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South Africa's assessment of Western involvement in  
the Namibian issue and the implications thereof.

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1. Introductory remarks

A final evaluation of the five Western Powers' (the Contact Group) endeavours to contribute to a settlement of the Namibian issue cannot yet be made, but an interim assessment may well be appropriate at this stage.

When the Western Five took it on themselves to make a contribution to the solution of the Namibian problem and to bring about independence in a peaceful way, it did not intend to usurp the UN's role but rather to act as intermediaries. The Contact Group was faced with the problem that South Africa would never confer with SWAPO directly, and that it was highly critical of the UN's role in the negotiating process. South Africa was also not prepared to accept a final settlement of the Namibian issue without the inclusion of other Namibian political groups and bodies, especially the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA).

The Contact Group eventually conceded to the inclusion of other Namibian political bodies along with SWAPO. They, however, made it quite clear to South Africa that the Western Five would not deviate from UN Resolution 435. They further emphasised that a final solution had to incorporate SWAPO's support and the Black African states -- particularly the support of the Frontline States.

When evaluating the Western Group's approach one has to assume that any prolongation of the Namibian independence process can only be to the detriment of Western interests. Furthermore, an undue delay would produce strained relations with Africa at a time when relations between Western powers and Africa were actually improving.

This was clearly spelt out by Dr Chester Crocker, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, when he addressed the Africa Subcommittee of the House of Representatives on 17 June 1981:



"We attach major importance to United States interests in Africa as a whole and we have no intention of permitting such issues or the behaviour of third parties to impede our growing cultural, political, economic links with the nations of Africa. We are well aware that our Canadian, British, French and German allies in the Contact Group have significant interests at stake in Africa based upon their involvement in the Namibian negotiations. The solidarity of the Contact Group allies remains a basic ingredient in the elaboration of a settlement. Finally, we recognise the inescapable fact that Pretoria holds the main key to a settlement and, therefore must have a minimum of confidence in any settlement if it is to be implemented."

Although one finds it rather difficult to ascertain a particular official policy, this leads us to South Africa's assessment of the Western involvement in its deliberations to bring about a final settlement of the Namibian issue. Certain attitudes as expressed by South African Government officials and politicians can, however, be of some help to discern particular trends.

Before concerning myself with how South Africa assesses Western involvement, I must outline my method of approach. The South Africa to which I refer goes beyond the South African Government even though it acts as spokesman for its national population. My approach assesses both the South African Government's attitude towards the Western Five's initiative and also examines the attitudes and sentiments of some of South Africa's majority population group: the Black South African.

## 2. The South African government's assessment of Western involvement in the Namibian issue.

The Western Five's involvement in the Namibian issue was not overenthusiastically welcomed by the SA Government, but it was accepted as an additional initiative to solve the Namibian issue. The Western statement that their involvement should be regarded as a means to narrow the gap between the SA Government and the UN was reluctantly accepted although South Africa stated that it was not to blame for the gap (cf. Min. R F Botha's statement in Parliament on 14 June 1977. South Africa (Republic) House of Assembly Debates, No 20, 1977, cols: 10075 - 10085).



In retrospect, it can be rightly said that the Western Five's mediating and clarifying role in the negotiation process has at no stage been an easy one; it has had to mediate between different sets of understandings, beliefs, assumptions and objectives.

South Africa's expectations were clearly set out by the S A Prime Minister, P W Botha, when the Western Five's foreign ministers conferred with the S A Government on 16 October 1978. Botha stressed that South Africa stands for the same democratic ideals that the West subscribes to. It opposes communism and is prepared to fight it in Africa. Soviet Russia's expansionist involvement in Africa, especially in Southern Africa, and its build-up of naval forces in the Indian Ocean, should not only be a concern to South Africa but also to the Free Western World. He criticised the lack of support by the West when South Africa tried to halt Soviet involvement in Angola:

" The West may say that it does not matter that there is a Soviet-imposed Marxist government in Angola .... a government imposed on the people by force under Soviet direction. We see this as the thin edge of the wedge ....the start of the domino theory.

.....

Let us suppose that in addition to Angola and Mocambique, the Soviet Union were to get a firm foothold in South West Africa by imposing a satellite government .... South West Africa together with Angola would provide the USSR with a solid bloc along the west coast and Southern Africa, enabling it to be used at will to the detriment of Southern Africa and the Free World. It would, for example, control South West Africa's mineral resources, including its uranium.

Botswana, Bophuthatswana, Transkei and Lesotho could wittingly become pawns in the Soviet master game. Cuban troop presence in Angola could be reduced, making the Cubans available for further adventures on behalf of their Russian masters, e.g. against the Western-supported state of Zaire. ... we would then be faced by a situation in which the Marxist-orientated countries of Congo (Brazzaville), Zaire and Tanzania would form a belt across Africa from East to West, effectively cutting Africa in half and isolating Southern Africa to be dealt with at leisure. Zambia, Rhodesia and Malawi, would be largely dependent upon the goodwill of the



four Marxist seaboard states of Angola, Zaire, Tanzania and Mocambique for their imports and exports, and thus liable to an economic stranglehold which could force them to toe the Marxist line. The isolation of the Republic of South Africa economically, politically and militarily would now be complete and final, and Russia would be standing before her ultimate strategic goal in Africa.

..... a chaotic South West Africa, or a country dictatorially ruled by a Soviet puppet, although internationally recognised, would be poor compensation to a people who had been promised orderly independence ..... An irresponsible government motivated by Marxist theories, can only destroy South West Africa and its infrastructure.

.....

We cannot escape the impression that at least some Western countries, while expecting South Africa's active co-operation in search of peace, nevertheless take steps which we cannot interpret other than hostile. It would seem that they hold the view that stability in Southern Africa, and our future, are to be sacrificed in the hope of satisfying the Third World and thereby indirectly curtailing Soviet expansion. This is a vain hope.

..... My advice is: stop shouting at us; stop putting stumbling blocks in our way. There is a different, wiser approach for dealing with us. Our different indigeneous peoples, white, brown and black, have never been slaves, and we do not intend being slaves, either now or in the future." (Southern Africa Record, SAIIA, no. 14, Dec. 1978, pp 45 - 51)

This sums up South Africa's standpoint which indicates the expected role by the Western Five. Without, at this stage, going into the merits of the expressed views by the South African Prime Minister, one can deduce from the above and subsequent statements that the Contact Group's performance and credibility would be judged by the South African Government against:

1. Its agreement with the South African Government's anticipated threat by the Soviet Union and its proxies.
2. The acknowledgement of the South African Government's struggle against Marxism-Leninism.
3. The recognition of South Africa's strategic importance (e.g. economically, militarily) to the "Free World".



5. The legitimate role of South Africa in Namibia.
6. The rejection of SWAPO as the sole and authentic representative of the people of Namibia and thereby the acknowledgement of the rightful existence of other political groups in Namibia, especially the DTA.
7. Supporting South Africa's attitude that the issue of Walvis Bay remains to be solved after the independence process of Namibia between South African Government and the government of an independent Namibia.
8. Honouring the South African Government's agreement to the following issues concerning Namibia (see UN Security Council Resolutions 385 and 435) that it can become a unitary state with universal adult suffrage; will remove discrimination based on colour; will hold free and fair elections; will support the urgency of achieving independence; will give the right to all Namibians to return and participate peacefully in the political process; will release detainees.
9. That a settlement will not be achieved unless equal treatment of all the parties is assured, the rights of minority groups are protected and guaranteed, and the fundamental principles of democracy are assured for the future.
10. That the independence of Namibia should have no security risks for South Africa.
11. The withdrawal of all Cuban troops from Angola.
12. The impartiality of the UN in the independence process of Namibia.

South Africa evaluated every move or statement by the Western Contact Group against this set of uncompromising preconditions and expectations, emphasising that no solution in Namibia is possible without the willingness and sanction of the South African Government.

The Contact Group in its role as negotiating intermediary was, from the very beginning, not in a position to agree unconditionally to all the understandings and conditions laid down by the South African Government. During its deliberations it has differed on a number of the stated South African assumptions and statements such as the



interpretation and application of democratic rights in South Africa and Namibia. Difference of opinion also existed on the intensiveness of the anticipated USSR threat to Southern Africa and on the South African Government's ways and means to counteract. It was felt that other than military means should be available to fight the real or anticipated threat.

While evaluating the South African Government's preconditions, the Western Five were compelled to state their own matters of concern, such as:

1. Fundamental democratic rights were still not being fully exercised in Namibia; discrimination was still continuing.
2. The unilateral decided and fought "national" elections in Namibia in 1978 which did not involve important and probable decisive political forces in Namibia, could not be recognised. Consequently, the "National Assembly" and the Council of Ministers were not representative bodies.
3. The South African military involvement in Angola and northern Namibia (with all the by-products) could not be supported.
4. The South African Government's insistence to fight SWAPO on a predominantly military basis rather than negotiating with it directly.
5. The South African Government's legality of continued involvement in the running of Namibia.

It was felt that these matters, among others were actually delaying the speedy process of independence and could eventually invite stronger unwanted involvement ... such as by the Soviet Union and its proxies.

When analysing the attitudes of the South African Government and the Western Contact Group, they have to be judged against the present situation in Namibia as it will influence the outcome of the independence process and the credibility of the negotiating parties. Namibia's political development is presently in a complete disarray; its security situation worsening; its administration in a state of near collapse; its economic



development stagnant or even retrogressive, (16% unemployed) and social relationships between black and white are at a new low ebb. Distrust and animosities have indeed accelerated.

One can assume that the reflected state of affairs is not conducive for the stability and the overall development process in Namibia.

Presently, SWAPO remains the only intact national political movement. It has benefitted tremendously from the destabilising development within the territory. The South African Government and its protégée, the DTA, on the other hand have lost in confidence and the chances have become slim to regain the same again.

It is a disconcerting situation which puts the Western Contact Group in a somewhat precarious situation in its deliberations with the South African Government. Observing the ongoing deterioration process in Namibia the pressure is mounting that in order to remain credible negotiators, a final solution to the Namibian problem has to be found, and found soon.

The Contact Group's patience and diplomatic skill has repeatedly been tried by the intransigent demands and expectations by South Africa, SWAPO, other political groups and participants (e.g. the black independent churches) in Namibia, African states (especially the Frontline States) and the United Nations. It is an unrewarding task for the Western Five, knowing that in the end it will not be able to satisfy all the demands and expectations.

Similar thoughts can be expressed about the South African Government. Namibia is without any doubt on its road to independence, but it has become a road of lost chances. The outcome will be less harmonious and less beneficial to South Africa than fifteen, ten or even five years ago. It will certainly affect future relationships between an independent Namibia and South Africa. The longer the independence date is delayed the more detrimental will be such a delay for the South African Government's pursued rapprochement in Southern Africa.



But, as indicated, such a delay could also have detrimental effects on the Western Five's future standing and credibility in Africa, especially in Southern Africa. To prove such an assumption I move now to the second part of my deliberations. This part intends to reflect the attitudes of South African Blacks towards the Western Five's involvement in the Namibian issue, how they evaluate this involvement and the consequences thereof for the Western Five.

3. The assessment by Black South Africans of the Western Five's involvement in the Namibian issue and the consequences thereof.

Let the following summary of views expressed to me by some politically-aware Blacks serve as a background. They feel:

1. Very suspicious about the Western Five's involvement in the Namibian issues; their motives are doubted.
2. The Western Five <sup>are</sup> attempting to please the South African Government and thereby alienate Black support and goodwill.
3. The Western Five are collaborators with the South African Government, a position which is detrimental to the interests of the Black population in South Africa and Africa in general.
4. Widespread fear that the five Western Powers want to install or impose a Western-oriented government in Namibia without giving the Namibian population a free choice.
5. A too-deep involvement by the Western Five in the Namibian independence process could harm the cause of SWAPO as the Western attitude towards it is highly doubted. They explicitly want a SWAPO ruled government.

One could argue that some of these positions are one-sided; for instance the support of a single political group ..SWAPO. But this is a factual situation which cannot be pushed aside easily or be assessed as being too emotional, too subjective, and of no real substance.

For further proof of the antagonistic attitude towards the West it might be helpful and of some interest to reflect the attitudes of a few hundred Black students at the University of Transkei. A general remark, however, when evaluating the attitudes of the Transkeian students one



might find that they are much less radical than anticipated attitudes in urban areas, such as in Soweto.

One of the questions which was put to 116 students in 1980 and 114 in 1981 (about 40% of the respondents are full-time students and about 60% are professional or predominantly government employed part-time students) was: "Which country of the World do you admire most?":

	1980 %	1981 %
USA	20.7	18.4
West Germany	12.9	7.9
Great Britain	5.2	2.6
France	2.6	0.0
Canada	not mentioned	0.0
Soviet Union	10.2	14.9
Yugoslavia	0.9	0.9
P R China	0.9	0.0
German Dem. Rep	0.9	0.0
Cuba	0.0	1.8
Poland	0.0	0.9
South Africa	4.3	6.1
Transkei	3.4	6.1
African countries with socialist systems	10.3	11.4
African countries with non-socialist systems	6.1	4.4
Other Countries outside Africa with non- socialist systems	16.8	15.8
No reply	5.2	8.8

The dominant reasons put forward by the respondents for the admiration of the following two groups of countries can be summarised as follows (in order of importance):

Western Countries:

1. They practice democracy and human rights (no racial discrimination; equality; freedom of the individual; guaranteed constitutional rights; majority rule; free judiciary; freedom of movement and speech).



2. They are highly developed (highly developed in the technical, economic, political and social spheres; economically advanced; highly educated; higher standard of industrial development).

Socialist Countries:

1. They help to liberate (concerned with the liberation of the oppressed; friend of the oppressed; use muscle to aid the liberation struggle; sympathetic to the oppressed; support liberation movements; train soldiers for the African liberation struggle).
2. The socialist system (no class distinction; no class struggle; no economic exploitation; everything in the hands of the state; communalism is practised).

Related to the previous question another question was put:

Is there any political idea (ideology) which interests you very much:

	1980 %	1981 %
Social democracy	2.6	2.6
Socialism	23.3	21.9
Communism/Marxism	6.9	11.4
Democracy/Liberalism	30.2	36.0
Social Welfarism	1.7	0.8
Black Consciousness	5.2	4.4
No reply	30.2	22.8

A combined interpretation of the responses to the two questions could be, in a nutshell, as follows: the admiration for the Western countries, especially their economic, social and political system is still relatively high, but it is realised that not much can be expected from the West to become actively involved in the liberation struggle of the Blacks. They doubt the effectiveness of the Western powers policy of persuading South Africa to bring about changes. A Western policy of mere condemnation is regarded as inadequate.

These attitudes concur with a recent statement made by Gibson Thula, the chairman of Inkatha's strategy committee:

"Today most black people realise that the Western countries, no matter how antagonistic to apartheid particular governments may be, are not going to actively and aggressively champion the cause of Blacks in South Africa." (Sunday Times, 7 June 1982)

It can be added that the West and its cherished values of human rights, self-determination and tolerance is heading for a confidence and credibility crisis in the Black population of South Africa.



Although the admiration for the socialist countries is not as high as for the Western countries, the admiration for the socialist system, whether practised in the East, West or in the Third World, is in its appreciation at least on a par with the Western democratic system. Socialist countries however, are admired for their commitment and active involvement (e.g. violent means) in the liberation struggle of the oppressed. Their visible engagement in the liberation process is both acknowledged and appreciated.

The implications of these attitudes are quite apparent. Added to this that Mugabe was the most admired international politician (mentioned as first choice in the first, second and third place), Mandela (first choice), Sisulu (2nd choice) and Tutu (third choice) judged as the most representative South African political personalities, and the ANC as the most supported and trusted political movement, the implied consequences of the responses for present and future strategies by Western and socialist countries towards South Africa and its total population cannot be ignored and underestimated. The pressure on both the Western and the socialist countries will even become greater once Namibia has gained independence.

Namibia's independence will, without any doubt, raise the expectations and demands of the Black population in South Africa. In a precipitated and subsequent intensified process of commitment to become equally free, the outside world's attitude and support will be carefully noted by the Black population.

My most recent experience with Black opinion is that its attitude towards the USA has hardened, especially since the Reagan administration initiated its policy of constructive engagement with South Africa. The present American administration is not only mistrusted for its present policy towards South Africa, which is interpreted as being sympathetic towards the whites and so neglecting the rightful aspirations of the Blacks, but also for its uncompromising stand towards the Soviet Union.



Canada does not feature prominently in the thoughts of Black opinion but West Germany fairly. Its involvement in Africa is appreciated, its social-democratic government found acceptable, its deliberations with SWAPO recognised although the motives are doubted, and its technical and industrial achievements admired. France has found much more favour since the socialist government took over. Its hardened attitude towards South Africa and its sound relationships with African countries is well noted. Great Britain is regarded somewhat more critically. The Conservative Government's attitude towards South Africa, less radical and critical than the Labour Government, has evoked a particularly sceptical attitude. Britain's role in Zimbabwean independence is appreciated but its handling of the Falkland issue labeled as neo-colonialistic.

The South African government's attitude towards the Five Western powers involved in the Namibian independence process is well known and can therefore be summarised : the United States government's attitude under Reagan and executed by the well-informed Dr Chester Crocker is appreciated and described as constructive. The South African Government knows, however, that it has to honour present US policy towards South Africa and has to deliver the expected goods in not too distant a future as the US government is concerned about its credibility in the rest of Africa. It wants to regain lost trust. The South African Government has to realise that within the next few months the first shots will be fired in the re-election campaign of President Reagan. As the United States view South Africa as the kingpin in the independence process of Namibia, a higher reward for its accommodating attitude towards South Africa is therefore expected. The South African Government is under pressure to meet these expectations.

Canada's very critical attitude towards the South African Government is noted but not regarded of too great a significance considering its influence in international politics. Great Britain's attitude under a conservative government is of more importance to South Africa. The South African Government had hoped for a more understanding attitude and



is somewhat disappointed that this has not materialised. Britain's uncompromising stance on the Namibian issue is noted.

Relationships between the South African Government and France have deteriorated since the socialist government of Mitterand came to power. France's friendly relations with SWAPO and the ANC have not helped to normalize the situation.

West Germany has gone through a period of ups and downs in its relations with the South African Government. Its friendly and reconciliatory attitude towards SWAPO, the non-recognition of the DTA as a true spokesman of the Namibian population and the role played by the West German ambassador in Washington, Baron R von Wechmar, when he as chairman of the UN General Assembly was obliged to refuse the South African representative at the UN the opportunity to address the General Assembly, have contributed to a level of animosity between the two governments which from time to time has barely stopped short of insult and crudeness. (e g the personal attack by minister R F Botha on Baron von Wechmar and on West Germany's past). The same attitude is not extended by the South African Government to Franz Josef Strauss, the leader of the CSU, and a close friend of some South African Government leaders. The South African Government earnestly hopes for a change of government in West Germany.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

The Western Contact Group has repeatedly been accused by the South African Government of having broken its word during the negotiation process and of not being impartial. The Western Contact Group's contribution to an expedient and peaceful settlement of Namibian Independence has been doubted from time to time.

Despite these accusations and animosities, the negotiating parties, continue to share the same interest in finding an agreeable and peaceful



settlement to the Namibian issue. Differences continue to exist on matters such as expectations, technicalities and the modus operandi to bring about independence to Namibia. These differences can be related to the different frameworks the negotiating parties operate in. For the Western Five the predominant frame of reference remains the international community. For the government of South Africa the Southern African situational context predominates. Some of the existing differences seem to be irreconcilable as some premises and presumptions differ while others have and can still be solved.

The Western Five Contact Group's engagement in the deliberation process is not without considerable risk for its constituting members. The outcome of their involvement will eventually have an impact on their standing and relationships in international politics, especially in Africa. The impression prevails that the Western Five are prepared to take the risk of further involvement in the Namibian issue but only to the extent that their bona fides and integrity in the process are not doubted by all the concerned parties and agencies. It is doubted that if the price to be paid for their involvement exceeds a certain cost and credibility level, that the Western Five will then continue indefinitely with their endeavours.

The South African Government has to realize this because their bargaining power would be weakened should they annoy the Western Five to the point that the latter would withdraw from the Namibian negotiation process.

It can be said that the Western Contact Group has so far shown a fair amount of understanding for South Africa's position and its government's political predicament. Goodwill and sympathy, however, carry a political price which must remain justified and answerable. The possibility therefore remains that if a solution to the Namibian issue is not found within a reasonable time, the Contact Group may as a whole or its constituting members reconsider its position and thereby its continued involvement in the negotiation process. A withdrawal by the Western Five's from the negotiation process will at any time be detrimental to a peaceful solution of the Namibian independence process, an independence which is so overdue.