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MOSCOW'S STRATEGY IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: A COUNTRY BY COUNTRY REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The crisis in southern Africa once again has captured international attention. Domestic violence in South Africa, anti-communist insurgencies in Angola and Mozambique, a coup in Lesotho, bombings by communist guerrillas in South Africa, diplomatic insults in Zimbabwe, cross-border preemptive strikes by South African forces--all vie for the attention of United States policy makers.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin must be delighted. The Soviet drive for control in southern Africa that began in the early 1960s and reached its peak in the mid-1970s--when communist regimes in Angola and Mozambique signed Treaties of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR--once again is underway. Although in the early 1980s Moscow backed off, it recently stepped up support for its client regimes in Angola and Mozambique, and for pro-Soviet insurgents in South Africa and South West Africa. Further, Moscow has been moving closer to the governments of Botswana, Lesotho, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. And, with a strategy that is the key to the entire region, Moscow long has been working for the destabilization of South Africa.

The stakes for the United States are high. The U.S. defense industry depends on critical strategic minerals imported from southern Africa. Without access to those minerals, the only source for many of them would be the Soviet Union. The Cape of Good Hope shipping route, moreover, is one of the West's vital trade routes: the 25,000 ships

that navigate it annually carry 90 percent of Western Europe's oil and 70 percent of its strategic minerals.¹ Clearly, the U.S. cannot afford to allow Moscow to pursue its regional goals unchallenged.

SOVIET OBJECTIVES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

There are two key Soviet goals in southern Africa. The first was stated by the late Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, when he admitted, "Our aim is to gain control of the two great treasure houses on which the West depends--the energy treasure house of the Persian Gulf and the mineral treasure house of central and southern Africa."² The second Soviet interest in southern Africa, as it is in other peripheral areas of the Third World, is to gain a geostrategic advantage in the region to maximize its global influence.³ Specifically, Soviet aims in southern Africa are:

- o To expand Soviet influence while reducing U.S. and Chinese influence.
- o To establish Soviet control over the "cordon" states--Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and South West Africa--to surround South Africa with pro-Soviet nations.
- o To gain access to air and naval facilities in littoral states of southern Africa to enhance Soviet power projection capabilities.
- o To deny Western access to the strategic minerals of South Africa.

Moscow pursues its objectives by arming its clients with military hardware ranging from fighter aircraft and sophisticated air defense systems to heavy tanks and armored personnel carriers. In most cases, Soviet advisers man the equipment and train host nation forces in its use. Depending on the particular government and the strength of its ties to the Soviets, security assistance also may include the provision of security experts to establish a Soviet-style state

1. South Africa, for example, holds 86 percent of the world's platinum group metals reserves, 64 percent of its vanadium, 83 percent of its chrome ore, and 48 percent of its manganese ore. See Adm. Robert J. Hanks, Southern Africa and Western Security (Cambridge: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, 1983), p. 12.

2. Cited in Richard Nixon, The Real War (New York: Warner Books, 1980), p. 23.

3. See Dr. Peter Vanneman, testimony, "The Role of the Soviet Union, Cuba, and East Germany in Fomenting Terrorism in Southern Africa," Hearings before the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism of the Judiciary Committee of the U.S. Senate, 97th Congress, 2nd Session, March 22, 24, 25, 29, and 31, 1982, Volume 1, pp. 28-49.

security system. In Angola, military assistance even includes Soviet bloc combat forces and command personnel to bolster the regime.

Moscow also uses such political weapons as foreign propaganda, international front organizations, and activities within international and regional organizations.⁴ Through these, the Soviets seek to manipulate public opinion in the target country and in the international community to create the conditions in which favorable outcomes are likely.

SOVIET EXPANSION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA: 1983-1986

In mid-1983 the Kremlin began escalating its activities in southern Africa. In South Africa and South West Africa (or Namibia) Moscow has been assisting rebels seeking the overthrow of an established pro-Western government. In Angola and Mozambique, Moscow helps the pro-Soviet regimes struggling against anti-communist national liberation movements. And in non-aligned Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Lesotho, Moscow is attempting to increase its influence, both overtly and covertly.

South Africa

The Soviet campaign to destabilize South Africa until recently was a relatively low priority for Kremlin strategists. For decades it has depended on the alliance between the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the African National Congress (ANC). The SACP was one of the first communist parties created by Lenin's Comintern. As such, it has always been one of the Third World's most pro-Moscow communist parties. The ANC, on the other hand, originally was founded in 1912 as a nationalist organization dedicated to the creation of a multiracial government in South Africa. It was not until immediately after World War II that the ANC was, for all intents and purposes, co-opted by the SACP.⁵

In 1960, the ANC was outlawed by the South African government. The following year, the organization adopted a strategy of violent revolution and formed a military wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe--"Spear of

4. For a fuller discussion of Soviet political warfare techniques, see Richard Shultz, "Recent Regional Patterns," in Uri Ra'anana, et al., Hydra of Carnage: International Linkages of Terrorism: The Witnesses Speak (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington Books, 1986), pp. 95-124.

5. See, for example, "Soviet, East German and Cuban Involvement in Fomenting Terrorism in Southern Africa," Report of the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism to the Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, 97th Congress, 2nd Session, November 1982.

the Nation" in the Zulu language. It began to send its militants to Soviet bloc countries for training. At present, there are an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 trained ANC guerrillas.⁶

Since the early 1960s, the ANC's trained guerrillas have been conducting a campaign of terror in South Africa. Its strategy is to "make the country ungovernable" by radicalizing the townships. ANC targets are, for the most part, moderate blacks--especially policemen, city council members, and businessmen--who are deemed "collaborators" with the government. By killing enough of them, the ANC hopes to scare away all moderate blacks from any attempt to work with the government for peaceful change.

One of the key Soviet tactics for political destabilization is formation of a broad opposition front in which communists persuade non-communists to jointly oppose a regime. The front in South Africa was formed in August 1983. Calling itself the United Democratic Front (UDF), it chose as its presidents three well-known ANC supporters: Albertina Sisulu, Oscar Mpetha, and Archie Gumede.⁷

Soviet bloc delegates, meanwhile, are active in regional and international organizations, attempting to isolate the South African government. The immediate goal of this effort is international economic sanctions.

Thus, the Soviet strategy for South Africa seems well on track. On the military side, ANC-led mobs are radicalizing the townships and terrorizing moderate blacks. On the political side, internal agitation is being led by a newly created ANC front organization. And on the diplomatic side, the Kremlin has been successful in pushing for international sanctions against South Africa.

South West Africa

The South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) is Moscow's chosen instrument for the destabilization of Namibia. Formed in 1960 to challenge Pretoria's control over South West Africa, SWAPO in 1962

6. The low figure comes from a conversation with Dr. Jan DuPlessis, a South African authority on the ANC, on May 19, 1986; the higher figure is quoted by Dr. Tom Lodge, another South African expert on the ANC, cited in Alan Cowell, "Wild Card in South Africa: Communist Party," The New York Times, June 26, 1986.

7. Joseph Lelyveld, "Foes of Apartheid Hold Large Rally," The New York Times, August 22, 1983, p. A11. Though the UDF denies that it is a front for the ANC, its leaders have been unable to point to a single instance in which there has not been a convergence of policy views between the ANC and the UDF. Moreover, even the respected British journal The Economist refers to the UDF as the "legal wing" of the ANC. The Economist, May 10, 1986, p. 11.

adopted a strategy of revolutionary violence. The guerrilla wing, known as the Namibian People's Liberation Army (PLAN), operates in northern Namibia from bases in southern Angola. After the United Nations in 1973 recognized SWAPO as the "sole legitimate representative of the Namibian people," Moscow stepped up its support for SWAPO, increasing training for SWAPO cadres and deliveries of military hardware.

Since then, Soviet policy on South West Africa has focused on: 1) supporting SWAPO in its terrorist campaign to destabilize the country; and 2) positioning itself as SWAPO's champion in international organizations.

So far, however, the combined operations of the South African Defense Forces (SADF) and the South West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF) have kept the SWAPO insurgency in check. The installation of the multi-racial Transitional Government of National Unity in Windhoek in June 1985 removed a purported justification for SWAPO violence. SWAPO cadres are now being used more in support of Soviet, Cuban, and Angolan forces operating against UNITA in southeastern Angola than they are in fomenting violence in South West Africa.

Lesotho

The landlocked Kingdom of Lesotho is totally surrounded by South Africa. A pro-Soviet underground communist party was formed there in 1962 and has provided aid for over 20 years to ANC militants on their way into and out of South Africa.

In September 1984 the Soviet campaign to woo Lesotho began in earnest. A delegation representing Lesotho's ruling Basotho National Party, led by the party secretary general and Lesotho foreign minister, Vincent Makhele, visited Moscow for talks with Soviet officials. In May 1985, Moscow named an ambassador for the first time with responsibility for just Lesotho.⁹ The Soviet embassy staff was enlarged, an almost certain indication that the Soviets have expanded KGB operations.¹⁰

Last December, Makhele again visited Moscow. There he signed a cultural and scientific cooperation accord and a technical and

8. Peter Vanneman, "Soviet Foreign Policy for Namibia: Some Considerations and Developments," Strategic Review, Institute for Strategic Studies of the University of Pretoria, November 1985, pp. 13-18.

9. Previously, the Soviet ambassador to Mozambique had doubled as the envoy to Lesotho.

10. Conversations with Western intelligence sources, September 13, October 2, December 18, 1985, and February 26, May 27, 28, and 29, 1986.

economic accord. Only the coup against the government of Chief Leboa Jonathan in January 1986 prevented the further consolidation of Soviet-Lesotho ties. This was a serious setback for Soviet aims in Lesotho.

Botswana

Because Botswana is one of Africa's few functioning democracies, and hence is relatively stable, the opportunities for Soviet influence are limited. Overt Soviet efforts in Botswana therefore concentrate on state-to-state relations. Moscow, for example, is attempting to increase arms sales to Botswana and last year made generous offers of military aid.¹¹

At the same time, Moscow seems to be expanding its covert operations in Botswana. Just four days after the new Soviet ambassador was posted to Lesotho last year, a new Soviet ambassador was posted to Botswana. The embassy staff then was enlarged. Of the 53 staff members, 28 have been identified as KGB and GRU intelligence officers.¹² Gaborone, the capital, has become such a staging area for ANC guerrillas that South African commandos struck at ANC facilities twice between June 1985 and May 1986.

Zambia

Though most observers believe that Zambia tilts West, it nevertheless is a key to Moscow's strategy for the region. Soviet activity in Zambia consists of a major military assistance program, efforts to transform the ruling United National Independence Party (UNIP) into a vanguard Marxist-Leninist party and support for the ANC, which has its headquarters in Lusaka, the Zambian capital.

From 1979-1983, the Soviet Union delivered \$180 million in arms to Zambia. These arms represented almost 70 percent of Zambia's total arms imports, which included MiG-21 fighter aircraft, tanks, armored personnel carriers, SA-3 missiles, and radar equipment. Some 500

11. For the period 1979-1983, the Soviet Union accounted for fully 50 percent of Botswana's arms imports. See U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), p. 131. These weapons included, among others, armored personnel carriers and SA-7 missiles. See above-cited conversations with Western intelligence sources.

12. The KGB is the Soviet national intelligence agency; the GRU is Soviet military intelligence. These figures come from the above-cited conversations with Western intelligence sources.

Soviet military personnel are in Zambia, training Zambian Defense Force troops in use and maintenance of the weapons.¹³

Formal Soviet Communist Party-UNIP ties were established in Lusaka in 1981.¹⁴ Since then, Soviet party delegations have visited Lusaka several times to help the UNIP become a vanguard Marxist-Leninist party. Reciprocal trips were made by UNIP delegations to Moscow.

Meanwhile, Zambia has been serving as ANC headquarters since early 1984. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Lusaka houses the largest Soviet embassy staff in the region. Employing 129 officials, including at least 25 KGB and GRU officers with diplomatic cover and another 50 without, the Soviets use Lusaka as the base for covert activities against South Africa. It is here that the military operations of the ANC are conceived and staged, with the help of Soviet military and intelligence personnel.¹⁵

Soviet strategy in Zambia typifies Moscow's short- and long-term considerations. In the short term, Lusaka provides a base for destabilizing South Africa; in the long term, Moscow aims at constructing a Zambian vanguard Marxist-Leninist ruling party, with tight links to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, a Soviet military assistance program ties the current government of Zambia to the Kremlin.

Zimbabwe

Relations between Zimbabwe and the Soviet Union were strained for a few years after the Zimbabwean revolution's victory in 1980. Zimbabwean Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, who is leader of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), had been backed during the insurgency by Beijing, while Moscow supported his principal rival, Joshua Nkomo.

As a self-proclaimed Marxist, however, who made no secret of his desire to create a one-party state in Zimbabwe, Mugabe was clearly a potential ally of Moscow.

The Kremlin push to intensify ties to Zimbabwe began in early 1984. That January, Zimbabwe and the USSR signed a trade and economic cooperation agreement. In February 1985 Zimbabwe sent Oswald Ndanga to Moscow as its first ambassador to the Soviet Union. At the same

13. See World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, *op. cit.*, p. 132. Other information comes from above-cited conversations with Western intelligence sources.

14. See "CPSU, Zambian Party Sign Plan for Interparty Ties," FBIS-USSR, May 1, 1981, p. J2.

15. See above-cited conversations with Western intelligence sources.

time, Soviet diplomatic presence in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, jumped from 48 to 62; among them are 18 KGB and GRU officers with diplomatic cover and 4 KGB officers without it.¹⁶

A major breakthrough for Soviet strategy was Mugabe's visit to Moscow last December. There he met with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, Soviet President Andrei Gromyko, Communist Party International Department chief Boris Ponomarev, and other top officials. He signed an economic and technical cooperation agreement and a Communist Party-ZANU cooperation agreement. It is widely believed that he discussed arms purchases with Konstantin Katushev, head of the Soviet Union's office which handles Third World arms sales. In fact, Western intelligence experts report that as early as September, Zimbabwe began receiving Soviet heavy weapons with the arrival of 20 T-54 tanks.¹⁷ With the conclusion of an economic and technical cooperation agreement, party-to-party ties, and a military assistance program, the Soviet effort to draw close to Zimbabwe seems to be succeeding.

Mozambique

From 1977 to 1984 Mozambique was one of the twin pillars, along with Angola, undergirding Soviet policy in southern Africa. The communist Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO), led by Samora Machel, had won control of the country from Portugal in 1975. Less than two years later, Machel signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR that calls for a close political and military relationship. Between 1975 and 1983, the Soviet Union sold Mozambique \$978 million worth of arms, accounting for over 75 percent of Mozambique's total arms imports for the period.¹⁸ In return, it appears, Mozambique gave the Soviets a base of operations for ANC guerrillas operating against South Africa and also port facilities for the Soviet Indian Ocean fleet.

Yet Mozambique also gives Moscow problems. In April 1977 a loose coalition of former FRELIMO militants and disaffected Mozambicans formed the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO). It began fighting the Machel regime for control of Mozambique.

16. See above-cited conversations with Western intelligence sources.

17. See above-cited conversations with Western intelligence sources. See also "Further Reportage on Mugabe Visit to Moscow," in FBIS-USSR December 3, 1985, pp. J1-6, "Further Reportage on Mugabe Visit to Moscow," FBIS-USSR December 4, 1985, pp. J1-7, and "More Reports on Mugabe Visit to Moscow," FBIS-USSR December 5, 1985, pp. J1-8.

18. See World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1985, op. cit., p. 131.

To staunch RENAMO's increasingly threatening activities throughout 1984, the Soviets intensified their military aid to Machel. Between September 1984 and August 1985, 20 T-55 tanks were shipped to Maputo, Mozambique's capital, bringing the total to 174; 85 armored personnel carriers also were shipped, bringing the total to 410. For the first time, heavy BM-24 and BM-21 multiple rocket launchers arrived in Mozambique.¹⁹

Despite this new aid from Moscow and troops from Zimbabwe, Machel has failed to suppress RENAMO. Since the start of this year, this national liberation movement has turned up its pressure on the Machel regime. This seems to be forcing Moscow to reassess Machel's future prospects and its continued relationship with his government. The future of Soviet-Mozambican ties thus is at a crossroad. The continuing success of RENAMO will play a large part in determining that future.

Angola

Soviet prestige is on the line more in Angola than anywhere else in Africa. It was only the massive Soviet airlift of Cuban troops and Soviet arms that gave the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) control of Luanda in 1975. Since then, the Soviet Union has sold Angola approximately \$4 billion worth of arms, including MiG-23 jets, MI-24 helicopters, and heavy T-62 tanks. At present, over 40,000 Soviet bloc military and security personnel are in Angola, keeping the MPLA regime in power. These forces include 35,000 Cuban combat troops, 1,500 Soviet military advisers, 3,000 North Korean advisers, and another 1,500 East German security advisers.

From its first day in power, however, the MPLA has been challenged by the freedom fighters of Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). When Savimbi began winning important battles in 1983--which since then has given him control of almost half of Angola--the Kremlin upgraded its arms for the MPLA. For the first time, Moscow sent T-62 tanks, MI-24 helicopter gunships and MiG-23 fighter aircraft to Angola.²⁰

Moscow-MPLA relations soured briefly in early 1984 when Angola signed the Lusaka Accord with South Africa. The agreement bound South Africa to pull its troops out of southern Angola in exchange for an MPLA promise not to allow the SWAPO insurgents to use Angola as a base for raids into South West Africa. Moscow did not like the deal, and

19. See above-cited conversations with Western intelligence sources.

20. See Peter Clement, "Moscow and Southern Africa," in Problems of Communism, March-April 1985, p. 34.

made its feelings clear to Angola. As a result of these strained relations, MPLA chief Jose Eduardo Dos Santos boycotted the February 1984 funeral of Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, and he omitted the Soviet Union from his itinerary when he visited Eastern Europe that August.²¹

By early 1985, however, relations seemed to be healed, possibly because of UNITA's military gains--which threatened the very existence of the MPLA regime. Soviet, Cuban, and Angolan consultations were held in Moscow that March. There plans apparently were made for a new offensive against UNITA. Soviet arms continued to flow into Angola, so that by last summer, Angolan government forces boasted a total of almost 500 tanks, over 100 fighter aircraft, and over 70 helicopters.²²

When the MPLA launched its offensive in late July, Soviet involvement was greater than ever. For the first time, Soviet officers took operational control of troops down to the battalion--and possibly even platoon--level.²³ Soviet and Cuban pilots flew the ground support combat missions.

The offensive was largely successful in recapturing from UNITA large portions of Angola. But the attack was blunted 120 miles north of Savimbi's bush headquarters at Jamba in late September.²⁴ Since then, new arms have continued to arrive from the Soviet Union, in preparation for an expected offensive later this summer.

A U.S. RESPONSE TO THE SOVIET CHALLENGE

The West, and particularly the United States, must begin to counter the Soviet drive for southern Africa. U.S. policies up to now generally have failed. Angola is still as intransigent as ever regarding whether and when the Cuban troops will withdraw, and the country remains a Soviet client. Mozambique, while eager for Western economic aid, is still aligned with the Soviet Union on every important issue. Zimbabwe has moved closer to the Soviets over the last several years, votes consistently against the U.S. at the United

21. Ibid., p. 36.

22. See William W. Pascoe, III, "Angola Tests the Reagan Doctrine," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 470, November 14, 1985, p. 5.

23. Ibid.

24. See Allister Sparks, "Angolan Forces Fall Back from Site of Heavy Battle," The Washington Post, October 9, 1985, p. A1.

Nations, and even publicly insulted the U.S. at this year's Fourth of July party at the U.S. Embassy in Harare. Zambia and Botswana, meanwhile, seem to be moving closer to Moscow. U.S. influence with these nations has decreased, while Soviet influence has increased throughout the region.

What is needed instead is a more creative and direct U.S. policy for the region. In Angola and Mozambique, for example, pro-Western national liberation movements threaten the existence of the communist regimes. Until very recently, U.S. policy precluded aid to these freedom fighters. Even now, only UNITA in Angola receives U.S. assistance--and the aid is purely defensive. Yet U.S. military aid to UNITA in Angola and RENAMO in Mozambique could be the deciding factor in ensuring their victories. The withdrawal of Mozambique and Angola from the Soviet camp not only would benefit the hard-pressed and suffering citizens of those nations but would send a signal to the Third World that Moscow has nothing to offer developing countries.

In Zimbabwe, Mugabe must be told explicitly that he will receive no U.S. economic assistance until he liberalizes his regime by allowing the creation of opposition political parties, freedom of speech and the press, and by ending state control over large sectors of the economy. He also would have to cut his strategic ties to the Soviet Union.

Zambia and Botswana must be reminded of the cost of close ties to the Kremlin.

In Lesotho, the U.S. should work closely with the new leaders to ensure a stable transition to representative government and an end to close ties to Moscow.

In South West Africa, the U.S. should delay no longer in recognizing the Transitional Government of National Unity, and should work closely with it in its move for independence from South Africa.

As for South Africa, the U.S. must recognize the very serious nature of the Soviet threat. Moscow, not the blacks of South Africa, would be the main victor if the African National Congress and its allies in the South African Communist Party came to power in Pretoria. For the U.S. and the West to isolate South Africa will radicalize the opposition forces in that country and lead to an increase in violence that heightens the chances of a pro-Soviet government coming to power. Rather than isolating Pretoria, Washington must devise a policy that uses the still considerable U.S. leverage to speed up the dismantling of apartheid, which already is underway. The U.S. should insist upon full political, economic, and social rights for all South Africans. At the same time, the U.S. must be aware of those forces in South Africa that serve Soviet ends.

CONCLUSION

The Soviet drive for southern Africa has begun again. Following a dormant period through the early 1980s, the Kremlin has stepped up its activities in this geostrategically vital area. Moscow has been moving on military, political, and diplomatic fronts, employing a wide range of methods--the establishment of correct diplomatic relations, the creation of communist party-to-communist party ties, the use of proxy forces, propaganda, high-level official visits, and the support of revolutionary forces. The prize for Moscow, of course, is the control over the vital strategic minerals of southern Africa, the Cape shipping route, and the clear demonstration to the Third World that the Soviet empire remains capable of expansion.

In South Africa and South West Africa, Soviet support for the revolutionary anti-government forces of ANC and SWAPO enables them to conduct campaigns of destabilization aimed at the overthrow of the established pro-Western governments. In the so-called non-aligned nations of Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, and Botswana the Kremlin seeks to bolster its influence through the myriad network of proper state-to-state relations, while employing covert methods in support of its other regional objectives. In Angola and Mozambique, its two treaty-bound allies in the region, Moscow's planners provide aid to embattled regimes fighting defensive battles against pro-Western freedom fighters.

While the Kremlin correctly has perceived the need to bolster its influence throughout the region by acting in all nations, it clearly has set its priorities. The campaign to destabilize South Africa is at the top of the list. Economic sanctions against Pretoria thus serve Soviet ends.

The Soviet Union is clear in its goals and strategy for southern Africa. It aims to take effective control of the region by supplying allied communist governments and revolutionary forces the weapons and advisers they need to take and maintain power. The U.S. and the West must be just as clear and clever in denying Moscow its goal.

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