapo government would be easily able to dampen NUNW militancy. In the event, the absence of detailed alternative proposals meant that the new Namibian government was persuaded after independence to adapt most of the Wiehahn recommendations to its draft Labour Code.\footnote{54 The regional background to the Wiehahn Commission is summarised by Brian Wood in \textit{Le Monde Diplomatique}, July 1989. For the resulting proposals by the new Swapo government, see \textit{Namibia Report}, January-February 1991.}

The Regional Power Remains

The Namibia settlement was clearly a gain for South African business interests, at least in the medium term. It also helped enable De Klerk to reduce pressure in the West for sanctions. He pleaded for time to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement in South Africa which may eventually lead to majority rule. The project was aptly described by Chester Crocker as 'a purposeful, evolutionary change towards a non-racial system'.\footnote{55 Chester Crocker, \textit{Southern Africa: Eight Years After'}.} Many Western leaders were prepared to grant De Klerk the time for such a project, despite the human cost which such a delay would entail.

When De Klerk made his speech unbanning the African National Congress (ANC) and other political organisations on 2 February 1990, his first specified 'aim' in the reform package was to achieve 'a joint programme of reconstruction ... for southern Africa' and 'a realistic development plan'. 'Obstacles in the way of a conference of southern African states have now been removed sufficiently' he
proclaimed. Such statements reflected a growing realisation amongst both English and, now, Afrikaans big business that the only way to regenerate South African industry was to penetrate and develop the African market — both at home and abroad — and thereby gain entry into other third world markets. Even hawkish P.W. Botha began in November 1988 to talk of an ‘Economic Community of Southern Africa’.  

This process had already begun, to a certain extent, but required political change if it was to succeed by the time the world’s three major trading blocs — North America, Japan and the Pacific Basin, and Europe — were too rigidly formed. The South African government claimed at the time that its business community traded in 44 African countries. While many were certainly marginal, some data did exist which showed that South African exports to Africa had risen from around $1 billion in the mid-1980s to nearly $5 billion in 1990. Trade with the rest of the continent accounted for 32 per cent of South Africa’s manufactured exports. The ten surrounding Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference states bought over 20 per cent of South Africa’s non-gold exports, and were the source of nearly half of South Africa’s trade surplus of $1.3 billion in 1988.

And it was not only trade that was increasing. South African investment in the surrounding region was said to have risen by 23 per cent between 1985 and 1988. Much of this was concentrated in enterprises which supplied South African needs. One industrialist explained that ‘You can’t go into a market with a price list and ask what people want on account of the limited forex. You need to look instead at projects which generate forex to fund the imports or programmes which promote import substitution’. Such was the logic of greater involvement and of the need for political change. South Africa’s major Western allies were also keen that this should develop. Their own firms which operated in the region were pressing for greater access to markets and for the spread of South African capital and expertise. They were also under pressure from organised labour in South Africa and were anxious to de-politicise it through a moderate solution.

It is certainly not only South Africa that was on the West’s agenda for political reform in Africa, but it was seen as a catalyst. In December 1986, US Secretary of State George Schultz had stated that ‘We recognise that South Africa’s evolution is intimately connected to the fate of the entire region’. Crocker’s replacement as US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, in turn told African journalists on 6 April 1990 that Schultz’s successor, James Baker, ‘feels that the constitution of Namibia could serve as an example for the restructuring of political life in the rest of Africa’. Baker was the first US secretary of state to


58 Phillip Gawith, ibid.

59 Cited by Chester Crocker in his address to the US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2 April 1990.

visit southern Africa in 12 years. He discussed Angola’s peace prospects with seven heads of state while in Windhoek in March. Cohen added that Namibia ‘has room for more than one party and it looks like it’s getting off to an excellent start with maximum civil liberties, with protection of individual rights and an independent judiciary’.\(^61\)

There was no doubt that the political impact of Namibia’s independence inside South Africa and the region was profound. Multi-party democracy was being discussed in the region’s one-party states as never before, and the new Namibian constitution was being looked at in detail. The UN plan itself was being studied in South Africa, not only at the expert level. It was no accident that the demand for a democratically-elected, non-racial constituent assembly was raised publicly in South Africa at the large Congress for a Democratic Future in December 1989 and that, after the first meeting of the ANC with De Klerk’s government, the Mass Democratic Movement decided to launch a mass campaign for a constituent assembly.\(^62\) On 25 May 1990, the ANC Executive in Lusaka called for a ‘referee’ such as the UN monitoring force in Namibia to play a role in the transfer of power in South Africa.\(^63\)

These demands could not be entertained by the De Klerk government because of the strength of white right-wing popular opinion. The new President had clearly tried to anticipate an upsurge in these popular demands when on 26 November 1989 he had rejected the idea of a Namibia-style transitional authority or a constituent assembly. De Klerk said his government would negotiate a solution in stages and the existing white-controlled Parliament would have to approve it.\(^64\) This evolutionary view might of course change with the pressure of events, but it is important to understand here that De Klerk’s government had in mind a long time span for watering down white supremacy. On 6 February 1990, for example, the former Administrator General of South West Africa, Gerrit Viljoen, then Minister of Constitutional Development, spoke of the National Party government surrendering control of power in ten years time.\(^65\) While such evolutionary schemes might end up being much shorter because of mass pressure, they were attracting adherents amongst Western leaders, just as the costly twelve year negotiation over Namibia’s independence had done.

With such a delay in mind, it is worth noting that the Namibia-Angola accords did not result in an immediate reduction in the South African government’s defence budget, but an increase of over 20 per cent for 1989-90 to S3.6 billion. The 1990-1 defence budget was marginally larger than that. Most of the increases were for the development, production or importation of new weapons, i.e. about 60 per cent of the total. The key problem faced by Pretoria was the replacement of the ageing Mirage III fighters. The arms embargo had prevented new purchases from the major

\(^{61}\) Ibid.


\(^{64}\) International Defence and Aid Fund, Review of 1989, London.

Western powers, but Armscor was trying to obtain an engine from Taiwan, developed from a US design, or from Israel. In addition, a new locally manufactured combat helicopter, an intermediate range (900-2,000 mile) ballistic missile (with Israeli help) and a model based on the German U-209 submarine were in the pipeline. The latter two projects were designed to ensure that the navy could launch sea-borne attacks against coastal cities (unnamed). There were also plans to increase the use of black South African troops. These would undoubtedly be an essential prerequisite for — and therefore an indicator of — a controlled state restructuring in South Africa itself. Subsequent evidence during 1991 of continued South African supplies to Unita and of SADF training of Zairean army and navy units indicate the extent of the De Klerk government’s strategic planning in relation to Angola.

Conclusion

Namibian independence in terms of the UN plan was brought about by a peculiar, cumulative combination of factors. The ‘main’ causes were not simply South Africa’s military set-back in Angola at the hands of Cuban, Angolan and Swapo forces, or even the propitious superpower rapprochement and financial crises amongst the key states. A principal prerequisite for the settlement was the South African regime’s exhaustion of its state and party-building programmes in Namibia, and its eventual preparedness to graft an ideologically reformed, and de glamorised Swapo leadership onto a semi-colonial state ‘in-waiting’.

Underlying Pretoria’s new strategy towards indirect state domination of the southwest African region was an historic trend towards the greater export of South African capital. Although this process was uneven, and was in fact still in its infancy in Angola, Namibia’s independence marked a watershed for the prospects of such expansion into Africa, especially of Afrikaans-owned capital. The corollary of such expansion was the National Party’s programme of controlled, ‘evolutionary’ political change within South Africa itself. F.W de Klerk’s reform programme, announced soon after the Namibian elections, was not simply a result of domestic pressures and an attempt to normalise relations with the major powers. It was timed to minimise the impact of Namibia’s non-racial, UN-supervised elections and its constituent assembly on political life in South Africa. Radical nationalist forces in South Africa were encouraged to begin ‘a negotiation process’ for constitutional change that was designed to avoid universal free elections to a constituent assembly.

To the extent that the achievement of a genuinely non-racial democracy in South Africa looked set to become a drawn out process, Namibia’s political and economic coexistence with its powerful white-ruled neighbour would assume a peculiar semi-colonial form. Some aspects of this relationship remained directly colonial, such as

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67 The Guardian, 8 August 1991. Although the Delta complex of SADF supply bases for the Unita headquarters at Jamba were closed down in early 1990, South African military aircraft were seen flying regular routes over northern Botswana towards Angola during 1991.
South Africa's retention of Walvis Bay and Namibia's twelve off-shore islands, while in other fields Namibia's new state assumed a degree of autonomy somewhere between that of Botswana and Zimbabwe. Successive South African government policies ensured that, on independence, the material base, core apparatus and ideological coherence of the new Namibian state remained weak. A lack of new financial resources, a legacy of ethnic fragmentation and the preponderance of populist and clientelist political relations inhibit what little the state can do to overcome the sharp social contradictions between rich and poor.

No account of these events would be complete without reminding ourselves of the catastrophic human cost caused by Pretoria's prolonged delay in implementing the UN plan for Namibia's independence — to prevent 'the vacuum', as Pik Botha put it. Leaving aside the structural dislocation and emotional trauma experienced by most Namibians, which will live on for several decades at least, provisional research by Swapo following independence in March 1990 indicated that at least 11,000 Namibians had died in war-related incidents, 9,286 in direct combat, while 647 were missing and 4,057 were seriously wounded. UNICEF had previously estimated that between 1980-8 over 50,000 Namibians died of causes indirectly related to the war. It is now know that over 45,000 Namibians fled the country as refugees. This per-capita toll in death and destitution was therefore worse than that during the Rhodesian war in Zimbabwe. In addition, it was estimated that at least 200,000 people had died in the Angolan war since the South African invasion of 1976.68

Yet, on the eve of what was supposed to be the UN-supervised cease-fire, Pretoria's bloody attempts to fill 'the vacuum' were not over — as the clashes between Swapo's combatants and Koevoet and South West Africa Territorial Force soldiers then testified.69 Reflecting on the cease-fire breakdown in 1989, the Director of South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs said, 'had South Africa ever entertained the idea of scuttling the settlement proposal, it could have done so in the immediate aftermath of the events of 1 April'.70 That this was never seriously attempted, is further testimony to the general argument above.

68 For Swapo's figures on war casualties, see Namibia Report, 1, 2 (April 1991). Unicef's figures on Namibia and Angola are given in Children on the Frontline (New York: United Nations, 1988). Numbers of Namibians forcibly exiled during the war with South Africa can be estimated from United Nations data on returnees (over 42,000) plus an estimate of how many Namibians died in Angola, Zambia and elsewhere abroad.

69 Again, the coverage of these clashes and the diplomacy which surrounds them in the South African, Namibian and Western media needs to be treated with extreme caution.

70 D. Auret, 'The Settlement Plan for Namibia: A South African Perspective'.

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