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SOUTH AFRICA STALLS ON NAMIBIA SETTLEMENT

May, 1980

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UNITED NATIONS AND SOUTH AFRICA - AN IMPASSE

On May 12 the South African Foreign Minister, R.F. Botha, sent a letter to Kurt Waldheim, the United Nations Secretary General, in the latest of many exchanges on the Namibian situation. This paper is a comment on this communication and the lack of progress it reflects in a process which is supposed to lead to the independence of Namibia.

The struggle for the independence of Namibia proceeds on two levels simultaneously. One is that of the armed struggle. This aspect of the struggle is led by SWAPO (The South-West African People's Organization). Their guerilla forces are pitted against the formidable military power of some 70,000 South African troops in Namibia. As in the case of Zimbabwe, this phase of the struggle may go on for many years with increasing destruction and suffering attendant to such a conflict.

The other level of conflict is international and diplomatic. Here the United Nations has a key role as supported by its member states, particularly the African states. Five Western powers (The United States, Great Britain, France, West Germany, and Canada) are also intimately involved through the diplomatic initiative they have taken. This memorandum, focusing attention on the May 12 South African letter to the United Nations, will deal with this level of struggle.

A Word of Background

The background to the controversy over Namibia is well known. South Africa's Mandate over the territory of South West Africa (now Namibia) inherited through the League of Nations system, was terminated both by United Nations action and by a decision of the International Court of Justice many years ago. Nevertheless South Africa has continued to dominate Namibia politically, economically and militarily up to the present time. SWAPO has continued to gain strength both politically and militarily in challenging South Africa's power in Namibia. And the international community through the United Nations has brought pressure to bear on the apartheid regime as it perpetuates its power in Namibia.

There have been some new developments over the years growing out of the conflict. In a series of long and complex negotiations, agreement appeared to have been reached between South Africa, the United Nations and SWAPO through the mediation of the Western Five. This process was outlined in a series of United Nations resolutions. The most important of these are resolution 385 of

January 1975 and resolutions 431 and 435 of July and September 1978. By these resolutions it is agreed that there should be free and fair elections held in Namibia under the supervision and control of the United Nations. These elections would choose a constituent assembly which would have the responsibility of drawing up and implementing a constitution for an independent Namibia. It was agreed that the Secretary General would choose a Special Representative to implement the procedure for the United Nations. Further, it was agreed that a United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) composed of both military and civilian personnel would be assigned to Namibia to police a ceasefire and to administer the elections. More recently, in 1979, it was agreed in principle that a demilitarised zone should be established covering 50 kms. on each side of the border between Namibia to the south and Angola and Zambia to the north and east.

The difficulty is that it has been impossible to get South Africa to agree to allow the process to be carried out. This letter from South Africa's Foreign Minister to the Secretary General is another phase in this long drawn-out effort to press South Africa to allow the process to continue.

The South African Letter - May 12

The five page letter begins by repeating what South Africa has said before: "South Africa seeks an international settlement of the Namibian question." But then the communication goes on to raise some serious questions which represent further attempts at delay. It is interesting that influential news papers in the United States grossly misinterpret the real meaning of the letter. The Washington Post headline greeted it with "South Africa hints readiness to resume talks on Namibia." The New York Times headline stated "South Africa is seeking assurances on Namibia." Both headlines are deceiving about what South Africa is really doing.

There are two major issues that the letter raises. First and foremost South Africa asks through the letter if the United Nations can really carry out its functions impartially in supervising the elections and the ceasefire. In Paragraph 7 of the letter the Foreign Minister says "Your Excellency will be aware of the extreme concern which exists regarding the impartiality of the United Nations...." The basis for South Africa's raising this issue is that the General Assembly of the United Nations has recognised SWAPO as the sole representative of the territory. South Africa has always fought this recognition, and this question represents a further attempt to undermine SWAPO's standing.

It is quite clear from lengthy discussions between the United Nations and South Africa that all political parties in Namibia will be allowed to participate freely and equally in any political campaign as far as the United Nations is concerned. In fact, South Africa has made it impossible for SWAPO to operate on a political level within the country by arresting all of its top leadership and interfering with its freedom of action. SWAPO has been given a special recognition by the African states because it is the only political movement inside the country which has continued the struggle against South African

domination in political ways that were open to it and also by military tactics. In this sense there is almost a direct parallel between the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe and SWAPO in Namibia. The attempt by white Rhodesians to reach a settlement by excluding the Patriotic Front would not work in Zimbabwe. And a settlement cannot be reached in Namibia without dealing with SWAPO. The best chance for impartiality in both administering the ceasefire and supervising elections is through the United Nations. South Africa's real fear is that SWAPO would win such an election. South Africa's insistence that the General Assembly pass a resolution withdrawing its special recognition of the role of SWAPO is politically unthinkable at this stage and can only have been proposed as a delaying or deliberate wrecking tactic.

Second the letter suggests that the dissident political movement in Angola, UNITA (the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) should be included in the process of making the demilitarised zone effective. The letter says "it would of course also be desirable that all elements present or operating in the DMZ extend their cooperation to make this proposal effective." And then the Foreign Minister refers to a telegram of March 3rd from the representative of the President of UNITA to the Secretary General of the United Nations. The Foreign Minister attached a copy of that telegram, (which of course the Secretary General already had), which said "we demand to become a party to take part in putting into effect the plan for the creation of the zone in question."

Again insistence on the inclusion of UNITA in the process of implementing the agreement on the DMZ could only end any progress toward an agreement. A key to any settlement of the Namibian conflict must include Angola's wholehearted cooperation. The whole concept of a demilitarised zone was proposed in 1979 by the late President Agostinho Neto of Angola.

These two points are unlikely to be given serious consideration by the United Nations. Only the third paragraph of the letter raises some questions which are negotiable. These questions are:

1. Will it be acceptable for South Africa to maintain 20 bases in the DMZ?
2. Will a larger percentage of UNTAG be deployed in the DMZ to make their work more effective?
3. Will satisfactory arrangements be made for disarming SWAPO personnel seven days after the certification of the election and the military bases are closed?
4. Will SWAPO's efforts to be allowed to have military bases inside Namibia be ended?

South Africa's Real Purposes

The letter from South Africa was certainly not designed to move the process forward. The United Nations authorities know this and are puzzled as to how to reply. The real purposes South Africa had in mind in sending the letter may be as follows:

South Africa does not want to proceed with free and fair elections because it is fearful that SWAPO might win. Therefore they are not prepared to

say "yes," and yet they do not want the onus of saying "no."

South African is stalling for time. By not saying yes or no, the continued exchange of notes of clarification can go on indefinitely until such time as they believe they have sufficiently strengthened their own internal political movement, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance or have succeeded from their point of view in emasculating SWAPO.

South Africa is waiting to see how the Mugabe government in Zimbabwe fares in the months ahead. It was a shock to South Africa which had committed significant funds to Muzorewa's candidacy to have him lose so overwhelmingly. They believe there may be a parallel between Mugabe's victory in Zimbabwe and the possibility of a SWAPO victory in Namibia.

The letter is designed primarily for apartheid hard-liners in South Africa.

South Africa was making a public relations effort to win moral support particularly among people and parties in western Europe and North America. It sounds reasonable for South Africa to seem to ask for more clarification from the United Nations on its role of impartiality.

The Foreign Minister's letter concludes by stating that "as soon as the issues raised herein have been resolved the South African government would cooperate in implementing the Security Council's resolution 435." The sad fact is that even if these questions could be answered satisfactorily, other questions would be raised. The time must surely come when some sort of decisive action, perhaps through sanctions, will be taken by the international community.

SOUTH AFRICA AND NAMIBIA

South Africa's reluctant participation and perpetual footdragging in the process of negotiating independence for Namibia reflects the increasing contradictions facing apartheid's policy makers.

In 1920, South Africa was granted a mandate over the territory, then known as South West Africa. For almost fifty years, South African policy was directly aimed at "turning the ward into a copy of its guardian," with the ultimate hope of incorporating it completely. For most of those years, despite local African protest, the international community turned a blind eye while African land was appropriated, segregationist laws were imposed, various administrative offices were incorporated into their South African counterparts and the political lines between the two countries were drawn closer and closer.

By the 1950's white South West Africans had acquired South African citizenship and six elected representatives in the South African Parliament. From 1964 the vicious Bantustan system was extended over the territory's African population, and in 1973 Ovamboland, home of the largest African concentration, was officially declared the first South West African "homeland" with a legislative assembly as a semi-autonomous body.

This unchecked drive for annexation met its first serious obstacles when SWAPO began to mobilize militarily, with growing effectiveness through the late sixties and early seventies, at the same time as the world wide thrust for decolonization brought important new members into the United Nations. These countries were prepared to challenge South Africa's policies and continued authority over the territory. In 1966 the General Assembly terminated South Africa's mandate, the Security Council called for South Africa's withdrawal in 1969, and in 1973 the United Nations General Assembly recognized SWAPO as the "authentic representative of the Namibian people."

Despite mounting internal and international pressure South African policy makers seemed determined to defy all opposition and hang on. Yet in the end even they could not ignore the hammering of history at their doors.

By 1974 successful wars of liberation fought against Portuguese colonialism in Africa had brought the collapse of facism in Lisbon. In 1975 movements pledged to building socialism took power in Angola and Mozambique, on the borders of Namibia and South Africa. South Africa was shocked into recognizing that a continued policy of defiant "no compromise" over the future of Namibia might lead to total defeat. A more flexible strategy was devised, almost certainly with the advice from some Western allies, that focused on maintaining ultimate control of the territory by careful manipulation. Crude incorporation was abandoned.

In an apparent about face South Africa initiated moves to involve blacks and whites in a joint political process aimed at a hinted "independence." By the end of 1975 carefully selected "ethnic" delegations from each of Namibia's so-called tribes, Ovambo, Herero, Nama, Damara, etc. were discussing the future alongside the white representatives in a Constitutional Conference convened in a Windhoek hall known as the Turnhalle. These Turnhalle deliberations, which ran on for many months, were deliberately constituted to exclude SWAPO as a national organization. The participants eventually formed a permanent political grouping, the DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance) under the leadership of Dirk Mudge, a middle of the road, former member of the Nationalist Party.

When in 1976 the Security Council Resolution 385 called for immediate South African withdrawal and elections under United Nations supervision and control, South Africa used the Turnhalle Conference to give legitimacy to its counter-moves. Claiming pure disinterestedness it declared that the Turnhalle participants, not SWAPO, were the true representatives of the Namibian people, and that it would therefore support the Turnhalle proposals calling for independence with a homeland structure, ethnic representation, guaranteed minority rights, and an interim five year continued Pretoria control of defense and foreign relations. On this basis South African announced that it would grant independence on December 31, 1978.

The announcement was followed by a series of acts including the establishment of an ethnically based Namibian army, to supplement South African forces, and the ending of South West African representation in the South African

parliament. In December 1978 elections were organized in Namibia which were boycotted by SWAPO and condemned as illegal by the United Nations. The National Assembly which emerged from these elections was heavily dominated by the DTA and had only limited legislative power - but it was a potentially useful body for the South Africans as they maneuvered towards a settlement.

Thus the battleground had shifted. The issue was no longer put forth as independence versus South African annexation. Now the issue was a true independence achieved with SWAPO participation in United Nations supervised and controlled elections as over against a South African managed "independence" with candidates chosen in ethnic elections.

The Pretoria policy makers have had to move cautiously in making any concessions in Namibia because of the potential impact on black/white relationships at home. Each move toward even limited independence or black political participation has brought cries of "betrayal" from the significant white right wing in South Africa. It is this, plus an ever constant fear that SWAPO will manage to win open elections that account for the zigs and zags of recent South African policy.

South Africa's aim is to preserve both economic and significant political control over the territory. Namibia has huge diamond, uranium and other mineral wealth and may also be a future source of oil. South Africa's Western allies, with less stake in the political preservation of apartheid, are profoundly concerned to maintain economic control and are increasingly concerned that South Africa's snail like pace might undercut all black moderates and strengthen the most militant elements in SWAPO. These differences have led to serious disagreements over the tactics to be used in achieving Namibian independence, and have sometimes been reflected in the exasperated tones in which Western diplomats talk about the endless South African recalcitrance in the Western sponsored settlement negotiations.

There have been times when it appeared that South Africa might accept some version of the Western contact group plan for United Nations supervised elections and transition to independence, but this has always hinged on the extent to which the settlement could be manipulated to obviate the intolerable - a SWAPO victory. The internal settlement option has never been abandoned, although it has waxed and waned in prominence.

The overwhelming ZANU election triumph in Zimbabwe, under extremely difficult circumstances, seems to have toughened South African resistance to running such a risk in Namibia. Recent developments indicate that South Africa may now have decided to adopt the "internal settlement" option despite the obvious difficulties involved - which will include a lack both of domestic and international credibility.

The National Assembly has been given increased authority, and on May 1 Prime Minister Botha told the South African parliament that his government was willing to hand over much of the administration of Namibia, including elements of the military, to "a body that could govern the territory."

The South African appointed Administrator General has been moving ahead with the establishment of an autonomous administrative and fiscal structure. He has established a central revenue fund in Windhoek separated from the South African system and there are rumours that Namibia will soon have its own currency. Early in 1980 Windhoek negotiated its first direct international loan from a Swiss bank. Now there is talk in Windhoek of new elections, still based on ethnic representation, that may presage South Africa's final moves in the independence game.

At the same time political repression directed at SWAPO has been constantly maintained - so that although the organization is not illegal, its leadership has been constantly harassed and thousands of members are now in jail.

The war is going badly for South Africa; despite heavy censorship, the Windhoek press reports mounting casualties and major electrical blackouts caused by sabotage. In this context the danger is that South Africa will force an internal settlement on Namibia, excluding SWAPO altogether, and creating a crisis for the United Nations.