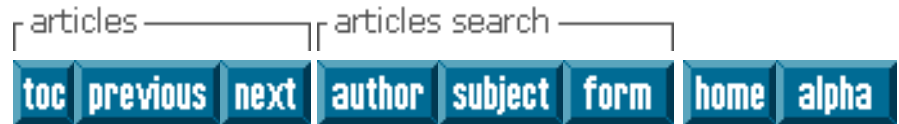


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The South Africa-Angola talks, 1976-1984: a little-known Cold War thread

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ABSTRACT

That South Africa invaded Angola in 1975, in an abortive attempt to prevent a Marxist government coming to power there, and that the South African Defence Force then repeatedly attacked Angola from 1978, is relatively well known. That representatives of the South African governments met on many occasions from 1976 is a largely untold story. This article uses documentation from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation, along with other sources, to analyse these meetings in the context in which they took place.

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As Arne Westad has shown, the Cold War had a global impact and scholars are beginning to explore the Cold War in different corners of the world.¹ From 1975 Angola was a major hot-spot in the Cold War (US), the Soviet Union, Cuba and South Africa all involved there in different ways.² For the South African

Angola from 1975 to 1988 we now have many detailed accounts of the battles fought by the South Africa in Angola, from Operation Savannah in late 1975 to Operation Reindeer in May 1978, and the many operations from 1980, of which Operations Protea in 1981 and Askari in 1983-4 were the largest before those that followed Cuanavale in 1987-8.³

What has not been analysed, and is the subject of this paper, is a little-known aspect of relations between South Africa and Angola in the decade after Angolan independence. For alongside South Africa's military aggression, as well as the Angolan government as a Soviet client, a series of talks took place between officials of the two governments. South Africa adopted a highly aggressive and confrontational stance towards Angola in public, bilateral meetings to the detriment of African and Angolan officials. Most of these were highly secret, and none of those involved have written about them. The relatively recent opening of the relevant files in the archives of the Department of International Relations in Pretoria makes it possible now to tell at least some of this story, and how it relates to that of the Cold War.

That there should have been such contacts between the two countries is at first sight very surprising. As the war in Angola was born in November 1975 South African forces were not far from Luanda, their mission to help stop the MPLA from taking power. Having failed in that mission, as a result of the arrival of a large Cuban military force in Angola, the South African forces withdrew by late March 1976. However, South Africa remained in a state of undeclared war with Angola for the next decade and more, training forces to overthrow the government and providing massive assistance to the rebel Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and often invading Angola from northern Namibia but sometimes from South Africa itself. Angola repeatedly condemned South African intentions towards her. South Africa in turn repeatedly accused Angola of providing bases from which the SWAPO People's Organization (SWAPO), the only Namibian liberation movement fighting an armed struggle against apartheid, was of actively helping SWAPO to send guerrillas into Namibia. From 1976, as well, Angola was home to the bases of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC).

With South Africa in occupation of Namibia then, the northern Namibia/southern Angola border separating the two countries under South African and apartheid rule, and from which South African forces operated into Angola, from the 1970s onwards on being Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary, hosted armed forces of movements dedicated to overthrowing the government in both Namibia and South Africa, along with Cuban troops, and had close relations with the Soviet Union. Were there extensive contacts between the two governments?

Background

What happened after Angolan independence was of course shaped in part by earlier relations between South Africa and Portugal. To the Lisbon coup of April 1974 the Portuguese rulers of Angola had been close allies of apartheid South Africa. In the 1960s and early 1970s the South African government saw Angola as a key part of the buffer of white-ruled South Africa from black-ruled Africa to the north and provided South Africa with a protective shield. South Africa had a consulate-general in Luanda, but much of the co-operation between the two countries was conducted in secret to avoid external scrutiny. Portugal did not want to be seen to be working openly with racist South Africa and the South African government did not want its electorate to know the extent of its commitments in the Portuguese colonies.

From 1968 a number of secret meetings were held between top military and security officials of the two countries. Both were concerned how South Africa could best help the Portuguese fight its war in Angola by providing air support, intelligence and financial assistance. In return the South Africans hoped for Portuguese help in dealing with the influx of guerrillas into northern Namibia. South African aircraft were stationed at a Joint Air Support Centre at Cuito Cuanavale. The Portuguese military provided the SADF with maps of southern Angola, which no doubt came in useful to the SADF as the SADF began to plan attacks in the area.⁶ Only three months before the April 1974 coup in Lisbon the South African permanent Portuguese military mission would be established in Pretoria (the Alcora mission), and on 15 April 1974 South Africa agreed to provide a large loan (R150 million) for Portuguese military equipment in Angola. Military co-operation between South Africa and Portugal increased then, until 1974, but was almost entirely secret. Its full extent remains unclear. In Angola, the Portuguese military thought in early 1974 that it was winning.

The single most important act of co-operation involving Angola in the years before the coup in Lisbon was the building of a large hydro-electric scheme at Ruacana on the Cunene River. Though the generating plant was on the Namibian side of the river that formed the Namibia/Angola border at that point, an integral part of the scheme was of two dams further up the river, well inside Angola. The scheme was signed and sealed between South Africa and Angola in 1969, without any consultation with Namibians or Angolans, and with almost all the funding coming from South Africa. Work began soon after at Ruacana and by 1973 the large Gove Dam deep in Angola, was complete. The smaller dam at Calueque in Angola, thirteen kilometers north of Ruacana, was only 70% complete. The flow of water to the hydro-electric scheme, which if it worked at full capacity could generate enough power to meet Namibia's needs. The project also included a canal to take water to Ovamboland in northern Namibia. In Namibia, the South Africans had a strong interest in seeing the project completed. The initial South African intervention in Angola in August 1975, when a small South African force took control of Ruacana and Calueque from the Portuguese, was to secure the scheme in the face of increasing instability in southern Angola.⁸

Relations between South Africa and Angola changed dramatically as a result of the Lisbon coup of late 1974. Portuguese remained in nominal control of Angola until 11 November 1975, the country was soon ripe for external intervention. The South African government no longer had a friendly neighbour there, and was wary of the prospect of a hostile government in Luanda once the country became independent, one that would give support to SWAPO and would provide bases at which MK cadres could be trained before returning to fight in South Africa. On 11 November 1975 in Luanda the MPLA proclaimed itself to be the government of an independent Angola. To prevent what it saw as a puppet party of the Soviet Union coming to power, the large Cuban military intervention in Angola was seen by both the US and the South Africans as working under the orders of Moscow and as a sign of expansionism.

To the South African government the arrival of the Cubans, more than the advent of the MPLA regime, was a major concern. It had developed in a country in the region in which it saw itself as hegemonic. It was feared in both Pretoria and Cape Town that the Cubans might intervene elsewhere in the region. Politicians and bureaucrats in Pretoria, much influenced by the US administration, saw Moscow's aim as the take-over of all southern Africa. In such a context, there was little support for either the US or South Africa opening diplomatic relations with newly independent Angola, and the South African government gave active support to Jonas Savimbi's rebel UNITA. The SADF did not forget the reverse it suffered in 1976, and from 1978 made constant raids into southern Angola, while from 1981 South African forces, as part of the South West Africa Territorial Force, which the South Africans had set up to 'Namibianise' the war, occupied the area along Angola's southern border.

Despite all this, a series of meetings took place between officials of the two countries during these years. Some of these took place in secret and were unknown to the press and the public. In the few cases in which they were reported, this was without context, and from the brief news reports about them it was not possible to discern the nature or content of the meetings. They have not been written about subsequently, except briefly and in passing. Chester Crocker, who was himself the chief mediator on issues relating to Angola and South Africa in the 1980s, is very dismissive of the meetings between the two countries that were held in the early 1980s while he was trying to negotiate a settlement in Angola separately to secure a withdrawal of the Cuban forces from Angola. He writes: '[I]t strained our relations that these characters would communicate effectively, lacking a common language, agenda or political context. Only that only he could achieve anything significant and reveals his annoyance at not being included in the role of mediator', he writes, 'can hardly make full use of his skills when warring parties choose to meet bilaterally'. His memoir suggests that he knew little about the specifics of what was discussed at the bilateral meetings between South Africa and Angola. His focus was, anyway, almost exclusively on the issue of Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola.

Why did the South Africa/Angola talks take place and what were they about? South Africa's war in southern Africa was an undeclared one, and did not preclude the officials in South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs from treating Angola as a country, like Mozambique, with which South Africa should deal on matters of common international interest. It rarely knew in advance what the military planned to do in Angola, and believed in diplomatic rather than military solutions to its problems. The Joint Management System that P.W. Botha set up as part of his Total Strategy, to deal with the 'communist' and 'terrorist' elements, was supposed to bring the various arms of government together, but this system worked only up to a point. An Angolan working committee, which reported to the State Security Council, was established, on which officials from the DFA sat along with military and intelligence officials,¹¹ but the

independently, stymieing the diplomatic relations that the DFA was trying to build. When R.F. (Pik) Bo Minister of Foreign Affairs, became involved directly on the Angola issue in the early 1980s, he went on Magnus Malan, his counterpart as Minister of Defence, into the discussions, in an attempt to ensure they did not work at cross purposes. For their part, the Angolans recognised that South Africa was the de facto posed a serious threat to the still very fragile regime in Luanda, which was attempting to rule a large country years of war. The Angolans wanted the meetings kept secret for two main reasons: they did not wish to racist South Africa and, especially given their support for SWAPO, they did not want there to be any suggestion giving de facto recognition to South Africa's occupation of Namibia.

Initial Meetings

The first meeting of officials of the two sides took place only a month after the last South African troop only months after the South Africans had been engaged in an undeclared war to prevent the MPLA from seen, there had been a long a history of South African support for the colonial regime that the MPLA had. As with the discussions South African officials held with their Mozambiquan counterparts soon after F power there, there was a measure of pragmatism on the South African side, a recognition that, however the new government in the former Portuguese colony might be, the liberation movement had taken power be dealt with. At most of the eight meetings between April 1976 and June 1980, all of which were held on Angola/Namibia border or at one of the towns in southern Angola, relatively low-level South African officials attended, but the leading figure on the Angolan side, the young Manuel Alexandre 'Kito' Rodrigues, was important in Angolan politics, and was the Angolan official whom the South Africans were to get to know on either side who was to attend such meetings over almost a decade, it was not altogether surprising Angola's first ambassador to South Africa after the transfer of power in 1994.

The main issues discussed at the meetings in 1976 and 1977 were practical ones relating to reducing tensions by creating a demilitarized zone on either side of it, and arranging for joint flights over it in helicopters. suggestions offered at these meetings. Rodrigues made it clear that no Angolan soldier would venture into the zone. He accused the South Africans of constantly violating Angolan air-space, and of giving support to UNITA.¹³

For the South Africans the single most important issue was the Calueque/ Ruacana scheme, which, as benefited South African-occupied Namibia. The South Africans needed Angolan co-operation because water to the hydro-electric scheme were in Angola and they wanted to complete construction at Calueque. Rodrigues responded that the question of the dam could not be viewed separately from political and military issues. There would be no co-operation with South Africa until acts of aggression ceased from the Namibian side of the border. This included the withdrawal of South African troops in bases in Ovamboland and in the Caprivi, and the training by the South Africans of 'puppet forces', meaning UNITA. The Angolans also decried the bellicose anti-MPLA propaganda emanating from the South Africans.¹³

Not only did the Angolans refuse to allow construction on the dam at Calueque to continue, but in 1978 they stopped work on the dam, rendering the hydro-electric scheme virtually useless. As a consequence the South African coal-fired Van Eck power-station in the Namibian capital, Windhoek. At a meeting with South African officials in Mocamedes in southern Angola on 1 March 1978, at a brief moment of optimism about the prospects for peace based on the compromise plan proposed by the Western Contact Group, Rodrigues said that the Angolan dispute about the scheme would be settled by the advent of a new independent Namibian government. The Angolans would be able to co-operate. But though the negotiations conducted by the Western Contact Group with South Africa had lead to the passage of United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 435 in September 1978, which provided a scheme for the transition to independence in Namibia, by the time South African and Angolan officials met that year, the prospect of Namibia moving to independence in the near future seemed much less likely. The Angolan government had by then made it clear that it was not ready to allow the UN to implement Resolution 435. to do. In May 1978 the South African Defence Force (SADF) had raided far into southern Angola to attack Cassinga. At the November meeting, the South Africans were again told that, though Angola was in favour of the Ruacana/Calueque scheme, construction could continue only if South Africa stopped helping UNITA.¹³ No deal was made.

At the meeting held at Ngiva in southern Angola on 2 September 1978 a new matter was discussed: the Johan van der Mescht, a white South African soldier who had been captured by SWAPO in northern Namibia the year and was being held in jail in the Angolan capital Luanda. For some years he was the subject of South African meetings they held with the Angolans. Angolan officials viewed him as a SWAPO prisoner of war and urged the South Africans to meet SWAPO to discuss him and other matters. The South African government refused to do that, on the grounds that this would be seen to acknowledge SWAPO's armed struggle. Van der Mescht was finally released in a prisoner swap at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin in May 1982. When an ANC Prime Minister P.W. Botha said that the swap was proof of South Africa's 'active contribution to the Front's survival against communist domination'.¹⁵

The 1970s ended without the meetings between officials of the two countries having achieved more than a few issues relating to patrolling in the border area. Brand Fourie, the leading official in South Africa's Department of Defence, was present at the February 1979 meeting at Ruacana, when the atmosphere was described as 'friendly'. South African officials were asked for a list of products they could send Angola. But in October that year the South African Air Force bombed Lubango in southern Angola, aiming to hit the SWAPO headquarters on its outskirts but destroying a few buildings in the process.¹⁶ After that the Angolan attitude hardened. In an abrupt telegram, Rodriques told Fourie that the meeting at Ruacana but that only the dam could be discussed.¹⁷ When the South African team went to meet the Angolans did not turn up, perhaps in part because of Pik Botha's comments to the South African Broadcasting Corporation on the eve of the proposed meeting, that Angola (and Zambia and Mozambique) should not listen to 'the imperialists and Africa's unrealistic militants' or look 'towards the Kremlin and its Cuban and East European salvation ...'¹⁸

The early 1980s

Despite this, and a number of new raids launched by the SADF into Angola to try to prevent SWAPO in southern Namibia, another meeting between officials of the two countries did take place in June 1980, now for the first time in Praia da Sal on Cape Verde off the West African coast. South African Airways, barred from flying over the African continent, stopped on Sal Island en route to Europe and America, and the money that Cape Verde derived from the stopovers was an important source of revenue for the impoverished archipelago.¹⁹ Sal was a good meeting place because it was relatively easy for South Africans to fly there, and Cape Verde had close ties with Angola because of its membership of the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries. It must be remembered that the South African government had been isolated internationally in the late 1970s, after the hoped-for links with black African governments during the previous decade had failed to materialize. The opening of serious talks with Angola on Cape Verde seemed a potential breakthrough in engagement with black Africa more generally.²⁰

At the June 1980 meeting, the Angolan team led by Rodriques included top Angolan army officials, while the South African team led by Fourie included Pieter van der Westhuizen, chief of military intelligence, and General Magnus I. van der Merwe, General of Defence. Rodriques stated that Angola was not influenced by Cuba or the Soviet Union and that the country would be won by dialogue, not violence. SWAPO, he said, was ready to talk to South Africa and the internal parties in Angola and would facilitate such a meeting. He suggested that a team of experts meet on the issue of Ruacana/Caluque by saying that he would have to consult his government, but he promised a relatively rapid reply. Before the meeting another South African military incursion into Angola took place, after which there was no further progress. It was also clear from the June 1980 meeting that UNITA was receiving support from within Namibia was misleading, for South Africa and the SADF were dealing directly with Jonas Savimbi, and giving him the wherewithal to sustain his fight against the Angolans. After he met the Mozambique Minister of State in Paris in December 1980, Fourie was still hoping for closer relations with Mozambique. He spoke of the possibility of South Africa buying oil from that country and selling it maize, and asked whether the fact that he had stopped assisting Savimbi, Angola might agree to end its assistance to SWAPO.²²

From August 1981 the border between Namibia and Angola became less of an issue because South Africa's largest military operation to that time into southern Angola, took control of the Caluque dam and occupied a 100-kilometre wide strip in southern Angola. In that same month the young President José Eduardo dos Santos

meeting with the new American team led by the aggressive Crocker. Almost immediately afterwards, a representative of the South African-based diamond company De Beers in Luanda that Angola wanted discussions with South Africa and to do so outside the framework of the Western Five Contact Group (now in effect been taken over by the Reagan administration). It may be that Dos Santos thought he could deal with the South Africans and Americans if he dealt with them separately. After his message was passed on to the South African mining magnate Harry Oppenheimer, it was agreed that a meeting between the two countries would take place in November.²³

The two chief spokesmen at the Paris meeting were Brand Fourie, the South African Director General of Foreign Affairs, and Venancio Moura, the Angolan Deputy Minister of Foreign Relations. The atmosphere was relatively friendly, with both sides saying they were ready for dialogue, but they pointed out that in previous meetings they had discussed the possibility of talks between the two countries, only to find 'a few days later' the South Africans again invading Angola. In response to the South African claim that they had no purpose in Angola other than to stop SWAPO launching attacks from Angola, the Angolans replied that they were committed to supporting SWAPO, adding: 'We are not sure if we should not also include talks with SWAPO? This could make some contribution'. When the Angolans asked why they were attacking places in southern Angola where there were no SWAPO forces, the South Africans replied that they were attacking the uniforms of the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA). The issues of a possible ceasefire along the border, which the Western Contact Group had advocated, and a cease-fire were raised, as was that of the return of the remains of soldiers who had died. The Angolans clearly saw a ceasefire as a way of preventing further South African attacks and were probably advised that the South Africans were not able to control the South African military. Moura said at one point: 'If there is still fighting the only way of stopping the talking.'²⁴ Both sides acknowledged that a meeting at ministerial level would be likely to be more constructive and would take over a year to arrange that.

The Angolans stressed that they wanted their contacts with the South Africans to be kept secret for, they found it very difficult to justify such contacts to those who were the victims of South African aggression. But it proved to be a meeting at ministerial level secret, and news reached the international press that such a meeting, the talks would take place on Sal Island on 7 December 1982.²⁵ Pik Botha, Magnus Malan, now Minister of Defence, and Foreign Affairs led the South African team, while the Angolan side was led by Rodriques, who had now become Minister of the Interior, and Antonia Ndalu, the chief of the Angolan Air force.²⁶ The South Africans began by saying that the way in which Crocker had been talking to them and to the Angolans separately, about linking the withdrawal of South African forces to the independence of Namibia. Rather than allow the Americans to make the running in what was a sensitive issue, it was better for South Africa and Angola to hold bilateral discussions, without the Americans. Pi

Botha said: 'If Angola thought that there was an agreement between the United States and South Africa he [Pi Botha] was making a very big mistake. No agreement existed whatsoever. The United States told South Africa that it was necessary for a settlement. In the process the United States asked for concessions from South Africa which were very painful. He thus welcomed this meeting to speak directly to Angola without anybody telling Angola what to do or what the other one was thinking. If South Africa and Angola were to disagree they would be wrong on facts, because history would not forgive them if they were to differ on something others had agreed on. South Africa differed from the United States on many issues. South Africa respected their views but also insisted on its own when it was necessary.'

South Africa realised that it should come to terms with Africa. Outside powers could not and should not interfere in Africa.²⁷

But, as we shall see, Cold War considerations continued to loom large in the discussions between the South Africans and the Angolans.

The South Africans had little knowledge of Angola, having no diplomatic representation there. At this time, in the early years, the DFA speculated that the Angolan government was divided about holding talks with South Africa. One faction, a black nationalist faction in the MPLA wanted to talk, and that the talks were opposed by the left-wing of the party, who were more influenced by Marxist and Soviet ideology. The South Africans thought they would have more in common with the less ideological black nationalists than with the Marxists, with their Soviet connections, and that

increased factionalism in Luanda would work to their advantage. There was also much speculation in Dos Santos had over his government was precarious and that he was totally dependent on Cuban backing. If the Cubans were to leave he would share the fate of Chad's government, which fell after Gaddafi of Libya withdrew. Island Pik Botha said: 'the Angolans must believe him when he told them that he heard in South Africa President Dos Santos wanted and indeed desired peace but that the Soviet Union would not allow him to do so'. Rodriques responded:

It was a fact that the socialist countries were helping Angola. It was also a fact that South Africa had been helping Portuguese colonialists. Although no diplomatic relations existed between South Africa and Angola, and although South Africa had condemned apartheid, he was sure that a way could be found for peaceful co-existence ... He contacted South Africa for a meeting at the border because southern Angola was occupied by South Africa and South Africa was feeling as before no longer existed. Angola was a sovereign country and an African country. The Soviet Union was a natural ally of Angola. If South Africa wanted to establish the extent of the influence of the Soviet Union, it could do so in many ways, for example through contacts with western countries. When the MPLA was a liberation movement only a few western countries were interested in it. It had had to isolate the Portuguese. The Soviet Union assisted it in accomplishing its aim.²⁹

The December 1982 talks mainly concerned a formal cessation of armed activities in southern Angola. South Africa offered to withdraw their troops from southern Angola if SWAPO forces were withdrawn from the area bordering the border and the Cuban forces in southern Angola were withdrawn even further north. The Angolans were not able to take a decision on the matter at this meeting and would have to refer it to their government.

Both delegations said they thought the talks had been promising and left Cape Verde expecting there to be a meeting in the near future. But this did not happen. A second ministerial meeting was arranged for 23 February 1983. The officials took place. The reason advanced by the South African government, on the eve of the further talks, was that the ministers back to Cape Verde was that SWAPO forces, actively supported by Angolan government forces, had launched a South Africans described as a large offensive into northern Namibia.³⁰ The South Africans therefore sent senior officials to Cape Verde, and they merely made clear that in their view no further talks could take place without restraint on the part of the Angolans, the Cubans and SWAPO.

Behind the Angolan and Cuban support for SWAPO, the South Africans believed, lay Moscow. The South Africans said, as they did on other occasions, that if the MPLA government in Angola refused to allow its territory to be used for an ideology utterly alien to the people of Africa, there would be no reason for a South African presence in the country. The South Africans claimed that they were helping to defend the people of the continent from the threat to all the African states ...' The MPLA regime was, they pointed out, unelected and unrepresentative. Without legitimate authority, they claimed, from 'the military violence of alien surrogates.'³¹ What the South Africans would demand was that their presence in Namibia was illegal and that if they had withdrawn from Namibia there would be no reason for them to operate from Angolan territory.

At the UN the Angolan representative regularly lambasted South Africa in the General Assembly for its actions against his country. South Africa was barred from the General Assembly, but speaking in the Security Council the South African permanent representative to the UN argued that his country's objective was to protect Namibia from SWAPO. The only reason South African forces were in Angola, he said, was because of SWAPO. If Angolan forces became targets, he said, it was because of SWAPO. The Angolans responded that their civilians and infrastructure were being targeted and that the South Africans sought to cripple the economy of the country, to vent its anger against its Marxist government and to force it to withdraw from UNITA.

The Angolans now took a harder line against further talks with the South Africans, especially after the SWAPO defeat at the hands of UNITA forces at Cangamba in Moxico provinces, some 500 kilometres from the border with South Africa in August 1983. Speaking in the UN General Assembly, the Angolan Foreign Minister, Paulo Jorge, blamed the aggression on South African aggression, saying that heavy artillery had been involved as well as 'South African mercenaries' supported by the West with South Africa and the 'puppet bandits' operating in southern Angola. He added that once the South Africans withdrew entirely from Angola would Angola and Cuba discuss the progressive withdrawal of the Cubans from Angola. He expressed interest in continuing any dialogue with South Africa.

This hard-line Angolan position was reiterated by Murrack Goulding, the British Ambassador to Angola intermediary between the Angolans and the South Africans when he met South African officials in Pretoria. He told them that the MPLA, panicked by what had happened at Cangamba, had placed the country on the table. To Goulding, Jorge, a member of the radical faction in the MPLA, had not been kept informed of the discussions which to his annoyance had been handled by the Deputy Foreign Minister and Rodrigues. In response, the leading DFA official, Dave Steward, argued that the lesson to be drawn from the discussions with him was that if the South Africans wanted Cuban withdrawal, it should withdraw its forces from southern Angola and stop supporting UNITA. This suggestion was not taken up.³³ Instead the SADF soon mounted another major incursion into Angola. Operation Askari, South African forces moved deep into southern Angola to destroy SWAPO's bases as they had not that now offered anti-aircraft protection to them and the Angolan army. Speaking in Cahama in Angola, the chief of the SADF, Constand Viljoen, acknowledged that South African forces had moved as far as 100 kilometres into Angola. He said that SWAPO was enjoying the protection of FAPLA and the access this provided to sophisticated weapons, including Sam 8 anti-aircraft missiles, and that FAPLA, Cuban and SWAPO arms were integrated. The South African Airforce now again bombed SWAPO's main logistical headquarters at Luanda. SWAPO guerrillas moved south towards the Namibian border via such small towns as Cahama and Cuvelai. As a result, the likelihood of further talks between the Angolans and the South Africans diminished. Instead it was the South African aggression in southern Angola that led to such talks.

1984-85

This was because both sides were keen to find a way to end the fighting. In 1984 more meetings took place between the two sides than ever before. Talks first resumed on Cape Verde in January 1984, again through the good offices of the British Ambassador, President Aristide Pereira, to discuss a possible cessation of hostilities.³⁴ Then on 16 February 1984 Pieter Botha and Crocker, this time in Lusaka, Zambia, where the South Africans and the Angolans agreed to the establishment of a commission to monitor the withdrawal of South African forces from Angola in a step-by-step process. The South Africans pull back from a position over 120 miles into Angola to the Namibian border. In return Angolans agreed to SWAPO forces from operating in the area from which the South Africans withdrew. Alongside the meeting, a meeting of military men from FAPLA and the SADF took place at the Mulungushi conference centre in Lusaka to decide on the modalities of the agreement.³⁵

From the time it was signed, there was misunderstanding about the Lusaka Accord. The Angolans saw the withdrawal of South African troops from Angola as a step towards the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and the independence of Namibia. A statement by the Central Committee of the MPLA-Workers Party in April approved of the agreement as being in the interests of 'the full sovereignty of Angola' and a settlement of the Namibian issue.³⁶ The Angolans were sensitive to the fact that the agreement they had signed directly concerned SWAPO, which was now no longer based north of Ovamboland any longer, yet SWAPO had not been part of the negotiations that led to the agreement. Dos Santos told the MPLA party school in Luanda on 8 March that the agreement did not say that SWAPO would end armed struggle, whereas the South Africans assumed the agreement would stop further armed actions. The Angolans were from the start skeptical of Angolan intentions. Pik Botha told the US Secretary of State that Angola remained bound by a treaty with the Soviet Union and that 'gaining unilateral advantage from agreements with other countries is a central principle in Marxist foreign policy doctrine. There was, he said, no reason to believe that the Soviet Union had abandoned their fundamental ideological positions; they remained totalitarian and authoritarian and ourselves the luxury of pretending that our neighbours have suddenly undergone a political metamorphosis. We could not, he told Haig, afford to 'cut corners' and accept 'any kind of cosmetic withdrawal of Cubans' from Angola...'.³⁷

After the Lusaka agreement numerous other meetings between Angolan and South African officials took place. At the highest level, others were between members of the Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC), others yet were between technicians to discuss the restoration of the hydro-electric scheme which now came under joint Angolan control.³⁸ Though Angolan and South African military personnel mostly got on well at the JMC, tensions soon arose because of the slowness of the SADF withdrawal and the allegations by the SADF that the Angolans had violated. The SADF was adamant that SWAPO was continuing to operate in what was called the 'area in

Angolans were turning a blind eye to such violations. Meanwhile Angola continued to speak out at the African 'colonization' of Namibia. They said that their role as 'the unwavering championing of the Namibians' earned the Angolan people a terrible retribution from the racist regime in Pretoria'. South African aggression and the systematic destruction of property in Angola was called 'vandalism of a strategic kind aimed at national reconstruction'. The idea that there was any threat to South Africa from the Cuban forces was. Cuban or Angolan soldier, it was pointed out, had ever set foot over the Namibian border.³⁹

When Pik Botha, D.F. Malan and other South Africans met Rodriques, da Moura and other Angolans in Windhoek, the Angolans agreed to consider sending a technical mission to Windhoek for discussions on the Ruacana dam question. That meeting Rodriques hinted that the Soviet Union was hindering Angolan attempts to control SWAPO. When Dave Steward of the DFA and Pieter van der Westhuizen, the head of South African military, met the Angolan head of state, Jose dos Santos, and Rodriques in Lusaka in late June, they asked for a reply to a proposal for a joint peacekeeping commission to succeed the JMC and expressed concern over a state of war. Angola was not responsible for controlling SWAPO and preventing violations. Dos Santos replied by saying that he was not sticking to the agreement to withdraw, for the SADF, having reached Ngiva, had halted their withdrawal. They claimed they were continuing violations of the agreement. The Angolan President added that there was no sense in continuing with anything like the JMC unless UN Security Council Resolution 435 was implemented. If SWAPO would come to power in Namibia and would be a good neighbour to South Africa. He added that he would cease aiding UNITA. The South Africans responded that if SWAPO violence from Angola could not be controlled, it was necessary for South Africa to mount raids into southern Angola again. Further talks with Angola in Gaborone level were mooted but never took place, and the ideas of a permanent joint peace commission, and of a South African/Angolan force being stationed at Calueque, were never accepted.⁴⁰

At a small ceremony on the Namibian/Angolan border on 18 April 1985, the last South African soldiers were leaving only two platoons of sixty men at the Calueque pumping station. The previous month it had been agreed that the men were to withdraw a month later. As South African and Angolan officers looked on from a marquee, a South African general had been present at the withdrawal of the last South African forces from Angola in 1976, said that he had never thought it necessary for South African forces to cross into Angola ever again.⁴¹ On 1 May Pik Botha wrote to Rodriques that he was that 'we shall soon have an opportunity of renewing the discussions which we conducted last year. The FAPLA officials met at Calueque over the future of guarding the hydro-electric scheme after South African forces were withdrawn. Within days of that meeting, however, an incident in the far north of Angola involving a South African commando put an end to any further such talks.

When the Angolans captured the commander of the South African mission in the enclave of Cabinda, Van der Westhuizen admitted that the purpose of the mission had been to destroy the storage installations of Gulf Oil on which Cabinda made most of its export earnings.⁴³ The embarrassed South African government tried to claim that the mission was to destroy SWAPO and ANC training bases in the area, but that was clearly nonsense as their bases were not in Cabinda. The South African Airforce had bombed the camp of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, at Nova Cate in 1979, but the ANC presence in Angola had not been an issue in the many talks with the Angolans, though the Angolans claimed that in discussions with Angola the previous year 'grave concern' had been expressed at the 'large numbers of Namibians' being trained in Angola, and that Angola had been asked to remove them. South Africa 'had to act to protect its interests' necessary to gather intelligence on the activities of ANC and SWAPO 'terrorists'.⁴⁴ In their statement, the South African government asked for an urgent meeting with Angola on the matter. Not surprisingly, none took place. The South African search for South Africans looking for 'terrorists' in Cabinda was absurd and the Angolans were furious that their people were being targeted by South Africans.⁴⁵

The conflict in southern Angola then escalated and the Angolan government was soon accusing South Africa of 'continued armed aggression'.⁴⁶ When Dos Santos addressed the UN General Assembly on 22 October 1985, he said that South Africa, having committed 4,000 violations of Angolan air and ground space in the past four years, including 100 air invasions, ship landings and countless dropping of material from helicopters. Dos Santos denied there was any war between Angola and said that the only war was that being waged by Pretoria against Angola.⁴⁷ There was now no sense in further talks with South Africa. The SADF continued to supply UNITA, the US gave UNITA Stinger anti-aircraft missiles and moved towards the major clash that took place in late 1987 on the Lomba river, at which the FAPLA for

SADF and UNITA, and then to the fierce battles close to Cuito Cuanavale where the SADF was unable to defeat the Cuban forces.

When leading South African officials next sat down with their Angolan counterparts it would be in Brokopondo in May 1988. This was the beginning of the series of negotiations that would lead to the Namibia/Angola Agreement of 1988 which provided at long last for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 435. After the process involving South Africa, Angola and Cuba under US mediation, had begun, another bilateral meeting was held between South Africa and Angola at Brazzaville on 13 May. The South Africans tried to find out what the Cubans were doing in Angola, especially in relation to Ruacana-Calueque, and what the Angolans thought the Soviet role would be in the process that had begun in London.⁴⁸ It was only because of pressure from both the Americans and the South Africans, working closely together, that the four-party talks reached a successful conclusion.⁴⁹

Conclusion

While the earlier bilateral talks between South Africa and Angola did not lead in any direct way to the Lusaka Agreement in London in May 1988, it would not be correct to suggest that the earlier talks achieved nothing at all. In his justificatory memoir, Crocker is misleading in suggesting that the Lusaka agreement was entirely an American achievement. The bilateral talks between Angola and South Africa helped pave the way for that agreement, and those talks were part of a process of dialogue that, for a time, did halt the fighting in southern Angola. By the time the Lusaka talks began, the Angolans and South Africans involved in the talks knew each other. General Geldenhuys, who headed the SADF, had had years of contact with key figures in the Angolan military, long before he got to know his Angolan counterpart, Rodriques, the key figure on the Angolan side, Angola's first ambassador to South Africa after 1994, he had been involved between the two countries in the new era, though got nowhere trying to persuade South Africa to grant independence to the destruction it had caused in his country.

While the bilateral talks led to little meeting of minds between the Angolans and the South Africans, it was far from the other than would otherwise have been the case. The very fact of talking to the Angolan 'enemy' made it clear to the South African government that there might be merit in talking to the internal 'enemy', the ANC. By the late 1980s, talks with ANC figures in the ANC were underway, both in South Africa and in Britain.⁵⁰ While the bilaterals between South Africa and Angola in the early 1980s took attention away from the role of the US and focused it on two African countries trying to reach a peace talks were, nevertheless, as we have seen, suffused with Cold War rhetoric and given the Cold War context. Neither South Africa nor Angola could escape its Cold War positionality in the 1970s and 1980s. While the war had complex local consequences and impact, however, the Cold War was not the entire story of what went on in southern Africa. Other threads, such as this one, need to be understood if the Cold War dimension is to be fully understood.

¹ O. Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Jeffrey Engel, *The Global Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007). The latter has a chapter on Angola by Jeffrey Engel.

² See, inter alia, Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Vladimir Shubin, *The Hot Cold War* (London: Pluto Press, 2008); Chester Crocker, *Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighbourhood* (New York: Norton, 1992).

³ Francois J. du Toit Spies, *Operasie Savannah: Angola 1975-1976* (Pretoria: S.A. Weermag, 1989). This book was written for the SADF, was mostly completed by December 1980, when a Historical Advice Committee of the SADF reviewed Spies's manuscript (Department of Foreign Affairs Archives (DFA), Pretoria, 1/22/3/19). See also Sophy Spies, *Angola* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1989) and Nerys John, 'South African Intervention in the Angolan Civil War: Motivations and Implications' (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 2002). Willem Steenkamp, *Border War 1966-1989* (Gibraltar: Ashanti, 1989) remains probably the best overview of the war itself from a South African point of view. Steenkamp, who was defence correspondent for the *Cape Times*, has also published, inter alia, *Into Angola 1975-1980* (3rd ed., Durban: Just Done, 2006). See also, e.g., Leopold Scholtz, 'The Namibia Question: An Appraisal of the South African Strategy', *Scientia Militaria*, 36, 4 (2006); Dick Lord, *From Fledgling to Eagle*

Force during the Border War (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South, 2008).

4 The main participant on the Angolan side, 'Kito' Rodriques, told me that he intended writing about it when he was ambassador of Angola to South Africa in 1996, but it seems he has not done so. Bran General in the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), does not discuss them in either of his two books *Woelinge om Suid-Afrika, 1939-1985* (n.p., 1990) and *Brandpunte: Agter die Skerms met Suid-Afrikas se B* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1991), even though chapter 23 of the latter is entitled 'Angola: agter die skerms

5 I thank Neels Muller for helping me access the relevant files in the DFA archives. Some of the transcripts among documents I rescued from the office of Andre Jacquet in the DFA a decade ago. They have now become available on the Aluka website (www.aluka.org: struggles for freedom in southern Africa). I have not been able to find relevant documentation that is accessible in the archives in Luanda or, say, the Arquivo Historico-Diplomatico in Luanda. I was able to discuss this topic with Rodriques in Pretoria in 1996 and with Marrack Goulding, who was British Ambassador in the early 1980s, in Oxford in 2005. Goulding's memoir *Peacemonger* (London: John Murray, 2002) is about the operations he was involved in, and not about his earlier ambassadorial career. I thank Dave Steward, a British journalist, for his story on the South African side, for consenting to an interview in Cape Town. Derek Auret, another key player, failed to respond to requests for an interview. I was able to speak briefly to Pik Botha and Jannie Geldenhuys on the topic at a conference at Monash University, South Africa, in late January 2009 and I thank Sue Onslow for the opportunity for me to do so.

6 These meetings are treated in detail in Paulo Correia, 'Political Relations between Portugal and South Africa from the Second World War until 1974' (Unpublished D.Litt. et Phil., thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2009). Those involved on the South African side were Generals C.A. Fraser and Hendrik van den Bergh. See also *Portugai's War in Angola 1961-1974* (Rivonia: Ashanti, 1993), 208-12. Van der Waals was South African ambassador until December 1973. Jannie Geldenhuys was vice-consul there from 1965: Jannie Geldenhuys, *At the Heart of South Africa's Border War* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2009), 39.

7 Correia, 'Political Relations', 212, 214, 222. South African support included providing rifles to the 'Fleishman' insurgency units: *ibid.*, 229.

8 On the building of the scheme, see 'Die Calueque-Waterskema', 15 March 1985 in DFA 1/22/3/4 and 'Kunene River Hydro-Electric Schemes' (M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1975) and 'Who Benefits from Hydroelectric Schemes', *Social Dynamics*, 2, 1 (1976). The Cunene forms part of the boundary between South Africa and Angola; there is then the 'cut-line, the straight line from the Cunene eastwards that forms the northern boundary of the Cunene. Cabora Bassa Dam on the Zambezi River in Mozambique, which was built at the same time, closely parallels the Ruacana/Calueque scheme as an example of Portuguese-South African co-operation. Correia mentions 'Political Relations', 160) but not Ruacana/Calueque.

9 Crocker, *High Noon*, 155.

10 In May 1985, in responding to a query about a legal issue concerning banks, Pik Botha said that South Africa recognised Angola as a state, but not its government, either de jure or de facto: DFA 1/22/29.

11 There are some records of meetings of the Angola Gemeenskaplike Bestuurcentrum (AGBS) in the South African National Archives, Pretoria. In May 1981, for example, it took up the issue of the capture of Van der Mescht: DFA 1/22/3/19. See later discussion of this issue below.

12 Minutes of meeting, 1 November 1978: DFA 1/22//29; also available on www.aluka.org.

13 Angolan memo, November 1976: DFA 1/22/29.

14 Minutes of meeting, 1 November 1978: DFA 1/22/29; also available on www.aluka.org.

15 *Rand Daily Mail*, 12 May 1982. This involved the release of a Russian whom the South Africans had captured in Protea in September 1981 and a Russian spy uncovered in South Africa. In March 1981 the idea was floated of exchanging Van der Mescht for SWAPO members being held on Robben Island, but the idea of making a deal was quickly squashed by the South African government: *Transvaler*, 2 March 1981. There is now an excellent book depicting van der Mescht's capture and ordeal in Angola: 'Captor and Captive. The Story of Danger As Experienced by Van der Mescht' (Rina Jooste, director; Johannesburg: Full Circle Productions, 2011).

16 *Diário de Notícias*, 2 October 1979 in DFA 1/22/3/18.

17 Rodriques to Fourie, telegram, 5 February 1980: DFA 1/22/3/18.

18 SABC External, 6 February 1980; Fourie to Rodriques, 8 February 1980: DFA 1/22/3/18.

19 For details see Roger Pfister, *Apartheid South Africa and African States: From Pariah to Middle Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 84.

20 Minutes of meeting, 5 June 1980: www.aluka.org.

21 For Savimbi's ties with South Africa, see especially Fred Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi. A Key to Africa* (n.p., 2008).

1988). Savimbi not only had regular meetings with South Africans at his headquarters at Jamba, but he number of occasions, on one of which he attended P.W. Botha's installation as State President in Cape
[22](#) Notes of meeting between Fourie and Valoso, Paris, 5 December 1980, DFA 1/22/3/2. Fourie said the border had been wrongly drawn, and should have been further south.

[23](#) See especially Killen to Director-General, 1 September 1981: DFA 1/22/3/20A. The go-between was Harry's cousin. In January 1981 the South African ambassador in London, Marais Steyn, had met Dr Fe Foreign Affairs in the office of the Angolan President, seemingly without result: Steyn to Director-Gen
1/22/3/19.

[24](#) Summary notes of meeting between South Africa and Angola, Paris, 28/29 November 1981: [www.aluka.org](#). Angolans paid a price for talking to the racist and despised South Africans, as with Kaunda of Zambia, accepted that Angola had to look after its own interests, and that these might require talking to the Sou

[25](#) *The Star* (Johannesburg), 9 December 1982.

[26](#) DFA 1/22/3/23. In July 1980 Fourie wrote to congratulate him on his new appointment: DFA 1/22/3

[27](#) Meeting between South Africa and Angola, Ilha do Sal, 7 December 1982: [www.aluka.org](#).

[28](#) *The Star*, 20 December 1982; *Africa Confidential*, 19 January 1983. Pik Botha thought Dos Santos was Angolans because of his Russian wife: 'you can't govern Angola with coloured people with white wives: is all coloured! 95% of blacks don't understand it .Botha to French Ambassador Dorin, 24 October 1979

[29](#) Meeting between South Africa and Angola, Ilha do Sal, 7 December 1982: [www.aluka.org](#), 5-6.

[30](#) In 1982 SWAPO fighters had penetrated into the white farming area near Tsumeb. For details see N. Played by the People's Liberation Army of Namibia during the Namibian struggle, 1978 to 1989' (Unp Afrikaans University, 1999).

[31](#) See esp. the speech by the permanent representative of South Africa to the UN Security Council, 16
1/22/3/26.

[32](#) See speeches by the permanent representative of SA to the UNSC, August 1981 and 16 December 19

[33](#) Notes of meeting with Goulding, 9 November 1983, and memo by Dave Steward, 11 November 198 claimed that a letter had been sent to Angola on 22 April about a meeting; when no response was recei
19 August, after which the South Africans were taken up with their constitutional referendum: Minutes Verde, 11 September 1983 in [www.aluka.org](#).

[34](#) DFA 1/22/3/26. *The Herald* (Salisbury), 25 January 1984 reported on 'Sensitive talks between Angol Cape Verde.

[35](#) DFA 1/22/3/27.

[36](#) DFA 1/22/3/27: statement, 18 April 1984.

[37](#) R.F. (Pik) Botha to Haig, 9 March 1984: DFA 1/22/3/27.

[38](#) DFA 1/22/3/28.

[39](#) See the speech by the Angolan permanent representative at the UN, 3 December 1984: DFA 1/22/3/

[40](#) DFA 1/22/3/30.

[41](#) *Star*, 18 April 1985; *South African Digest*, 26 April 1985; DFA 1/22/3/29.

[42](#) R.F. Botha to Rodrigues, 1 May 1985: [www.aluka.org](#). Botha drew Angola's attention to South Africa attacks from SWAPO in Angola and to 'inflammatory remarks' in the Angolan media, including those c South African presence at Calueque.

[43](#) Angop, 28 May 1985: DFA 1/22/3/30.

[44](#) Press release sent to Angola, 24 May 1985: DFA 1/22/3/31. On 21 May 1984 the South African govern joint declaration by the two countries declaring that neither would allow any training on their soil aga

[45](#) Magnus Malan makes no mention of this episode in *My Life with the SA Defence Force* (Pretoria: Pro

[46](#) See speeches of Elisio de Figueiredo, the permanent representative of Angola, to the UN Security C 3 October 1985. He spoke of 'the South African-run, South African-supplied, South African-supported, South African-defended, South African-controlled, South African-maintained group of puppets, traitors and thieves which calls itself the Unita group ...': DFA 1/22/3/32.

[47](#) DFA 1/22/3/32. On 5 June 1986 the SADF attacked Namibia using scorpion missiles from Israel: thr two Soviet merchant ships were damaged and a Cuban merchant vessel was sunk. *The Herald*, 25 Sept a South African attack on Cuito Cunanvale had been repulsed after heavy fighting.

[48](#) Summary minutes of meeting, 13 May 1988 in [www.aluka.org](#). Pik Botha raised his concern that fou Angola, had launched a SAM7 missile in South Africa. F. van Dunem, the Angolan Minister of Justice, s Namibia/Angola border, having written a doctoral thesis on the subject.

[49](#) On the 1988 talks see esp. G. Berridge, 'Diplomacy and the Angola/Namibia Accords, *International / Crocker, High Noon*, chapters 16-18. Angola played down the May bilateral with South Africa: Victoria I 16 May 1988 cited Berridge, 'Diplomacy', 468, note 79.

[50](#) The first full account of these talks appeared in Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country* (Johan 1994). [[Links](#)]



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