

THE SOVIET THREAT TO SOUTHERN AFRICA

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There is no understanding Soviet policy and strategy in any region, including southern Africa, without understanding Soviet foreign policy in general. And this cannot be understood without recognizing the Soviet Union's determination to be a global power, entitled to a role wherever it deems its interests at stake, with the power and influence to carry it off. It is also an alienated power. That is, Soviet leaders reject many aspects of the existing international order: Its structure of power (viewed as still too favorable to the West), its economic hierarchy (viewed as still the creature of the industrialized market economies), its rules of play (viewed as still too favorable to American technique), and its obstacles to change (viewed as still too formidable to their friends and favorites). Soviet leaders, Andropov no less than Khrushchev, see their country as the single most powerful force for rectifying these "deficiencies." This they do without dreaming of conquering or controlling the world. They seek influence, not real estate — not even others' natural wealth.

The Soviet Union is also, for want of a better adjective, an ideological power. Its perspective on the world differs fundamentally from the United States', deriving as it does from a peculiar, often encrusted, and highly institutionalized set of beliefs. Without suggesting that the United States and its major allies are free of their own peculiar ideas, the Soviet outlook means that every important area of change becomes for East and West a contest of value as well as a test of strength. Cynical the Soviet leaders are, but in superficial ways, not at the core of their beliefs, and that is the problem.

This ambitious, alienated, and ideological power, however, exists in a world as complex and intractable for it as for others, a fact evident to Soviet leaders. The reality of a fragmenting international order plagues their policies as much as those

of the West. The cohesion of Soviet alliances is as threatened as the West's, although in different ways. Enemies are as immediate and powerful, and, indeed, more numerous. Clients, particularly in the Third World, are as obstreperous and willful, and involvements with them as hazardous. Above all else, nuclear war casts as much of a shadow over Soviet policy as over the West's, though popular myth in many Western circles has it otherwise.

As a result, Soviet policy faces an impressive and not always easily reconciled set of tasks. In order of importance, as I judge Soviet priorities, these are first to secure the cohesion and stability of the Soviet domestic order by promoting an environment beyond Soviet borders which helps rather than hinders. Second, and by extension, policy's next most important task is to contribute to the endurance and viability of the Soviet alliance system in Eastern Europe. Third, policy must seek to avoid nuclear war. This belongs third because, as far as one can judge, Soviet leaders apparently would sacrifice it to the other two; they also, it seems, have a version of "better dead than (not) red," and events in Poland and the German Democratic Republic, not only in the Soviet Union, may trigger it.

Fourth, policy is expected to enhance Soviet influence over developments, conflicts in particular, within regions bordering the Soviet Union. Whether Soviet leaders fancy themselves someday ruling over the critical strategic theaters ringing their own lands from northeast Asia through the Persian Gulf to the Balkans is impossible to tell. This belongs to day dreams and Soviet leaders do not say much about their day dreams. Whether, short of this, they aim at a kind of droit de regard over military trends within neighboring regions, making themselves in effect the security manager for each area, also cannot be settled based on the evidence. Soviet leaders, however, do make plain a determination to prevent any other power from retaining or amassing greater influence than they in these areas, to guarantee

themselves a major role in dealing with change, particularly violent change, in these areas, and to see to it that Soviet interests, as they choose to define them, will be respected.

Fifth, and only fifth, policy is designed to reinforce Soviet standing as a power apart, possessing the same authority as the United States, the same claim to deference from lesser powers, the same opportunity to mediate and, therefore, to influence international conflicts, and the same right to intervene in any quarter as Soviet leaders see fit. Crudely put, Soviet policy seeks to destroy America's double-standard for the superpowers while preserving one for everyone else.

Sixth, and only sixth, the Soviet Union means to undergird the global reach of its power with facilities, friendships, and political access in the most far-flung regions. From Southeast Asia to Central America, from southern Africa to the Middle East, the Soviet Union wants more "coaling stations," parapets, and friends in high places. With these it intends to protect its own expanding lines of communication, lanes of commerce, and vast fishing fleet, and, it should not be doubted, in war to threaten those of its major Western adversaries.

Soviet leaders, however, also view this infrastructure as vital to the seventh task of policy: Promoting (and protecting) change in tune with their notions of a more desirable world. This comes last, not because it is unimportant to Soviet leaders, but because the other six are still more important. Unless, however, it is recognized that Soviet leaders are driven at some level by more than the desire to aggrandize their nation's and their regime's power, a crucial policy impulse will be missed.

Only the last three of these objectives have much to do with most of the Third World and the dramas within. Soviet priorities in short, not merely Soviet

objectives, are important. Russia, Europe, and surrounding territories remain the point of departure for Soviet foreign policy, not southern Africa. And, when Soviet leaders address the problems closest and most critical to them, they do so directly, not vicariously, with roundabout strategies for assailing nearby adversaries from afar. Soviet policy in southern Africa comes after, not as part of, Soviet policy in Europe and Asia.

True, the United States figures in all seven priorities, lending them a superficial unity. The only compelling threats to Soviet security and peace of mind, after all, at least the only consciously instigated ones, are those which Soviet leaders can imagine the United States raising or backing. The threat of China, for example, but for the shadow of American complicity, would not be nearly so menacing. Neither NATO nor Germany, but for the introduction of American power, would occupy Soviet policymakers as they do. Only the United States is the Soviet Union's fit partner and foe in shaping the nuclear threat. And only the United States sets the standard of superpower status — not to mention, setting the widest range of obstacles to its achievement by the Soviet Union.

The United States also lurks in the background of nearly everything of concern to the Soviet Union in the Third World. If any political force can threaten or impede the growth of Soviet facilities and access in the Third World, it is the United States. If these facilities and access are intended to constrain and counter the power of any particularly country, it is the United States'. If any other country's successes and failures in the Third World affect the overall global balance, they are, again, the United States'. If any other country can affect the pace and character of change nearly everywhere in the Third World, it is the United States. And, if any country symbolizes and leads history's alternative to socialism, it, too, is the United States.

Yet, the Soviet preoccupation with the United States hardly means that Soviet policy in places like southern Africa is not the product of a great many other considerations. Nor does it make these regions only battle grounds in a Soviet-American contest and nothing more.

International politics is too complicated for that. And Soviet priorities are too disjointed. For Soviet leaders only regions on Soviet borders, like Europe, the Persian Gulf, and Northeast Asia, are strategic preoccupations; only they are approached with strategic criteria constantly uppermost; only they regularly make it onto the daily agendas of the men at the top. Areas beyond are regions of opportunity, attractive precisely because change does not automatically threaten the underlying East-West balance and Soviet advances do not inevitably risk provoking superpower confrontation. Granted Soviet policymakers harbor a permanent urge to displace American power almost everywhere (along with French, Chinese, Israeli, and Saudi power), the urge has never become a compulsion. By the same token, gains in these areas are, from the Soviet perspective, worth fewer risks than Soviet stakes in the critical close-in theaters. If the superpowers come eyeball-to-eyeball again, it will not be over Nicaragua or Namibia, but over Iran or its equivalent. It will not, because the Soviet leadership has no intention of accepting a head-to-head military conflict with the Americans in Central America or southern Africa. It has no intention of doing this, not only because the military balance favors the United States in such cases, but because neither is central to the strategic contest between East and West as the Soviet Union conceives it.

This is not to say that, when Soviet leaders think about southern Africa, strategic considerations never cross their minds, or that the West's dependence on minerals from this area has no place in their calculations. On the contrary, nearly every Soviet piece of writing on the area alludes to the minerals. Some also refer

to South Africa's position "at the junction of two oceans," giving the country "great strategic value to the West." Indeed, as this particular account concludes, "this is why it [South Africa] can be described as an extremely important bridgehead of world imperialism, whose loss would deal a telling blow to its own positions."<sup>1</sup> Rather I am arguing that, in the case of southern Africa these are second-level considerations, a matter for wartime planners, a pleasant vision were these resources already under Soviet command, and not a primary guide to policy — policy that in reality must respond to richer and more immediate pressures.

### **Soviet Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa**

The framework of Soviet policy in southern Africa is Black Africa, not Europe. Understanding the twists and turns, aims and concerns, of Soviet policy below the Zambezi comes easier if one has some sense of the evolution of Soviet policy elsewhere on the continent. The Soviets, after all, have been engaged in this part of the world, struggling, hoping, learning, plotting for more than a quarter century. Much of that time their policy has been keyed to developments outside southern Africa.

Leaving aside prehistory, that is Russia's eighteenth century liaison with Abyssinia and the Comintern's desultory liaison with the South African Communist Party, Africa became a serious, working object of Soviet foreign policy only with decolonization. Ghanaian independence in 1957 launched the Soviets in Africa. For the next decade Soviet policy surged and swelled from early naive expectation. Introduced to Sekou Touré's seemingly radical regime in Guinea in 1958 and Patrice Lumumba's Congo a year later, and knowing little about the soil from which they

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1. A. Runov, "South Africa: Citadel of Racism and Reaction, International Affairs, no. 11 (November 1976), p. 72

grew, Soviet leaders took Black Africa for a new revolutionary front. An exuberant Khrushchev was at the helm, and his vision of newly independent states, in ever increasing numbers revolting against Western tutelage and eventually Western political ways, went hand in hand with his other excesses: 1958 was a year after Sputnik and the first Soviet ICBM, the year the Soviet Union provoked the second great Berlin crisis, a power move to highlight the shift in power underway. 1959 was the year Khrushchev made his boast, later written into the 1961 Party Program, of catching and passing the mightiest capitalist economy within eleven years.

His transport had little to do with an overt, comprehensive Soviet strategy. Its inspiration was written into events. The Soviet Union would press the Western powers in Central Europe, the fulcrum of the postwar world, and the momentum of Soviet scientific and economic progress coupled with a the gathering force of defecting new nations would do the rest. In Africa, the Soviet Union arrived and began choosing sides immediately. By 1960 African states were dividing over the Congolese conflict, the Algerian war, and relations with former colonial powers. Moscow not merely sided with the so-called Casablanca group (Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Morocco, and the United Arab Republic) against the so-called Brazzaville (later Monrovia) group of "splitters" and "imperialism's collaborators," it embraced the wave of the future. Its aid program, its insinuated partnership in international forums, its imperious political advice for building the new society, virtually every aspect of its demeanor revealed Soviet expectations. Eventually the Soviet leadership, though in this case Khrushchev had less than full support from several of his colleagues, even persuaded itself that the most advanced of these states, a group labeled "revolutionary democracies," had escaped across the line into socialism or, more accurately, onto the "path of socialist construction." Apparently inspired by the Cuban model, Khrushchev after 1963 pronounced a

number of regimes — Algeria, Ghana, Mali, and the UAR — the genuine item, accepting their single-party systems as adequate substitutes for communist parties and their versions of Marxism, sometimes Leninism as close enough.

Soon after Khrushchev fell in 1964, so did Algeria's Ben Bella, then Ghana's Nkrumah, then Mali's Keita. Much of the Soviet Union's second decade in Africa, from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, was spent coming to terms with African realities. The Ghanaian, Malian, and other African revolutions had turned out to be mock enterprises, shallow affairs, as Soviet experts and policymakers now recognized, half-baked, undisciplined, and rushed. History's castoffs in the Ivory Coast, Senegal, Tunisia, and Zaire had more staying power. And, if there was a wave of the future, by 1967-68 it seemed to be African militaries, more and more of whom were pushing the politicians aside and assuming power themselves.

Over the next ten years, Soviet leaders set their sights more realistically, trimmed commitments — "We shall do the most for the cause of international revolution if we first build up our own Soviet society," they now said — and settled down to diversifying their relations with a wide array of African states, giving increasing attention to inherently significant countries like Nigeria and less to simply congenial ones.<sup>2</sup> They also lost interest in Africa.

In the mid-1970s the pendulum swung again. Dramatic change in southern Africa released it. The sudden, unanticipated collapse of Portuguese colonialism in 1974 seemed in one fell swoop to alter the whole picture. Colonial salients now gave way not only to independent regimes but revolutions. These in turn seemed sure to increase the pressures on Rhodesia and Namibia, and, once they fell to

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2. Not that Moscow now for the first time approached Africa's more moderate regimes. From 1962-63, when relations were established with the likes of Senegal, Nigeria, and Kenya, the Soviet Union had actively sought expanded ties.

black rule, on the Republic of South Africa itself. For the first time, developments in southern Africa, in Soviet eyes, had become the wheelhouse of change on the continent, rather than as for so long in its tow.

Rarely does Soviet policy on any problem or in any region shift overnight, and I would be misleading the reader if I left the impression that this next stage in Soviet African policy began full-blown the day after the Caetano regime collapsed in Lisbon. It was neither so fulsome nor abrupt as that. In fact in the year or two before, Soviet observers had already begun to feel better about trends in Africa. The counter-revolutionary wave they feared with the collapse of so-called progressive regimes, the rise of African militaries, and daunting obstacles to development never materialized. Instead of a Thermidor, or, as Soviet commentators put it, the "Latin-Americanization" of Africa, the continent had settled into an uneasy political stasis, with change here and there, some moving in one direction, some in another. Regimes like the Ghanaian, that had lost their way had not lost it completely, as a third generation of leaders took from both the Nkrumah experience and the backlash to it. Regimes that proclaimed socialism their goal — "scientific socialism," not, as the Soviets saw it, the bastardized African version — still cropped up. They emerged in Somalia, the Malagasy Republic, and Benin, to go with the ones already in place in Congo-Brazzaville and Guinea. To the toned-down satisfaction of Soviet observers, Africa's progressives this time around appeared less given to "leftist excesses" and false hopes. They, approving Soviet writers noted, were proceeding more sensibly with programs to nationalize private holdings, expand the state sector, develop agriculture, and build grass-roots political organization. And they were unambiguous in their commitment

to Marxism-Leninism, often spelling it out in their national constitutions.<sup>3</sup>

Then came the Portuguese revolution. In a relative instant it put southern Africa's future in a new light. Soviet leaders, who for nearly a decade had left Africa to Africanists, suddenly took note. Africa, again, became a region of promise, an area capable of producing a revolutionary pattern, rather than merely the odd revolution. Soviet leaders were not reverting to old illusions. They had not forgotten the perishability of supposed African revolutions nor had they unlearned twenty years' of lessons in the frustrations that Africa holds for outsiders who come with preconceived notions. But, from all appearances, they placed a special faith in the men and regimes coming to power in Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Angola. These were revolutions, as the Soviets judged them, made of stiffer stuff, in part because they were won in armed struggle, led by men who bore arms rather than pamphlets, and in part because they faced real and powerful external threats that would keep them from growing soft.

For five years, from 1974 to 1979, Soviet excitement mounted. Not blindly or unrealistically. Soviet leaders were not thinking of all of Africa when they contemplated the significance of developments in these three countries. They knew many parts of the continent would remain untouched. But in southern Africa, Mozambique and Angola were only a first installment. There a process greater than any single country, they assumed, was fast approaching dénouement. Out of it the area would emerge remade. And once there were "progressive," maybe even

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3. See E. Melnikov, "Politicheskie preobrazovaniya v Afrikanskikh stranakh sotsialisticheskoi orientatsii" (Political transformations in African states of a socialist orientation, *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya*, no. 12 (December 1981), p. 121. For a fuller and enthusiastic discussion of the notion of African states of "a socialist orientation," giving the concept the patina of theoretical importance see Anatoly Gromyko, *Afrika: Progress, trudnosti i perspektivy* (Africa: Progress, Problems, and Prospects) (Moscow: "mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya," 1981), in particular, pp. 75-97.

revolutionary regimes in Salisbury and Windhoek as well as Luanda and Maputo, what they knew still to be the long, arduous issue of South Africa would nonetheless at last become inescapable. History would have written another small but distinctive chapter. The West would not be the better for it. And the growing list of African states that Soviet analysts celebrated, ten states in the first rank, six in the second, would take on a new coloration.<sup>4</sup>

It was not to be, not in any case so smoothly as Soviet leaders had anticipated in 1975-76. In Zimbabwe the process went awry — or, if not awry, then its own way. Power there passed to Black Africans, progressive Black Africans, not despite the West, but in the end through the West's good offices. Afterwards Zimbabwe's new rulers hardly threw themselves into the struggle to liberate the remainder of southern Africa and hardly rushed to embrace their would-be Soviet benefactors. Namibia, too, disappointed Soviet expectations. By the early 1980s Soviet observers could tell that Namibian independence was not, as the French say, for tomorrow. Coupled with major new distractions elsewhere, in Afghanistan, Poland, the Middle East, not to mention, in U.S.-Soviet relations, southern Africa's cloudier future stilled Soviet enthusiasm. By the early 1980s Soviet leaders were, again, taking the long view and day-to-day African concerns, South Africa included, were once more in the hands of Africanists and other middle-level bureaucrats.

#### Soviet Policy in Southern-Africa

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4. By the late 1970s Soviet commentators grouped Algeria, Angola, Benin, Ethiopia, Guinea, Congo, Libya, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Tanzania in a category of states making "far-reaching economic and social changes . . . facilitating and accelerating their possible transition to socialism." (A tame version of the 1963-64 formulation.) A second cluster of states — Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, Mali, and Zimbabwe — were said to be taking constructive but less advanced steps. See, for example, Gleb Starushenko, "Chosen Path," *New Times*, no. 40 (October 1980), p. 18. Starushenko is the Deputy Director of the African Institute.

The Soviet Union has not methodically applied itself to the problems and opportunities of southern Africa. Its contemporary involvement does not grow out of a long-term, carefully invested strategy tracing back to the start of the anti-colonial struggle, let alone back to the the Third Comintern Congress in 1921 and the first appearance of the South African Communist Party. In a real sense, the beginning of Soviet policy in southern Africa is hardly a decade old. 1974 is the divide. All the long years of public diplomacy and sloganeering for "national liberation" and all the aid channeled to the MPLA, FRELIMO, and later to the ANC and SWAPO were part of a different era. Physically, strategically, and conceptually the current Soviet position originates with Mozambique's and Angola's independence.

Their independence when it came caught the Soviet leaders by surprise. They like everyone else had no way of foretelling the Portuguese revolution and the effects it would unleash. As far as they were concerned, and much as they may have regretted it, on the eve of April 1974 the status quo in southern Africa looked roughly as stable to them as it did to the American authors of NSSM 39. While they had every intention of keeping up the drumbeat of condemnation and every intention of continuing their support to anti-colonial and anti-apartheid groups, neither their commentary nor their actions suggest any inkling of what was about to happen. Indeed, after 1972 they had cut off aid to Neto's MPLA, as they concentrated on the bickering within the party, only to hastily resume it in early 1974.

When the Soviet leadership suddenly awakened to the portent of far-reaching change, it did not move instantly or decisively nor did it devise a whole strategy leading from Angola to Zimbabwe to Namibia. Soviet actions in the early confusion of the Angolan civil war were tentative and uncertain, hardly the

determined moves of a leadership with its mind made up and its ultimate goal firmly set.<sup>5</sup> And such has been the character of Soviet policy in the region ever since.

Aside from wanting their friends, the MPLA in Angola and ZAPU in Rhodesia, to share in power, Soviet policymakers gave no indication of aiming for a particular outcome. Nor did they seem especially eager to meddle with their military power. In Angola, their first steps unfolded cautiously, even hesitantly. Arms were sent to the MPLA and in increasing numbers by fall 1974, a period of substantially expanded Chinese assistance to the FNLA. But in January 1975, when under OAU pressure the three contending Angolan factions agreed to a coalition government come independence and a shared arrangement for the transition, the Soviets backed the idea.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the spring, as the situation deteriorated and the fighting between the FNLA and MPLA increased, particularly by May when the FNLA seemed to be getting the better of it, Soviet public statements appealed for strong Portuguese action to head off a civil war.<sup>7</sup> The Soviet media also

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5. There are a number of useful commentaries on the Soviet role in the Angolan War, including Jiri Valenta, "Soviet Decision-Making on the Intervention in Angola," in David E. Albright (ed.), Communism in Africa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 87-117 as well as his "The Soviet-Cuban Intervention in Angola," Studies in Comparative Communism (Spring/Summer 1978); Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, The Angolan War: A Study in Soviet Policy in the Third World (Boulder: Westview Press, 1980); Colin Legum, "Angola and the Horn of Africa," in Stephen S. Kaplan et. al., Mailed Fist, Velvet Glove: Soviet Armed Forces as a Political Instrument (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1979)); and Peter Vanneman and Martin James, "The Soviet Intervention in Angola: Intentions and Implication," Strategic Review (Summer 1976). But the most balanced and incisive account is in Larry C. Napper, "The African Terrain and U.S.-Soviet Conflict in Angola and Rhodesia," in Alexander L. George (ed.), Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry (Boulder: Westview, 1983), pp. 155-85.

6. See, for example, Pravda, February 16, 1975, p. 5. In contrast, the Americans did not publicly endorse the notion of a coalition government until summer 1975, too late.

7. See Napper, "The African Terrain and U.S.-Soviet Conflict," p. 160.

reaffirmed the importance of a coalition government and, on at least one occasion, criticized outside intervention from any quarter.<sup>8</sup>

As one looks back on the tangled set of moves, counter moves, and separate moves that followed, several aspects of Soviet behavior are striking. First, while clearly the Soviets wanted the MPLA to hold its own among the warring factions and planned to give it considerable military support, nothing suggests that until the last moment was a large-scale direct joint intervention with the Cubans contemplated. Instead they apparently calculated that, provided the MPLA's military position was not undermined, it would do fine in whatever political arrangement was finally made, all the more because the radical officers in the Portuguese Armed Forces Movement were expected to stack the deck in its favor. The Soviet Union, as they saw the situation, had no reason to get out front. Second, while the South African role does not account for the steady increase in Soviet military aid over the summer months nor the initial appearance of Cuban advisers in June, nearly two months before the first South African patrols crossed into Angola, the South African decision to become heavily involved in October does appear to have been a turning point in the Soviet leadership's own thinking. Within a week of South Africa's escalation, the air and sea-lift of Cuban troops had begun (suggesting, of course, that the contingency planning had been done weeks before). Third, throughout the Soviet-Cuban intervention, Soviet leaders kept a wary eye on others, particularly the United States, the OAU, and, until late summer 1975 when it pulled out, China. Even after the large-scale Soviet-Cuban military operation began, Soviet leaders appeared ready to retreat if the United States drew itself up and did something. Not until the Senate ruled this out December 19 were Soviet leaders confident they were home free. Never until the very end was the die

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8. Izvestiya, May 21, 1975.

cast.

Taken as a whole, Soviet actions in Angola have implications important for understanding the broader thrust of Soviet policy in the region. First, there is every reason to believe that a determined counter intervention on the United States' part (leaving aside its questionable wisdom on other grounds) would have reversed the Soviet decision. Second, there is even reason to believe that, had the Americans made an issue of preserving the Alvor accords and avoiding superpower intervention early on — indeed had they focused on the issue at all in the context of U.S.-Soviet relations — the Soviets would have been responsive. That would have still left the Cubans, who, if Carlos Rafael Rodriguez is to be taken at his word, had committed themselves even before they knew the Soviets were on board and who could have mounted some kind of an operation even without Soviet support. It would also have been no guarantee of a different outcome within Angola itself. But it is a critical piece of evidence suggesting that Soviet policy in the region is neither so single-minded, undeflectable, nor ambitious as many assume.

What Soviet behavior in Angola hinted, its behavior in Rhodesia demonstrated. Faced with major constraints, headed by the determination of the Frontline States to recapture control over regional crises from the superpowers, Soviet policy relented.<sup>9</sup> Looked at from this distance, the more remarkable aspect of Soviet

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9. Not only did the five Frontline States (Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Botswana, and Angola) push ZAPU and ZANU into collaborating in the Patriotic Front and take the lead in managing the diplomacy among all key parties, including the British and the Americans, they also saw to it that all, or nearly all, arms to ZAPU and ZANU were channeled through the OAU Liberation Committee as well as determining what kinds of weapons could be introduced into the conflict. They did all this because, as Kenneth Kaunda had said, "Our failure to find a solution here [in Angola] confirms that the Organization of African Unity has no power to shape the destiny of Africa. Power is in the hands of the superpowers, to whom we are handing Africa by our failure."

actions was not how much military assistance was given to ZAPU and its military arm, some of it doubtless outside the OAU framework, or how readily the notion of armed struggle was embraced by them. The more remarkable aspect was how docilely the Soviets let the Frontline States control the state of play, how unopportunist (or inept) they were in exploiting politics within the Patriotic Front, how feebly they resisted the Lancaster House settlement, and ultimately how little they did, indeed, wanted to do to set their defeated clients against Mugabe and his people after the February 1980 elections.

True, events dealt them as allies the weaker of the contending factions and, true, this time the OAU in the form of the Frontline States, the Western powers, foremostly the British, and even the South Africans (in pushing Ian Smith toward a settlement of some kind) all closed, rather than opened, opportunities to them. But this does not gainsay the resigned Soviet response nor the impact the whole experience has had on Soviet thinking about the region. Indeed, Soviet behavior in the Namibian case, has since 1978 been almost identical. Grumbling, it has gone along with Security Council Resolution 435 and the role of the Contact States in shepherding it. It has gone along with virtually the same rationalization by which it abstained in voting on the original (1977) UK-US UN resolutions for a negotiated settlement in Rhodesia: The Africans want it. In this case, not only the Frontline States favor a settlement within the guidelines of Resolution 435, but, as Soviet accounts note, SWAPO, too, has embraced the idea, and, while Moscow has its reservations, it has made it plain that it will not act on them.<sup>10</sup>

This is one side of Soviet policy in the region, an important side if the Soviet

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10. See Veniamin Midtsev, "Abetting the Racists," New Times, no. 45 (November 1979), pp. 23-24. Significantly, Midtsev is a senior Africanist in the International Department of the CPSU's Central Committee.

challenge in southern Africa is to be accurately understood and insights derived for dealing more effectively with it. But there are other sides as well. When in 1974 Soviet leaders made southern Africa the focus of their hopes and attention, they were also re-entering Africa as a certain kind of benefactor — as the military patron of "progressive" change. Somewhere along the line they had given up pretending that they had an all-purpose, all-around role to play. Economic development, other than token contributions, gestures to reassure friends or secure commodities, became the West's problem (and duty, as Soviet representatives to UNCTAD and other forums liked to stress).

The figures spoke for themselves. From 1975 to 1979, Soviet arms deliveries to sub-Saharan African governments totalled \$3.3 billion, seventeen times their value in the decade 1961-1971.<sup>11</sup> Economic credits meanwhile fell from \$492 million in 1961-1971 to \$335 million in 1975-1979 (even though Soviet economic credits to the Third World in general rose steadily from \$3.8 billion in 1955-1964 to \$6.2 billion in 1965-1974 to \$10.6 billion 1975-1981).<sup>12</sup> In 1981 the Soviet Union signed \$2 billion in arms sales contracts with sub-Saharan African governments, almost four times the economic assistance given to the area over the previous quarter century.<sup>13</sup> (Western economic aid to these states in 1981 was \$6 billion.)

Moreover, these aggregate statistics failed to indicate, as David Albright has

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11. David E. Albright, The USSR and Sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s, The Washington Papers No. 101 (Washington: Praeger Special Studies, 1983), p. 7. In neither case do these totals include assistance to so-called national liberation movements.

12. The first statistics, adjusted by the author to exclude north African countries, are from Soviet Economic Prospects for the 1970s, Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress (Washington: GPO, 1973), p. 768; the second from Albright, The USSR and Sub-Saharan Africa, p. 95.

13. Background Brief, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (London), July 1983.

pointed out, the special place the Soviet Union came to occupy in the military efforts of a growing number of Black African states, including Angola, Mozambique, and Ethiopia.<sup>14</sup> From 1975 to 1979, \$500 million of Angola's \$890 million arms purchases came from the Soviet Union, \$170 million of Mozambique's \$240 million, and \$1.5 billion of Ethiopia's \$1.8 billion. (Western and multilateral agency economic assistance to Ethiopia over this period was \$725 million, Soviet economic assistance, \$125 million; Western aid to Angola \$131 million, Soviet, \$15 million; Western aid to Mozambique, \$350 million, Soviet, \$5 million.)

These sums — and their effect would only be heightened by adding trade statistics and numbers of military advisers — represented both a plight and a conception. A plight because the Soviet Union lacked the resources to contribute more in other areas, or so Soviet leaders said and doubtless thought. Gromyko often and pointedly explained to Third World audiences simply how little his country had to give. But a conception because Soviet leaders, having grasped the mantle of a global power and built their military strength to a certain point, believed they should play a more direct and active role in defending "progressive" forces in places like southern Africa. And sometimes defending these forces meant helping them to defeat opponents who stood in their way. Admiral Gorshkov, the father of the modern Soviet navy, from the early 1970s spoke of protecting the "national liberation struggle," and made this one of the rationales for a stronger navy. Others also, long before southern Africa exploded in change, began writing of the link between the Soviet Union's growing ability to intervene with force and

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14. Albright, The USSR and Sub-Saharan Africa, p. 16. By 1975-1979 Albright reports that 17 African countries were primarily dependent on the Soviet Union for arms supplies, four of them exclusively dependent. (p. 8).

the course of national liberation.<sup>15</sup> When the Angolan events broke, Soviet leaders were in a mood to get involved, albeit cautiously.

Returning to Africa as a military patron also represents both a commitment and an opportunity. The Soviets tend to see themselves, along with the Cubans and one or two of their East European allies, as the only force able and willing to provide substantial military aid to so-called liberation groups. When these groups triumph, as in Angola and Mozambique, the commitment almost automatically transfers to aiding with their national security. Both as a matter of Soviet credibility in the Third World at large (the Soviets, too, to judge from some of the private rationalizations offered after the invasion of Afghanistan have a fear of appearing weak if Third World clients can be intimidated or overthrown) and as entrée with new and insecure regimes, the Soviet Union takes on itself a share of their defense. Hence, the warnings of the Soviet ambassador in Mozambique ("If our friends are attacked, we will have an appropriate answer") and the visit to Mozambique ports by two Soviet warships after the South African raid on ANC facilities at Matola in January 1981.<sup>16</sup> Hence, the recent quiet, but direct warnings to Pretoria over its aggressive acts in Angola.

These are not open-ended commitments. Nor are they evidence of a Brezhnev Doctrine for Angola and Mozambique; were either regime to begin unraveling internally the Soviet Union is unlikely to save it by direct military intervention. On the contrary, the Soviet Union has carefully tailored the kinds of arms that it supplies and hedged its own direct role. Were it, as one sensible observer has

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15. The best illustration was V.M. Kulish (ed.), Voennaya sila i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya (Military force and international relations) (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1972), particularly the chapters written by A.M. Dudin and Yu.N. Listvinov.

16. Le Monde, March 20, 1981.

noted, to provide Mozambique with more sophisticated weapons or assume a direct role in the counterinsurgency effort against the Movimento Nacional da Resistencia de Moçambique (MNR) or were it to make public its threats to South Africa over the attacks on Angola and ostentatiously to take a larger part in preparing Angolan defenses, as it is doing in Syria, that would be another matter.<sup>17</sup> The Soviets have not been in a hurry to escalate their involvement to this extent, granted that Africans have placed their own limits on military ties.

The Soviet Union, however, is not militarily engaged in southern Africa out of generosity (although its leaders, like the leaders of other great powers with forces dispatched around the world, may think so). It is there because opportunity beckons and because, once there, to leave involves risks and implied losses. First is the chance to add to the complement of air strips, bunkering facilities, storage depots, and communications installations serving the Soviet Union's sprawling military establishment. These, Soviet leaders want, foremostly to keep an eye on and to offset the global infrastructure of America's capacity for waging general war, including its strategic nuclear component, and then to beef up the tools by which they, in descending order of priority, (1) protect their proliferating lines of communication and commerce, (2) checkmate the West's, particularly the United States', ability to intervene with force, while in some instances mounting interventions of their own, and (3) intimidate local governments that "get out of line" (as the Ghanaians did in seizing Soviet fishermen in 1967) or bolster them with the visit of frigates or admirals when friends are in domestic trouble (as Somalia's Siad Barre was in 19 and the Seychelles' France Albert René was in 1981).

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17. Seth Singleton, "The Shared Tactical Goals of South Africa and the Soviet Union," Africa Notes of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, no. 12, April 26, 1983, p. 3.

Second, the Soviets are eager to demonstrate that history is moving in the right direction, zig-zags and all. Much of their definition of success and, indeed, much of their sense of legitimacy — the legitimacy of the "Soviet experience" — rests on changes like those in Angola, Nicaragua, Yemen, and above all Vietnam, a fact driven home at every Party congress and by every major foreign policy speech in between. Trends alone, even if not much aided by the Soviets, as in Nicaragua or Mozambique, matter to them, reassure them, buoy them. If the Soviets have played a role, so easily and preeminently a military role, the effect is still more powerful.

Third, and often not so distinguishable from the second, Soviet leaders instinctively favor trends or events diminishing U.S. power and influence. On the surface of it, southern Africa has from the start appeared to the Soviets as a place where U.S. influence must inevitably erode. If by playing the role of military benefactor the Soviets can speed the process, most assuredly they will. The trick for them is always to work at the problem indirectly — to displace the Americans, not to defeat them. Defeating them is a high risk proposition for which, in any event, in all but the most favorable circumstances the Soviet Union does not have adequate military power.

Because Soviet policy in southern Africa is the creature of all these contending impulses, and no one of them alone, least of all the last, it is not accompanied by a coherent, well-honed strategy dedicated to a single objective. To believe the Soviet Union measures every step in accord with a consuming desire to capture the strategically valuable minerals in the region, and this to strangle Europe and, through Europe, the United States, requires incredible powers of simplification and, what a psychologist would call, tendency for projection. No doubt Soviet leaders would welcome the leverage that control over the flow of minerals would yield —

were it in fact as great as worst-case analysts fear. But there is literally no evidence in what they write, in what the more candid among them say privately, or in their actions to date suggesting that a "resource war" is a conscious, first-order priority or practical guide to workaday policy.<sup>18</sup>

### **Soviet Policy toward South Africa**

South Africa, as any Soviet policymaker or scholarly analyst knows, is the ultimate issue in southern Africa, maybe in all of Africa. Yet the Soviet Union really does not have a South African policy, much as it does not have an Israeli policy in the Middle East, only a policy toward a situation, accompanied by a half-strategy. The situation comes in two parts: South Africa's internal evolution and the prospects for far-reaching change and, second, but invariably ahead of the fate of South Africa, the challenge raised by South Africa's counter offensive within the region. These, of course, are reinforcing, acutely so since 1974. What begins in the Soviet mind as an opportunity to affect the outcome in South Africa from neighboring states ends, at the moment, in the challenge raised by South

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18. I will not belabor the point here because I have had my say on this subject in congressional testimony and in "The Strategic Implications of the Soviet Union's Nonfuel Mineral Resource Policy," The Journal of Resource Management and Technology, Vol. 12, no. 1 (January 1983), pp. 47-55. Frankly what one believes on this score depends more on how one understands the basic character of Soviet foreign policy than it does on the issue itself. If one believes with James Arnold Miller that Brezhnev "at a secret meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders in Prague in 1973" said "that the Soviet objective was world dominance by the year 1985, and that the control of Europe's sources of energy and nonfuel minerals would reduce it to the condition of a hostage to Moscow," or, if one believes with former Ambassador Donald B. Sole that "as recently as [also] 1973 Leonid Brezhnev is reported to have told President Barre of Somalia [also] in Prague: '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,'" elaborate analyses of Soviet foreign policy probably do not much matter. Nor, for that matter, does the fact that Barre was not in Prague in 1973. (The Miller quote is from Alarm: Alert Letter on the Availability of Raw Materials mimeo., Issue No. 54, September 1983, p. 3. The Sole quote is from an interview with him in Africa Report (September-October 1981), p. 14-19.)

Africa's determination to erase that opportunity and restore, through intimidation, a de facto cordon sanitaire. Added to this mix is the American role, always a looming factor in Soviet calculations.

To begin where the Soviet leadership almost certainly does not, with the destruction of apartheid and the transformation of South African society: For, neither drives Soviet policy. Not that Soviet leaders are insincere in their commitment to black rule in South Africa and, better yet, black rule with socialism. Because, however, the chances of either happening soon are slim, even in their view, policy focuses on more imminent issues. South Africa's revolution serves as a lode star, it seems, rather than a constant, immediate source of policy. As a practical consequence, therefore, the Soviet strategy for South Africa is long-term and still basically evolutionary. Soviet leaders, following in effect the more expert judgment of the South African Communist Party (SACP), in their most optimistic moments speak of "winning liberation" within the "lifetime of the present generation," but privately their specialists hold less hope.

South Africa is not, as Soviet observers know full well, Rhodesia. Its social and political foundations are hardly about to crumble. Armed struggle will not soon carry the day, and, indeed, for this reason, Soviet analysts continue to assign it a subordinate and secondary role. Change, as they see it, will only come out of a long-term political struggle, designed to shrink, what they call, the "social base" of apartheid. South Africa's revolution is to be a fatal erosion by defection, with critical segments of the society turning their backs on the Afrikaners, rather than a gathering storm of revolutionary warriors over-running the institutions of power. Soviet analysts count on a loose, multi-tiered process: At its base are the blacks, oppressed, disenfranchised, and presumably increasingly disaffected, youth in particular; then the Asians and Coloureds; then leaders of social and economic

institutions such as religious figures, who reject apartheid (Denis Hurley, the President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference, Alan Boesak, the President of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and Desmond Tutu, the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches are all mentioned) and business circles, who fear the effects of social conflict, including "influential foreign investors" and local business circles (e.g., as noted in Soviet accounts, the National Development and Administration Fund, the Federal Chamber of Industry, and the Association of Chambers of Commerce). And finally there are the liberal forces among the white population, who recognize the injustice and even more the impossibility of preserving institutionalized discrimination on such a scale, forces growing most rapidly, again, say the Soviets, among the youth.

Inevitably these different segments of society and a host of organizations representing them may head in different directions, say the Soviets, resisting the system in their own ways. But the critical effect will be cumulative: Be it the strengthening of black trade unions and the rise of "civic protests" against the growth of prices, rents, and transport services or the more timid unease of business leaders raising their voices against racial discrimination "as incompatible with economic growth." Students organizing, creating strike funds, and working with African trade unions are as much a part of the process as young blacks fleeing their homeland and preparing themselves for the South African underground at Mazimbu or in the Angolan camps. Armed violence is treated as a galvanizing mechanism, a means to hearten blacks faced with the seemingly overwhelming power of the state, a fillip to less bold protesters, reinforcement for business interests worried about mounting disorder, and proof to the regime that its defenses are no longer unbreachable. The last, at a time when "contradictions are now rending the 'white tribe,'" when the Nationalist Party has split and "seditious ideas have penetrated even racist institutions that only recently seemed immutable — the

Dutch Reformed Church and even the Broederbond," is expected to pay even greater dividends.<sup>19</sup>

The process, as Soviet observers apparently envisage it, is not so much the ascendancy of revolutionary violence toward some moment of truth as it is a synergism among the many forces at work within South African society, accelerated by armed struggle, hollowing out the underpinnings of the system, until at some distant point it begins to crumble and change. The image of South Africa someday going up in revolutionary flames rarely, if ever, appears in Soviet analyses.

Moreover, despite the quickening of events since 1974, Soviet commentators apparently also recognize the many cross-currents at work within South African society, beginning with the attitude of the white worker. Though theoretically a natural ally, in fact, white workers are "infected with racial prejudice." The struggle "to clear their minds of the poisonous fumes of chauvinism," writes Yusuf Dadoo, the Chairman of the SACP in the World Marxist Review, "will be long and hard."<sup>20</sup> And within the black community there is, thanks to the Bantustan policy, as Soviet authors acknowledge, a "stratum interested in the success of [the regime's] racist policy and ready to cooperate with it."<sup>21</sup> As the chiefs, the administrative elite and "nascent African bourgeoisie" in the Bantustans can be bought off, so, admit Soviet authors, can some of the leaders of the Coloureds. Several Soviet sources have commented on the decision of H.J. Hendrickse and D.M. Curry to swing the support of the Labour Party behind the constitutional

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19. Boris Asoyan, "Split in the 'White Tribe,'" New Times, no. 19 (May 1982), p. 22.

20. Yusuf Dadoo, "Crisis of the Racist System in the South of Africa," World Marxist Review, no. 12 (December 1982), p. 19.

21. Runov, "South Africa," pp. 67-8.

reform of 1983.<sup>22</sup> Were these complications, and a great many others like them, not enough, one has to add, as Soviet commentators do, the problems of waging guerrilla warfare in a country without jungles, the timidity of neighboring states in the grip of South Africa's economic power or under the shadow of its military might, divisions within the OAU, the leverage the South African regime has over its African population through the elaborate apartheid system, and ultimately the sheer strength of South Africa's army, police, and other instruments of control. Toppling the system from within — and Soviet commentators repeatedly underscore that the battle will have to be fought and won within South Africa — will not be easy.

Despite their belief in fighting and winning the battle within South Africa, however, Soviet leaders also see the context beyond South African borders as important, indeed, as the rear of the revolution. Since South Africa does too, and has adopted a highly offensive strategy to deal with it, the Soviet Union's most immediate priority is to checkmate South African foreign policy, a task rather beyond its means.

The Soviets make no bones about the general sequence: "African countries," they maintain, have been effectively practicing "the tactics of 'selecting the weakest link' and advancing stage-by-stage to their ultimate objective of ending colonial rule."<sup>23</sup> First the French were defeated in Algeria, then after a long struggle, the Portuguese in all their African colonies. "After that goal was accomplished, action was shifted to Zimbabwe and Namibia." And now to Namibia

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22. See, for example, L. Skuratov, "Racist Stratagem," New Times, no. 13 (March 1983), pp. 22-3.

23. Anatoly Gromyko (ed.), Vneshnyaya politika stran Afriki (The Foreign Policy of African Countries) (Moscow: "Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya," 1981), p. 93.

and South Africa. Never mind this fairy-tale account of what Africa has been up to over the last twenty years; in this sequence, countries in South Africa's strategic rear, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, have a critical role to perform. Soviet leaders are mindful of the hazards compelling these countries to play this role with great caution, but they are expected to play it nonetheless, and in playing it to alter the context of the South African struggle. While the Soviets are not likely to push the leaderships of these countries beyond the risks they dare run, Soviet readiness to aid with Angolan and Mozambique defenses and with the arming and training of ANC insurgents is meant to buck them up.<sup>24</sup>

True, the Soviet Union has been cautious itself, avoiding a precipitate and deep involvement. True, it assigns to many others roles ahead of its own. Take, for example, Angolan defense. When Soviet writers deal with the threats facing Angola, "fraternal assistance" from the socialist countries is never among the first items mentioned. In Veniamin Midtsev's hierarchy, Soviet aid comes fifth, after the restraining influence of Western nations like France and West Germany who are less quick than the Americans to excuse Pretoria, after the "unbending resolve of the leadership and the people of Angola to uphold the independence of their country," after "the support from other Frontline States," and after OAU solidarity.<sup>25</sup> That was never the order during the Vietnam war, and it is not today the order in the Middle East.

Before making too much of Soviet restraint in this case, however, some

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24. By and large Zimbabwe has not provided facilities to the ANC, complying with assurances given on the eve of independence, a circumstance about which the Soviets are silent. The other countries on South African borders do not provide bases to the ANC, a fact the Soviets acknowledge and accept.

25. Veniamin Midtsev, "Explosive Situation," New Times, no. 34 (August 1982), pp. 9-10.

thought should be given to the recent evolution of events. In Soviet commentary, 1981 has emerged as something of a watershed. Since then, Soviet authors insist, the South African offensive has taken on a new character, and so has the larger context in which it unfolds. The escalation of the military assault on the ANC beyond South African borders deep into Angola and against targets in Mozambique and Lesotho as well as the expanded efforts to destabilize Angola, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, Soviet authorities maintain, are largely a consequence of the shift in U.S. policy under Ronald Reagan.<sup>26</sup>

We are, thus, brought back to a larger dimension of the problem. For most of the Carter years, the Soviet leadership paid scant attention to the interaction of U.S. and South African policies. While it resented the American role in mediating change in the region and disdained the Young-McHenry-Lake inflection as merely an attempt to salvage selfish American interests, it also comfortably assumed that the United States would not do well with the new "revolutionary" regimes and that the U.S. rift with South Africa would only help, since it was not likely to go far enough to alter South African behavior nor far enough to satisfy the African states, only far enough to undermine any prospect of U.S.-R.S.A. collaboration. Under Ford, Soviet leaders were actually eager to divorce southern African developments from U.S.-Soviet relations. Whatever they thought first of the gambit implicit in NSSM 39 and then the flip-flop and sudden energizing of U.S. diplomacy in the region in 1976, their over-riding interest was in decoupling Angolan developments and others to follow from East-West détente. They were not about to make an issue of U.S. policy in the area while struggling to fend off Henry Kissinger's

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26. Presumably Soviet analysts know that the proximate cause was the increase in ANC sabotage, in particular, the successful attack on SASOL plants in mid-1980, but, at the same time, Soviet leaders are doubtless convinced that Reagan's policy is the decisive factor.

efforts to make their's a major issue.

The situation now, however, is quite the reverse. The interconnection of U.S. and South African policies is, again, of importance to the Soviet leadership. Reagan's alleged global offensive and South Africa's regional offensive, they insist and no doubt believe, flow together. Part of Soviet strategy, of course, is to persuade the remainder of Africa, to the degree it needs persuading, that an "unholy alliance" has been struck between the two countries. Every measure of economic assistance (the 1982 \$1.1 billion IMF loan), every step toward military cooperation (easing restrictions on the sale of military-strategic goods) or crypto-military cooperation (lifting the ban on exports of nuclear power equipment and plutonium-3), every U.S. Security Council veto protecting South Africa, and every visit of one country's intelligence or military officials to the other are picked up and trumpeted in Soviet accounts.<sup>27</sup>

Where before U.S. and South African leaders were said to have only partly overlapping interests and divergent tactics, according to Soviet analysis, the contrast has been wiped away since January 1981. Now the two countries are said to be on the same wavelength, pursuing largely identical objectives by complementary means. The Americans, they say, seek to preserve, "though not without some facelifting," a South African regime "that would be a reliable ally;" to "suppress or to disorganize the national liberation movement in South Africa;" to stall in Namibia while "fostering pro-Western forces there capable of counteracting

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27. See, for example, Y. Tarabrin, "U.S. Expansionist Policy in Africa International Affairs, no. 10 (October 1983), pp. 41-50, and his "Afrika v globalnoi strategii imperializma" (Africa in the Global Strategy of Imperialism), Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, no. 2 (February 1982), pp. 25-37; as well as A. Urnov, "Alyans Vashington-Pretoriya i Afrika" (The Washington-Pretoria Alliance and Africa), Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, no. 3 (March 1982), pp. 46-58.

SWAPO;" to "destabilize the countries of socialist orientation in the region" while "dragging them into various talks at which it is difficult to discern the carrot from the stick;" to "undermine the group of Frontline States;" and, "last but not least, to guarantee for American corporations unimpeded access to the region's raw materials."<sup>28</sup> Phrased in this way, there is little with which the Soviets would think the South African government disagrees.

Until recently, however, notwithstanding growing frustration and anger, the Soviet Union has tended to downplay the effectiveness of Administration policy and, by extension, the potency of its supposed alliance with South Africa. Thus, despite the sweeping aims attributed to the Administration, the malevolence of its attitude toward the Soviet Union and its friends, and the inflexibility of its policy, Soviet leaders seemed unimpressed with Washington's accomplishments. Or, at least, that was the posture struck. Over the last month or so, however, there are signs that Moscow's mood is changing substantially. No longer are Soviet diplomats and institute types talking only about the frustrations of not being able "to do business this administration," a judgment most Soviet observers had reached by last summer. Over the last several months, with the collapse of the intermediate-range nuclear missile force (INF) negotiations in Geneva, the U.S. invasion of Granada and escalating pressures on Nicaragua, and mounting instability in the Middle East, many Soviets are now glumly, and with considerable alarm, talking about a complete collapse of the restraining framework of arms control and the renewed risk of direct confrontation between the superpowers.

Two separate concerns have merged to push Soviet leaders beyond their earlier defiant equanimity to this new level of apprehension: First, largely because of their

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28. Tarabrin, "U.S. Expansionist Policy in Africa," p. 42.

view of the Administration's behavior in the area of arms control, in particular, its handling of the Soviet walkout from the INF talks, Soviet leaders are convinced the Administration does not take the Soviet Union seriously; that it believes the Soviet leadership is merely playing games; and that it fails to understand the peril now facing the entire edifice of arms control, including START. (Rather than yielding on the issue of their own missiles in Europe, the Soviets, if and when they return to START, will make the American Pershing 2s and ground-launched cruise missiles part of the bill, making, as they are aware, the Soviet proposal still more non-negotiable in American eyes. START, they sense, is about to become moribund.) Second, recent U.S. actions in the Caribbean and Central America, together with its use of military force in the Middle East, apparently persuade Soviet leaders that the Administration is not nearly so passive as its moderate American friends claim. Soviet analysts are not suggesting that Reagan and his people want a confrontation with the Soviet Union or, for that matter, a test of American strength in the Middle East. But they are worried by what the Administration may stumble into, particularly, when as they judge from its actions in Central America, its disposition is self-confident and assertive. And, for all the Soviet leadership's distractions, they know that there are circumstances from which it, too, will not retreat.

This shift of mood, if it is occurring, has potential implications for Soviet actions in southern Africa. During the first two and half years of the Reagan Administration, Soviet leaders hewed to a course set at the time of Zimbabwe independence. Minus the inflated expectations of 1974-79, it consisted of pressing forward with diplomatic, military, and party ties with Angola and Mozambique and, where possible, with Zimbabwe, a modest but steady contribution to Angola and Mozambique's defense, and a major role in supplying and training the ANC. To this they added an intensive effort to exploit the Reagan Administration's policy of

"constructive engagement" with Pretoria and apparent backsliding on the Namibian question.<sup>29</sup> Over the last three years they have waged an intensive propaganda effort in their media and, one can be sure, in private conversations with African leaders to drive home the significance of Washington's alleged alliance with South Africa. But I know of no indication that they acted more militantly — for example, by substantially increasing the tempo of arms deliveries into the area or by kicking up a fuss over the moderate behavior of the Frontline States.

If they, however, are beginning to view the Administration in a more disturbing light, so are they likely to view events in southern Africa differently. Southern Africa, as I indicated earlier, is not likely to be the place where Soviet leaders make their stand against the Reagan Administration. Nor are they likely, in any circumstance, to intervene recklessly in the area. Nor are they likely to sweep aside the sentiments and preferences of the Frontline States, because keeping in step with their policies has become a cardinal guideline of Soviet policy. But they are likely to feel the need to prove a stiffening resolve. And they are likely to want to show American clients, such as they assume South Africa to be, that a more assertive United States does not guarantee them more freedom of maneuver.

If this is the case, then one might expect the Soviet Union to become more directly involved in Angola and Mozambique's defense, supplying more advanced equipment and Soviet personnel to man it. One might also expect gestures of military support, high-level contact between the Soviet military and the military of any of these states willing to have it, more frequent visits by Soviet naval task forces, and the like. The Soviets are also likely to take a tougher line with the

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29. On the last, beyond a constant stream of commentary in the central press, see V.Yu. Vasilkov, "Problema Namibii i Positsiya SShA" (The Namibian Problem and the Position of the U.S.A.), SShA: Ekonomika, politika, ideologiya, no. 4 (April 1983), pp. 49-52.

South Africans, warning them in public and in private to curb their military attacks on Angola and their ambitions for UNITA. They may also take a more active role in training ANC insurgents on the ground, instead of the indirect role they play now. And, in general, they are likely to strike a more aggressive pose for the Frontline States, encouraging them to act more firmly as well. This is not quite the strategic offensive that conservatives imagine the Soviet Union has underway, but it would mean a more assertive Soviet policy in southern Africa, originating in a steadily deteriorating East-West relationship.