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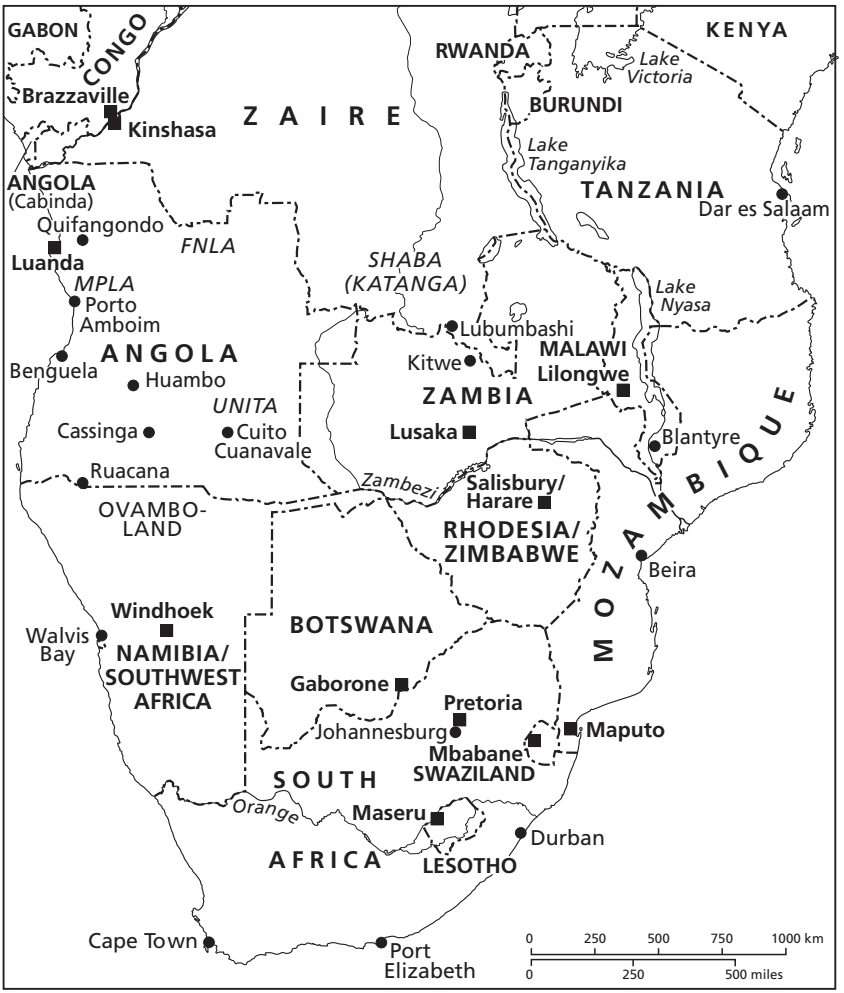
The Cold War and southern Africa, 1976–1990

CHRIS SAUNDERS AND SUE ONSLOW

Although southern Africa remained marginal to the Soviet–American relationship in the Cold War era, much of the history of the region in these years was shaped by the ideological confrontation between the superpowers.[1] This theme has attracted little detailed attention in the relevant scholarly literature, perhaps because the connections are often difficult to draw and local actors did not see the struggle between Moscow and Washington as all-important. In southern Africa, the primary process underway in these years was decolonisation, and the residual strength of white settler regimes gave anti-colonial struggles a particular intensity. These struggles pre-dated the onset of the Cold War, but the superpower conflict moulded them in new ways, and played a key role in the transition from colonial and white minority control to black majority rule.

In the decade before the mid-1970s, the Soviet Union supported liberation movements that embarked on armed struggles, while the United States, despite its anti-colonial origins and rhetorical commitment to freedom, remained an ally of the colonial powers and of apartheid South Africa, with which it retained close economic and strategic ties. From the mid-1970s, the United States accepted the need for evolutionary change towards black majority rule. The debate in Washington was then over the pace, and means, of such change. Under Gerald R. Ford and, in particular, Ronald Reagan, the United States sought to prevent regimes allied to the Soviet Union from achieving power or retaining control. The administration of President Jimmy Carter worked more actively through multilateral diplomacy to secure transitions to

1 On the period to 1976, see Michael E. Latham's and Piero Gleijeses's chapters in volume II. We define 'southern Africa' as including Angola but not Tanzania (which received more aid from China than any other African country) or Zaire (where Cold War intervention in the early 1960s had resulted in the installation of the US-backed regime of Mobutu Sese Seko) (see Sean Kelly, *America's Tyrant: The CIA and Mobutu of Zaire* (Washington, DC: American University Press, 1993)).



Map 2. Southern Africa

black majority rule in Rhodesia and South West Africa (SWA)/Namibia; Carter was convinced that racial justice and independence were the best recipe to forestall Communist influence and domination. For their part, the white governments of South Africa and Rhodesia continued to use the perceived threat of Communism to demonise the liberation movements, to legitimate actions against them, and to divert domestic and international attention from the real causes of opposition to racist rule.

The Cold War did not merely mean rivalry between the United States and the USSR in the struggle to gain influence in southern Africa. The Soviet Union's aspirations to be the leading supporter of African liberation movements in the 'anti-imperialist' struggle were challenged, after the Sino-Soviet split, by China and by Cuba's activism. Washington's policy towards southern Africa was not always in tune with London's approach. While some Western policy advisers argued that radical African nationalism was first and foremost an indigenous phenomenon, others emphasised foreign influences and links. And the 'anti-imperialist' struggle in southern Africa was not confined to that between the Soviet bloc, China, and their European/American capitalist antagonists, for the South African and Rhodesian white regimes also regarded themselves as anti-imperialist. Afrikaner antipathy to British imperialism had deep roots, while in Rhodesia Ian Smith's government had broken with Britain in 1965.[2]

The dynamics of the Cold War in southern Africa were, therefore, complex. The regional liberation movements themselves did not form a monolithic bloc. Often bitter rivals, both before and after independence, these movements tried to exploit the preoccupations of the external powers for their own benefit and to achieve a greater degree of independence in the global system. While socialism appeared to many to offer an alternative path to modernity, and a way to re-align the asymmetrical economic and power-political arrangements of the pre-independence era, none wished to exchange one form of foreign domination for another – although this was not widely recognised at the time. The overwhelming provision of assistance for the liberation struggle from the USSR, its East European allies, and Cuba took the form of military instruction, logistical support, and weaponry, rather than substantial injections of economic aid. However, a significant part of the Second World's support of the African 'global South' was also the provision of tertiary education and collaboration through international youth and women's groups. This provided an important sense of solidarity that helped to sustain the determination of African nationalists. While the Organization of African Unity's Liberation Committee joined the socialist countries in supporting the armed struggles of liberation movements, most independent African countries tried to distance themselves from superpower competition through participation in the Non-Aligned Movement, hoping thereby to enhance their moral legitimacy and freedom to manoeuvre.

The Cold War in the region, then, constituted a highly complex clash of systems and ideas, in which the propaganda battle on the home front often

2 See D. Lowry, 'The Roots of Anti-Communism and the Cold War in White Rhodesian Culture, ca. 1920s–1980', *Cold War History*, 7, 2 (2007), 169–94.

played as important a part as military conflict. Three distinct phases can be identified in the period between the collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1975 and the final disintegration of the Soviet bloc in 1990. In each period, domestic developments and events were affected by the international dimension, and local actors drew upon external support as it suited their own particular agendas. In each phase, the attitude and activities of the regional hegemon, South Africa, are particularly important to an understanding of the shifting dynamics of power, perception, and political control.

1975–1980

The Cold War appeared to have arrived in Africa with a vengeance as a direct consequence of the failure of the Ford administration, aided by the South African government, to prevent a Marxist party, the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, MPLA), from coming to power in Angola in 1975–76. This resounding setback for American and South African policy had far-reaching implications for the regional ideological and racial balance of power. The MPLA victory was achieved thanks to the support of a substantial Cuban military force. On the other side of the continent, newly independent Mozambique followed Angola in signing a treaty of friendship and co-operation with the Soviet Union, and the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (Frente de Libertação de Moçambigue, FRELIMO) formally declared itself Marxist-Leninist. To the South African government, which had long claimed itself to be a bastion of anti-Communism and asserted its affinity with Western strategic and economic interests, these developments brought the Cold War to its doorstep and raised the spectre of the country being surrounded by hostile states directed by Moscow. The apartheid regime viewed the Cubans in Angola as a Soviet proxy, and feared that the USSR had a grand design to bring all southern Africa within its sphere of influence, and therefore would increase their aid to liberation movements. The South African government was in the process of developing nuclear weapons as the ultimate defensive measure to deter international threats and forestall possible regional armed intervention.[3] Yet the failure of the South African invasion of Angola and the triumph of radical

3 Though South African diplomats continued to deny that Pretoria had nuclear weapons, by the early 1980s South African scientists had begun to construct atomic bombs. The United States may have given clandestine support for South Africa's nuclear weapons programme: Marta van Wyk, 'Ally or Critic? The United States' Response to South African Nuclear Development', *Cold War History*, 7, 2 (2007), 195–222.

14. Soldiers of the MPLA (Movimento Popular da Libertação de Angola). The MPLA came to power with Soviet assistance and with the help of Cuban troops.

15. Black students protesting against apartheid in Soweto, South Africa, June 1976.

movements in Luanda and Maputo emboldened black South Africans, and the uprising that began in Soweto in June 1976 strengthened the South African government's belief in a Communist-led 'total onslaught' on the white minority regime, and the need for a 'total strategy' to defeat it.[4]

Cold War perceptions had also long been important in framing the outlook and behaviour of the members of the Rhodesian Front (RF) government, representing the interests of about 250,000 whites in a population of more than 4.5 million. These politicians, like those of South Africa, had persuaded themselves of the existence of an international Communist threat and elaborated a self-serving propaganda to convince the white electorate, as well as elements within the African community, that Rhodesia represented the front line in the Cold War in the region.[5] Events in Angola merely served to convince politicians in the Rhodesian capital, Salisbury, of the validity of this view. As the RF's leader, Ian Smith, told B. J. Vorster, the South African prime minister, 'the West should realise Rhodesia was trying to avoid a revolution; premature majority rule would ensure that Rhodesia would be lost to the free world'.[6] Smith's refusal to accelerate domestic political and economic reform, while attempting to find black leaders prepared to collaborate with his agenda, prompted the rival Zimbabwean nationalist movements to approach Cuba, the Soviet bloc, and China for military hardware and training. This ability to appeal to a variety of external patrons intensified power struggles within the nationalist groups themselves. Furthermore, the presence of Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) guerrilla training camps in Zambia and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) military bases in Mozambique meant that those countries were targeted for retaliatory action by the Rhodesian security forces. As a result, the Zambian and Mozambican economies suffered increasingly from disruption of trade and communications links. Support for the liberation struggle in neighbouring countries thus came at a high price for these newly independent states. To the political leadership in Lusaka, Maputo, and Luanda, however, the failure

4 See, e.g., M. Malan, *My Life with the SA Defence Force* (Pretoria: Protea Boekhuis, 2006), esp. ch. 11. The term 'total onslaught' was not new at this time, but was now given new significance: N. Stultz, 'South Africa in Angola and Namibia', in T. G. Weiss and J. G. Blight (eds.), *The Suffering Grass: Superpowers and Regional Conflict in Southern Africa and the Caribbean* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 86.

5 J. Frederikse, *None but Ourselves: Masses vs Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982); C. A. Ford, 'South African Foreign Policy since 1965: The Cases of Rhodesia and Namibia', DPhil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1991; Lowry, 'The Roots of Anti-Communism'.

6 J. Gaylard, record of meeting, 9 June 1976, Smith Papers: 4/002 (M), Cory Library, Rhodes University, South Africa.

of their Rhodesian/Zimbabwean comrades to achieve comparable independence represented a compromised victory for their own liberation struggles.[7]

Relationships within the socialist bloc were not as straightforward as its opponents often believed. Contrary to Pretoria's and Salisbury's perceptions, the Cubans had not acted at Moscow's behest in the Angolan conflict, although the Soviets had provided much of the transport, weaponry, and equipment by which the Cubans asserted their authority. With the triumph of the MPLA, the Kremlin was optimistic that Soviet influence in the region would grow as sponsor of the 'anti-imperialist struggle' and that more pro-Soviet regimes would come to power. The Communist Party of South Africa had had close relations with Moscow from its inception, and from the early 1960s the underground South African Communist Party (SACP) had forged new ties with the underground and exiled African National Congress (ANC). During the 1970s, the Soviets stepped up their military and logistical support for liberation in the region. From 1979, Moscow sent military advisers to Angola, who helped train the Angolan armed forces and the ANC's army, called Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), as well as those from Namibian liberation movements. By the mid-1980s, there were approximately 2,000 Soviet instructors in the Angolan theatre.[8] The Cuban commitment remained much larger: although Castro had originally intended to withdraw gradually all Cuban forces over a three-year period, the continuing regional conflict, and especially South African aggression in southern Angola, prompted increased Cuban provision of military advisers and training, in addition to the growing number of troops.

By contrast, the influence of Moscow's ideological rival for leadership of agrarian revolutionary nationalism, the People's Republic of China (PRC), waned in relative terms. This was in part because of the political convulsions in China following the death of Chairman Mao Zedong in 1976, but it was also

7 Though Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia sought to distance his country from both Washington and Moscow, he had tried to persuade the American government to share nuclear technology. See A. DeRoche, 'Non-Alignment on the Racial Frontier: Zambia and the USA 1964–1968', *Cold War History* 7, 2 (2007), 227–50. The Zambians were very unhappy when the Americans then sold high-grade enriched uranium to South Africa, and the Byrd Amendment permitted American purchases of Rhodesian chrome in defiance of UN-mandated economic sanctions.

8 V. Shubin, 'Moscow and ANC: Three Decades of Co-operation and Beyond', paper presented at Conference on International Anti-Apartheid Movements in South Africa's Freedom Struggle: Lessons for Today, Durban, 10–13 October 2004; V. Shubin, 'Unsung Heroes', *Cold War History*, 7, 2 (2007), 251–62. The South African government cited the capture of a Soviet soldier in Angola in 1981 as evidence of the threat from the USSR. See also Piero Gleijeses's chapter in volume II.

because Beijing often backed less successful nationalist movements. Driven by the Sino-Soviet split in its selection of regional clients, the PRC supported the relatively ineffectual Pan-Africanist Congress in the South African liberation struggle, the marginalised South West African National Union in SWA/Namibia, and the National Front for the Liberation of Angola (Frente Nacional de Libertacão de Angola, FNLA), one of the losing parties in the Angolan civil war. Although China stepped up aid to independent Zambia and Mozambique and to ZANU's guerrilla forces, Beijing's influence was more rhetorical than substantive, and far less than that of the Soviet Union and Cuba.[9]

For its part, the Ford administration continued to view southern African developments primarily through Cold War lenses. Washington realised that the failure of its covert activity in Angola had accentuated perceptions of US weakness, but both Henry Kissinger, who still regarded South Africa as the 'key policeman' in the region, and the South Africans were determined to try to prevent the USSR from embarking on further adventures. Their greatest fear, as Kissinger put it, was a 'total victory in Africa' for the Soviets.[10] To this end, the US secretary of state launched a diplomatic offensive in 1976 to achieve negotiated settlements to end the Rhodesian and Namibian conflicts. The United States and Britain hoped that, because of its diplomatic isolation following the Angolan debacle, South Africa would be susceptible to a joint approach on Rhodesia and vulnerable to discreet diplomatic pressure.

This was by no means certain, for the South African government felt betrayed, as Kissinger and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had encouraged South African intervention in Angola. The failure there had enormous implications for Pretoria's control over neighbouring SWA/Namibia. Prime Minister Vorster was seeking Western endorsement for his Turnhalle conference approach, which excluded the most important party, Sam Nujoma's South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO). As the MPLA consolidated its victory, SWAPO was able to establish its military bases in southern Angola, immediately north of Ovamboland, from which it drew most of its support. Its war against South African occupation of Namibia, which had begun in 1966, now began to escalate.[11]

9 This was in part influenced by events elsewhere, such as Chinese support for the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia. See S. F. Jackson, 'China's Third World Foreign Policy: The Case of Angola and Mozambique, 1961–1993', *China Quarterly*, 142 (1995), 388–422; I. Taylor, 'The Ambiguous Commitment: The People's Republic of China and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 18, 1 (2000), 91–106.

10 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 237–38.

11 CAB 1/1/6, 7 September 1976, South African National Archives, Pretoria.

At the same time, with the triumph of the pro-Marxist FRELIMO forces in Mozambique, the liberation war in neighbouring Rhodesia/Zimbabwe grew more intense. For Kissinger and the South Africans, resolving the crisis there became even more important than bringing about a Namibian settlement. From Pretoria's perspective, if radical nationalists came to power north of the Limpopo River, South Africa would lose a vital buffer state on its perimeter. Now isolated in the international community, and under considerable pressure at the United Nations over its presence in Namibia, the South African government sought to use a settlement of the Rhodesian issue as its path to international respectability. Despite the government's sense of betrayal, in Kissinger it appeared to have found a Western leader with whom it could work. In a major speech in Lusaka, Zambia, in April 1976, Kissinger promised that the United States 'would communicate to the Smith regime its view that a settlement leading to majority rule must be negotiated rapidly'. Like the South African government, he hoped that 'moderate' blacks could be found to take over in Rhodesia and Namibia. This, Kissinger believed, would meet international and internal pressure for majority rule and isolate the radical leadership of the liberation movements, with links to the USSR or the PRC. He was especially concerned to ensure that the Cubans did not intervene in the full-blown guerrilla war in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Were they to intervene there, he told the American president, 'Namibia is next and after that South Africa itself.'[12]

The continued presence of Cuban forces in Angola added to the shared sense of threat felt by the white minority regimes, but each had a different approach to resolving the challenge from radical African nationalism. Despite the appearance of white solidarity and their shared loathing of Communism, there was little love lost between South Africa's Afrikaner nationalist government and the Smith regime.[13] Vorster pressed Salisbury to compromise before Carter's anticipated election victory, as this might close a vital window of opportunity to achieve a settlement with preferred nationalist elements. South Africa's resolve to settle the Rhodesian issue meant that when Kissinger met Vorster in Europe in June 1976, the US secretary of state had little difficulty

12 National Security Council minutes, 7 April 1976, www.ford.utexas.edu/library/document/nscmin/760407.pdf, Gerald Ford Presidential Library.

13 Ford, 'South African Foreign Policy', 114, 119–20, 124. See also S. Onslow, 'South Africa and the Owen–Vance Plan', *South African Historical Journal*, 51 (2004), 130–58. To the South African government, the Rhodesian white community seemed tainted by its past close association with British imperialism, the historic foe of Afrikaner nationalism, and Rhodesian racial policies seemed fundamentally flawed.

in persuading the South African premier to withhold military supplies and crucial ammunition from Rhodesia. Kissinger and Vorster then pressured Smith into conceding a transition to majority rule within two years.[14] While hard-liners in the South African Cabinet remained profoundly concerned about the security implications for the republic of majority rule in Rhodesia, it was recognised that South Africa could not afford to continue to provide massive injections of aid and arms to the RF regime.[15]

The advent of President Carter saw a shift in US policy towards southern Africa. Driven by his particular moral agenda, Carter immediately terminated nuclear collaboration with South Africa, and his administration was to devote an inordinate amount of time and energy to the settlement of the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean and SWA/Namibian issues. Departing from Kissinger's free-wheeling style, Washington now worked closely with Britain to promote a Rhodesian/Zimbabwean all-party settlement from September 1977. South Africa, meanwhile, encouraged the RF government to pursue an internal settlement, meaning a 'home-grown' form of majority rule that would allow for continued white political and economic direction of the country and would exclude what was seen to be the Marxist-oriented Patriotic Front (PF) of ZAPU and ZANU. Smith's obduracy strengthened the determination of the nationalists to challenge him militarily, and they received increasingly active backing from their external patrons. By 1979, the Rhodesian security forces had lost control of most of the rural hinterland, and the Soviet Union was providing sophisticated weaponry to ZAPU guerrillas based in Zambia, while Cuban military instructors were training ZAPU recruits at Luso Boma in Angola. By 1979, the camp there contained 125 Cuban instructors, training approximately 6,000 ZAPU guerrillas at a time; more ZAPU fighters were based in refugee transit camps in Botswana. It was, however, ZANU's combatants, operating from neighbouring Mozambique and using Maoist techniques of infiltration and indoctrination, who proved much more successful than ZAPU's fighters in penetrating Rhodesia/Zimbabwe.

Carter also tried to use multilateral diplomacy to resolve the Namibian issue, but there, too, failure to secure a swift transition to majority rule resulted in an escalation of violence. SWAPO relied on the Soviet bloc for its arms, and from 1976 Cuban instructors helped train its military wing in Angola. SWAPO's

14 See S. Onslow, '"We Must Gain Time": South Africa, Rhodesia and the Kissinger Initiative of 1976', *South African Historical Journal*, 56 (2006), 123–53.

15 For some in the South African security forces, the Rhodesian conflict was a useful theatre in which to refine counter-insurgency techniques and even to test chemical and biological weapons.

Lusaka congress that year adopted a political programme that spoke of the goal of 'scientific socialism', and the organisation began planning to move its headquarters from Zambia to Marxist Angola.[16] The Carter administration took the lead in forming a Western Contact Group, comprising representatives of the five Western countries then members of the Security Council, to discuss with the South African government and SWAPO how to reach a settlement to end the conflict. The Contact Group told Vorster to abandon his Turnhalle scheme because it did not include SWAPO, and subsequently produced a compromise plan for a transition to independence in Namibia. This called for an election supervised by the UN and a continued South African administration until independence.

Although the military/intelligence establishment in Pretoria, which was increasingly dominating South African foreign policy, disliked the idea of a UN-supervised election that might bring SWAPO to power, the South African Cabinet accepted the compromise plan in April 1978.[17] Despite the South African Defence Force (SADF) raid on the SWAPO camp at Cassinga in southern Angola on 4 May 1978, in which over 600 people were killed, pressure from the front-line states – Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Angola, and Botswana – induced the reluctant SWAPO leadership to agree to the plan in July. It was then embodied in UN Security Council Resolution 435 of September 1978, which the USSR did not veto because the proposed settlement had African support.

Hopes that the Western powers had successfully arranged a Namibian transition to democracy were, however, soon dashed. As soon as details emerged of how the UN intended to implement the plan, the South African government began the stalling tactics that would delay Namibian independence for another decade. As in the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean case, the South Africans were not prepared to see their preferred successor competing against its arch-opponents through the ballot box. Pretoria would not accept that Nujoma was in the mould of Samora Machel of Mozambique – a pragmatic nationalist who wanted independence above all and who was no Soviet puppet.

Cold War fixations became increasingly entrenched in South Africa in the latter half of the 1970s. The major Soviet/Cuban intervention in Ethiopia in 1977–78 was misinterpreted as a possible precedent for intervention in the

16 For SWAPO's ideology, see especially L. Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia* (Basel: Schlettwein Publishing, 1998). The headquarters moved in 1979.

17 See Westad, *Global Cold War*, 283–84.

south of the continent.[18] Although Moscow was growing somewhat disenchanted with intervention in the Third World, the South African government, lacking access to accurate intelligence, continued to believe in a total onslaught orchestrated from the Kremlin.[19] In this distorted world-view, South Africa was a prime target of Soviet designs – a misperception strengthened by the fact that the ANC, in exile, strongly influenced by the SACP, was committed to armed struggle to overthrow the South African state.

In an attempt to counter the seemingly all-encompassing Soviet threat, Vorster's successor as prime minister, P. W. Botha, held out a vision of a neutral 'constellation' of anti-Communist states in southern Africa. This was explicitly designed to set South Africa apart from both East and West. South Africa also continued to explore the idea of collaboration with authoritarian, anti-Communist states in Latin America, while at the same time presenting itself as the last redoubt of Western capitalism in southern Africa against the advancing tide of Communist-inspired radical African nationalism.

Despite fears that the Rhodesian imbroglio would deepen, the decade ended with a surprisingly swift Rhodesian settlement. After both the British Labour government and the Carter administration had refused to accept the internal settlement of 1978 which excluded the Patriotic Front, the new British prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, was persuaded by her foreign secretary, Peter Carrington, of the vital necessity to include the PF in negotiations. Carrington then brought the all-party negotiations at Lancaster House to a successful conclusion in December 1979. Machel exerted crucial pressure on ZANU leader Robert Mugabe both to attend the conference and to accept the outcome. It now seems likely that the United States and Sir 'Sonny' Ramphal, secretary general to the Commonwealth, helped behind the scenes on the land issue.[20] Thatcher herself was persuaded that the white-led Rhodesian security forces would retain ultimate authority and that a moderate black government would be elected, a conviction shared in Pretoria. In April 1980, Zimbabwe attained internationally recognised independence after an election supervised by Britain and the Commonwealth. Despite the South African and British governments' sense of shock when Mugabe swept to victory at the polls,

18 See *ibid*.

19 Under Reagan, close ties were to develop between South African military intelligence and the CIA. Much of the story of intelligence co-operation remains unclear, but see J. Sanders, *Apartheid's Friends: The Rise and Fall of South Africa's Secret Service* (London: John Murray, 2006).

20 Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon Schuster, 1983), and private information.

Mugabe's conciliatory rhetoric on assuming power, his apparent willingness to co-operate with the white-dominated business community, and the effective postponement of radical land reform all seemed to suggest that Zimbabwe could become a successful multi-racial, pluralistic capitalist state.[21] At the start, it was hoped that a stable and prosperous Zimbabwe would encourage gradual change in South Africa. In the view of Richard Moose, the US assistant secretary for African affairs, the fact that Zimbabwe's transition to independence was the product of a negotiated settlement brokered by Britain, and not a military victory, was 'the greatest reverse the Russians have suffered in Africa for years'.[22] Much of this was, in reality, the West being purblind in the context of the Cold War, for Mugabe continued to use violence to achieve political goals in independent Zimbabwe.

1980–1985

Although the prospects of peace in southern Africa initially appeared brighter at the start of the 1980s, thanks to the Zimbabwe settlement, much of this period was a time of growing militancy, violence, and repression of dissent in the region. The South African government remained fixated by the perceived threat from the USSR and its regional proxies. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, although conceived in Moscow as a defensive measure, had seemed to the increasingly embattled white minority regime in South Africa to be the 'ultimate proof of [Soviet] aggressive intent'.[23] Pretoria's world-view was to find strong support from the Reagan administration as well as from Thatcher, in the context of renewed international tension between East and West. This effectively gave South Africa an international protective shield.[24]

Although Mugabe's declaration of political support for the South African liberation movements stopped short of permitting the establishment of ANC forward bases inside Zimbabwe, the South African government remained

21 David Blair, *Degrees in Violence: Robert Mugabe and the Struggle for Power in Zimbabwe* (London: Continuum, 2003); Stephen Chan, *Robert Mugabe: A Political Life* (London: IB Tauris, 2002). Washington provided a three-year aid package of $225 million, and in 1981 Zimbabwe was pledged a further $665 million by the international community.

22 *Christian Science Monitor* (weekly edition), 28 April 1980, cited in Adrian Guelke, 'Southern Africa and the Superpowers', *International Affairs*, 56., 4 (Autumn 1980), 648. The new Zimbabwean state did not permit the USSR to establish an embassy in Harare until 1981.

23 Westad, *Global Cold War*, 322.

24 Roger Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States 1961–1994* (London: IB Tauris, 2005), 105–06.

profoundly suspicious of his ideological agenda.[25] Furthermore, Mugabe's victory had undermined the South African government's hopes to create a constellation of client states on its perimeter. Now intent on ensuring a weak and fractured Zimbabwe which would be in no position to foment further unrest within South Africa, Pretoria began to recruit former Rhodesian military personnel and created a network of informants within the Zimbabwe police, armed forces, and intelligence community. A campaign of sabotage and assassination was initiated, targeting Zimbabwean and exiled ANC officials, as part of an anti-Communist counter-insurgency strategy. South Africa also assumed responsibility for the military and financial support of the Mozambique National Resistance (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana, RENAMO), a dissident militia originally created and funded by Rhodesian intelligence in 1976 to destabilise the Marxist Mozambican government. Working through RENAMO, South Africa deliberately stoked the civil war inside Mozambique, which was to last until 1992. In southern Angola, the South African military gave massive support to build up the rebel and anti-SWAPO Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, UNITA), in another effort to keep the black African radical challenge as far as possible from South Africa's own borders.

Zimbabwean independence inadvertently delayed Namibia's own attainment of majority rule. Mugabe's victory suggested to the Botha government that SWAPO would win a Namibian election, and South African determination to prevent this outcome helped to ensure there would be no such settlement in the early 1980s. The South African minister of foreign affairs told Chester Crocker, the US assistant secretary of state for African affairs, in 1981 that South Africa wanted the United States 'to stop Soviet gains ... SWAPO's people are indoctrinated in Marxism every day ... [the South African government]'s bottom line is no Moscow flag in Windhoek'. The South African minister of defence was adamant that South Africa could not allow a SWAPO election victory or the presence of Soviet/Cuban troops at Walvis Bay.[26] SWAPO's political programme enabled Pretoria to present the conflict as one between a party intent on establishing a Communist dictatorship and an occupation regime wishing to bring Namibia to independence as a

25 There remained an undercurrent of tension between ZANU-PF (the name ZANU acquired as the PF broke up) and the ANC, for the ANC had been linked to ZAPU. In the Unity Accord of 1987, ZANU-PF formally merged with ZAPU.

26 The transcript of the meeting between C. Crocker, P. W. Botha and M. Malan, leaked by a State Department official, is in B. Wood (ed.), *Namibia, 1884–1984: Readings on Namibia's History and Society* (London: Namibia Support Committee, 1988), esp. 705.

liberal multi-party democracy.[27] But Crocker, who worked tirelessly to try to settle the Namibian issue, albeit on American terms, drew a clear distinction between the pragmatic Marxist regime in Mozambique and the Cuban-backed regime in Angola. He agreed with the South African government that 'Soviet domination [was] a danger', but added that he believed the 'best way to avoid that danger [was] to get Namibian issue behind us'.[28] He pointed out that any government of an independent Namibia would be so economically dependent on South Africa that it would not be able to support the armed struggle against the apartheid state.

For Reagan, the prime goal was to extricate the Cuban troops from neighbouring Angola. In 1982, the CIA predicted that, even if SWAPO and Angola were to accept Western plans for a Namibian settlement, 'the Soviets [will] seek to fuel tensions and suspicions to ensure that the final accord is reached in an atmosphere of antagonism and distrust . . . The Soviets would hope that, in such an environment, the Namibian Government would turn to the USSR for support.'[29] But the USSR did not interfere when the Western Contact Group in 1982 formulated a set of constitutional principles for Namibia and secured SWAPO's acceptance of them. The Contact Group hoped to re-assure the South Africans that an independent Namibia would be a pluralistic and liberal-democratic state. The Soviets did not expect this to succeed, especially in the light of the continued South African raids into southern Angola on SWAPO bases. The Reagan administration refused to support resolutions at the UN condemning South Africa's raids, on the grounds that SWAPO was engaged in violence against the occupation regime. When one of these raids in early 1983 led to fierce clashes between the SADF and the Angolan army, the Soviet Union told the South African government bluntly that it would not allow the MPLA regime to collapse.

Superpower rivalry continued to influence the course of the liberation struggle in South Africa itself. Despite the continued existence of the main

27 L. Scholtz, 'The Namibian Border War: An Appraisal of the South African Strategy', *Scientia Militaria*, 44, 1 (2006), 34. SWAPO remained pragmatic in its search for an end to the South African occupation. A leading UN official commented that if Nujoma had met Marx in the street, he would not have recognised him: B. Urquhart, *A Life in Peace and War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1987), 198.

28 Wood (ed.), *Namibia, 1884–1984*, 706. See C. Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

29 National Intelligence Estimate, 'The Soviet Challenge to US Security Interests', 11 April 1982; see also 'Moscow and the Namibia Peace Process', Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, 7 April 1982, both at www.foia.ucia.gov.

pillars of apartheid, South Africa was viewed by the Reagan administration as a valuable ally which, for example, provided access to information on Soviet shipping movements around the Cape. A great deal of propaganda was generated about southern Africa as a source of essential strategic minerals for the West. It was widely believed that if the ANC came to power in South Africa, it would introduce a pro-Soviet socialist system. For its part, the Soviet Union believed that in giving the ANC and SWAPO military support it was on the right side of history, for these liberation movements were destined to come to power. The Soviets had no illusions, however, that once in power such organisations would be firmly controlled by Moscow, despite the influence of members of the SACP in the ANC in exile.

Soviet policy elsewhere in the region was far from an unmitigated success. Angola and Mozambique were economic disasters, and in both countries the Soviets had found themselves sucked into civil wars. In 1981, the Soviet bloc's economic community refused entry to Mozambique because it could not afford the aid that entry would entail, and the pragmatic Machel then began a slow process of reconciliation with the United States, hoping to attract Western aid instead. American pressure helped produce the Nkomati Accord, signed between Machel and Botha in March 1984, and named after the border town where the signing took place. In the accord, South Africa agreed to sever support for RENAMO's destabilisation of Mozambique, and Mozambique promised that it would not allow the ANC to operate against South Africa from its territory. This followed the US-brokered Lusaka Accord the previous month between Angola and South Africa, which provided for a withdrawal of South African forces from southern Angola. In return, the Angolans promised to prevent SWAPO moving into the area vacated by the South Africans.

While these agreements showed the strict limits of Soviet influence, a series of events in 1985 seemed to signal that Cold War-related conflict in the region was set to continue. The Lusaka Accord fell apart when the Angolans failed to prevent SWAPO operating from southern Angola, and the SADF did not honour the Nkomati Accord. The Cabinda incident of May 1985, in which a South African reconnaissance unit was discovered by the Angolans while it was preparing to blow up American-owned oil-storage facilities in northern Angola, demonstrated the continued determination of Pretoria to pursue a counter-insurgency strategy. As part of its agenda actively to assist counter-revolutionary groups after the repeal of the Clark Amendment (which expressly forbade such support) in July 1985, the US Department of Defense gave UNITA sophisticated weaponry, including Stinger anti-aircraft

missiles.[30] While the United States saw this as countering Soviet attempts to destabilise the region, American support for UNITA helped escalate the war in southern Angola. Though there were now growing doubts in Moscow about Soviet involvement in the region, American assistance to UNITA made it more difficult for the USSR to find a way to extricate itself. With little prospect of persuading the Cubans to leave Angola, given the continuing South African raids, there appeared to be no hope of Namibia becoming independent.

As South Africa itself became engulfed from 1984 in the Township Revolt – another internal uprising and the most serious challenge the apartheid regime had faced – it was difficult for the Reagan administration to argue that its policy of 'constructive engagement' with the South African government had achieved anything significant in encouraging a peaceful transition to political reform.[31] Yet, for all the apparent impasse in the region, and escalating conflict and brutality, the next five years saw an extraordinary series of developments. These would break the log-jam of entrenched animosity and confrontation and bring the story of Cold War intervention in the region to an end.

The winding down of the Cold War

The reverberative effect of the dramatic change in the climate of superpower relations that now took place was increasingly evident in southern Africa. As the intensification in the Cold War in the early 1980s had helped sustain apartheid, so the easing of international tensions played an equally important role in its eventual collapse. The new superpower rapprochement helped produce both Namibian independence and political transformation in South Africa itself.

These developments were due in large part to the 'new political thinking' in the USSR. The Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, realised that liberation forces sought national independence as much, if not more, than socialism, and that South Africa and the United States remained extremely powerful in the region. He and his Politburo allies believed that misconceived policies in

30 UNITA received more than $250 million in aid from the United States between 1986 and 1990: Westad, *Global Cold War*, 391. In building up UNITA, South Africa sought to tie down both SWAPO and the ANC in Angola.

31 Crocker and others pointed to the new constitution of 1984 as an important departure from apartheid, but its introduction coincided with the outbreak of the Township Revolt. The abolition of the pass laws, another reform cited by the proponents of constructive engagement as evidence of the success of the policy, was forced on the government by the breakdown of the system of enforcing those laws.

the Third World had been responsible for Soviet failures.[32] While not initially prepared to cut and run, the Soviet leadership wished to resolve conflicts so that the USSR could withdraw without loss of prestige, reduce the substantial burden of financial and military support, and concentrate on domestic problems. In discussions with Reagan at the Reykjavik summit in October 1986, Gorbachev disavowed any Soviet ambitions in southern Africa.[33] Just as the intervention in Afghanistan now seemed to the Soviets to have been a mistake, so too did continuation of the massive support that had been given to Angola. At a meeting of the Central Committee in December 1986, Gorbachev announced both Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the reduction of support for Angola. He informed his colleagues that he was prepared to make compromises in the Third World to improve relations with the United States and that he wanted to use Soviet leverage to resolve conflicts by peaceful means.[34] However, this did not translate into an immediate reduction in Soviet assistance to Angola: in 1987, the USSR supplied another $1 billion of arms in response to the US weaponry sent to UNITA. On Soviet advice, and backed by Soviet weaponry, the MPLA government launched a major offensive against UNITA.

The Soviets' reassessment of their policy in southern Africa was matched by a growing realisation by the Reagan administration – now reverting to Carter's interpretation – that the ANC and SWAPO were first and foremost nationalist movements, influenced by, but not under the control of, left-wing forces. The United States now began to accept that there was no Soviet master plan to control all of southern Africa, and that the Soviets wanted to find ways to reduce their assistance to liberation movements. Like others in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the Soviet security and intelligence agency, the KGB, began to explore the idea of a negotiated

32 This shift in Soviet thinking away from fostering the armed liberation struggle was reflected in the appointment of the career diplomat and long-serving Soviet ambassador to Washington, Anatolii Dobrynin, as head of the International Department.

33 See Westad, 372, and G. Evans, 'The Great Simplifier: The Cold War and Southern Africa, 1948–1994', in A. Dodson (ed.), *Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Cold War* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 139.

34 A. Adamishin, *Beloe solntse Angoly* [White Sun of Angola] (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001). See V. Shubin and A. Tokarev, 'War in Angola: A Soviet Dimension', *Review of African Political Economy*, 90 (2001), 607–18. To say, as Gennadii Gerasimov did, that all Angola and Afghanistan had in common was the letter 'A' was wrong: V. Shubin, *ANC: The View from Moscow* (Bellville, South Africa: Mayibuye Books, 1999), 325. Gerasimov said this in the context of the rejection of an offer by the South African minister of defence in March 1988 of a bilateral agreement with the USSR over Angola. That offer reflected a new South African attitude towards the USSR, even if the 'bear' was not yet seen to be a 'teddy' (A. Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa* (London: Ballantine, 1990), 363.

settlement in South Africa,[35] Secretary of State George Shultz met Oliver Tambo, the ANC leader, against the background of rumours that the jailed Nelson Mandela was talking to officials of the South African government.

These international developments were mirrored by important developments within the ANC itself. In September 1985, the exiled ANC leadership first held talks in Zambia with leading South African businessmen, and these and subsequent discussions helped shift the ANC's attitude to the role of the market. With Moscow's change of stance from support for armed struggle to negotiated settlements, and in the light of the reality of the minimal impact of its armed struggle on the resolve and military capabilities of the apartheid state, the ANC began to play down its rhetorical emphasis on the role of armed struggle.

As the Cold War started to wind down, both superpowers began to seek compromise positions. It was, however, a second large-scale Cuban intervention that tipped the balance towards accelerated change in Namibia and South Africa itself. The major offensive launched by the Angolan army against UNITA in September 1987 was routed by a South African counter-attack. In response, Castro sent 15,000 of his best troops to Cuito Cuanavale in southern Angola. The successful defence of the town and the subsequent rapid advance of a Cuban force of approximately 13,000 men to the Namibian border fundamentally altered the military balance of power in southern Angola/northern Namibia. The Cuban-led offensive in Angola was a calculated risk, given the open secret of South Africa's nuclear arsenal. As had been the case in 1975, the Cubans had not consulted Moscow in advance. The United States played its part in bringing South Africa to the conference table by threatening to withhold satellite information on Cuban troop movements in Angola.[36] As the military setback at Cuito Cuanavale greatly weakened the influence of the 'securocrats' in Pretoria, and raised the possibility that the Cubans might not stop their advance southwards at the Namibian border, the South Africans agreed to negotiate in May 1988. Through Crocker's mediation, Angola, Cuba, and South Africa held a series of meetings in a variety of different cities. For their part, the Soviets gave cautious encouragement to Cuba and Angola to negotiate an agreement.[37] These

35 Other elements in the Soviet bureaucracy remained committed to helping the ANC gain power by any means possible: Chris Saunders interview with Irina Filatova, Soviet specialist, Cape Town, July 2006.

36 Chris Saunders interview with Robert Frasure, assistant to Chester Crocker, Washington, DC, May 1990.

37 E.g., *Cape Times*, 26 June 1988; Chris Saunders interview with Vladillen Vasev, Africa specialist in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Moscow, June 1996.

discussions culminated in the Angola/Namibia Accords signed in New York in December 1988 which initiated the process leading to the independence of Namibia and the withdrawal of all Cuban troops from Angola. In the aftermath of the signing of the accords, the United States and the Soviet Union were to work closely together as members of a joint commission to oversee the implementation of the accords.

Although the accords did not specify that the ANC bases inside Angola had to be dismantled, this was part of the agreement. The loss of these bases further weakened the residual hard-line stance of the ANC. With the disintegration of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe later in 1989, and the disappearance of its patrons there, the ANC's shift to accept a mixed economy, property rights, and a liberal democratic multi-party system accelerated.[38] Without the Angola/Namibia agreement, the subsequent relatively peaceful election campaign, and the knowledge that Namibia would become independent with a liberal-democratic constitution, President F. W. de Klerk would not have been able to announce, at the opening of the South African Parliament on 2 February 1990, that the ANC, the SACP, and other organisations were to be legalised, and that negotiations with Mandela and the ANC would begin.

De Klerk himself stressed the importance of the events in Eastern Europe in his historic speech.[39] To many South Africans, the fall of the Berlin Wall seemed to symbolise the very collapse of Communism itself, and the fear of Communism triumphing in southern Africa rapidly evaporated. Though apartheid ended chiefly because of growing internal resistance, which gave substance to the notion that the country was becoming ungovernable, the end of the Cold War and the end of apartheid were inextricably linked.[40]

The Cold War and black liberation

The Cold War played a crucial role in the transition in the region from colonial and white minority rule to black majority rule. While the Cold

38 Douglas Anglin, 'Southern African Responses to East European Developments', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28, 3 (1990), 431–55. Although the ANC had traditionally looked to Moscow for guidance and support, China's gradual transformation under Deng Xiaoping towards a managed market economy added credence to the model of modified socialism.

39 See F. W. de Klerk, *The Last Trek – A New Beginning. The Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1988), A. Guelke, 'The Impact of the End of the Cold War on the South African Transition', and J. Daniel, 'A Response to Guelke: The Cold War Factor in the South African Transition', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 14, 1 (1996), 101–04.

40 The connection between the ending of the Cold War and the end of apartheid was 'secondary and tactical rather than primary and strategic': Evans, 'Great Simplifier', 148–49.

War brought stability in Europe, it made for instability and an increasingly 'hot' war in southern Africa, including the threat of a more serious confrontation, which had it eventuated, say between the Cubans and the South Africans in 1988, might have sucked in the superpowers. The white regimes exploited the clash between the two great power ideological rivals to preserve power and to justify their actions against the liberation movements. Then, the easing of international tensions encouraged Pretoria to negotiate settlements in which, through a bargaining process, it hoped to win major concessions ensuring protection of property rights and continued political influence. Although the Soviets, like successive American administrations, acted opportunistically and largely reactively, it was strongly believed in Washington, Pretoria, and Salisbury that Moscow aimed to take over the region, a belief that buttressed the white minority regimes. While, with hindsight, it is evident that such perceptions bore little relation to reality, at the time they profoundly shaped policies and actions. While the differing racial policies of South Africa and Rhodesia were condemned by the West, both countries remained closely integrated in the West's intelligence network, and the economies of both remained assimilated in the international economy, despite boycotts and sanctions, in large part because of their strategic minerals.

In particular, the Cold War stimulated and shaped the armed struggles in the region. A prime example of this was the way in which the United States armed UNITA as an opponent of the Cuban- and Soviet-backed MPLA. Without the massive amounts of arms and material provided by the USSR, both to the new black governments and to the liberation forces, the armed struggles would have been much smaller in scale and less successful. Cuba's contribution to the battle against colonialism and apartheid was particularly important in terms of military personnel. While Cuba was perceived in Washington to be acting as Moscow's stooge, the Castro regime was motivated by its own highly developed sense of historic, cultural, and ideological solidarity with its African nationalist anti-imperialist comrades. By the time the last Cuban troops left Angola in 1991, 380,000 Cuban combatants and 70,000 civilian aid workers had gone to southern Africa, the great bulk to Angola.[41]

In addition to the cycle of superpower intervention and reaction, a wide range of actors and institutions played secondary but still important roles. These included the Non-Aligned Movement, which supported liberation struggles while distancing itself from superpower rivalries expressly to

41 Edward George, *The Cuban Intervention in Angola, 1965–1991: From Che Guevara to Cuito Cuanavale* (London: Frank Cass, 2005), 268.

underpin national independence, and the Organisation of African Unity. UN bodies also frequently reflected regional Cold War tensions. Most importantly, the Cold War helped shape the behaviour of the Security Council, where superpower vetoes circumscribed action.[42] Organisations, such as the Commonwealth, were similarly affected by Cold War concerns. So too were the actions of individual European governments that sought to stand apart from the ideological conflict. Scandinavian governments went out of their way to emphasise their neutralist credentials when aiding liberation in southern Africa through education and political support for transition to black majority rule.

The Cold War also had broad and enduring societal consequences for the region. It profoundly influenced the provision and consumption of information via television and radio. The ideological struggle also had an insidious corrupting impact upon the role of opposition in political debate. Government repression of dissent was legitimated, and progress towards majority rule delayed. The militarisation of the liberation struggles meant resistance was organised on hierarchical lines, which deeply affected social and gender relationships. The conflict mentality engendered lasted into the post-independence era. Once nationalist movements achieved formal independence, they were often highly suspicious of domestic political criticism. Namibia and South Africa gained remarkably liberal constitutions in the early 1990s, but the Cold War environment left compromised post-independence transitions to democracy in the southern African region.[43] The assertion of 'victors' history' by particular successful liberation movements has tended to distort understanding of how and why majority rule was achieved. It has also eroded political debate, a vital element of a tolerant democratic society. In such ways, the Cold War has left lasting legacies in the region.

42 On the Non-Aligned Movement, see, for example, A. W. Singham and S. Hine, *Namibian Independence: A Global Responsibility* (Westport, CT: L. Hill, 1985); on the UN, see, for example, United Nations, *The United Nations and Apartheid, 1948–1994* (New York: United Nations, c. 1994).

43 See Henning Melber, 'Liberation and Democracy: Cases from Southern Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 21, 2 (2003), 149–53.