

Foes, Friends, and Fighting for Freedom: The  
United States, Soviet Union, and Cuba in the  
Southern African Regional Conflict, 1975-1988

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## Introduction

The regional conflict in southern Africa was a conglomeration of domestic conflicts and international tensions in the 1970s and 1980s. Domestically, Marxist and conservative factions in Angola waged civil war in the aftermath of decolonization. Tensions between black South Africans and the minority government became violent in the mid-1970s. Internationally, South Africa sought to impose dominance over Namibia, Angola, and other countries to subvert threat to the apartheid government. To establish its role as the regional hegemon, South Africa occupied Namibia in 1915. Beginning in the 1960's, nationalistic sentiments in Namibia rose, making the occupation increasingly contentious. Out of fear that a government that was unfriendly to South Africa could take root in Angola, the South African Defense Forces (SADF) invaded Angola in 1975. The regional conflict in southern Africa consisted of these various domestic and international dynamics.

The United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba added another layer to the international nature of this conflict, as this area became an ideological battleground. Eager to gain influence in southern Africa at the onset of the conflict, the Soviet Union supported the Marxist faction in Angola and opposed South African adventurism. The United States was equally keen to stymie an enlargement of Soviet influence, so the US ardently supported South Africa and the conservative National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Cuba, too, entered the conflict in southern Africa to protect the newly decolonized Angola from foreign encroachment and push for Namibian independence. The conflicts in southern Africa were initially predicated on independence and self-determination for Angola and Namibia. However, the region quickly became

another opportunity for the Cold War superpowers to validate their system.

The regional conflict was illustrative of Cold War pressures as a whole. Heightening and lessening of tensions between the superpowers reverberated in southern Africa. During the 1970's and early 1980's, the superpowers were very antagonistic, so they amplified their commitment in arms, military strategy, and trade to their respective clients in southern Africa. Though the regional conflict was comparatively less violent in the late 1970's and early 1980's than in 1975-1976 or 1986-1988, tensions remained high. Then, when the superpowers became more agreeable during the late 1980's, especially with regard to the third world, enhanced relations helped end this regional conflict. In addition, Cuba's unflinching commitment and military might in the region established Cuba as the leader of the negotiations that ended the conflict. Its strength in the region facilitated the alterations in the US-Soviet relationship that made the end of the conflict possible. The newfound relationship of trust between the superpowers would allow the US to be an effective mediator in the negotiations that brought about the end of the conflict in southern Africa.

#### Part One. Doused with Kerosene: The Inception of the Regional Conflict in Southern Africa and Superpower Involvement

##### Initial Engagement

1975 marked a critical year in the decolonization of southern Africa. After nearly a decade and a half of fighting between the Portuguese colonizers and The Republic of Angola, the fall of the Portuguese *Estado Novo* regime led to the country's withdrawal from southern Africa. In Angola, gaining independence was not solely an occasion for celebration; though free from colonial rule, Angola suffered from internal strife as three factions divided the country. This coupled with the rise of Namibian nationalism after

half a century of occupation by South Africa made southern Africa a region rife with internal tensions.<sup>1</sup>

Far from existing within a vacuum, though, the rise of nationalism in southern Africa was influenced by global movements. The People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) was the Marxist faction that vied for power in Angola after Portugal's withdrawal. Heavily influenced by the Soviet Union, Agostinho Neto – former member of the Portuguese Communist Party and leader of the MPLA – sought Soviet support in the struggle for control of Angola against the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and the National Liberation Front of Angola (FLNA). Eager to strengthen a comparatively strong Marxist faction in a region in which many burgeoning Marxist parties in decolonizing countries hoped for international aid, Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev offered support to the MPLA. It seemed geopolitically prudent to Brezhnev to work to establish a stronghold in the region. Neto and his successor, José Eduardo dos Santos, found a partner in the Soviets from the onset of the Angolan Civil War.<sup>2</sup>

The United States, too, became embroiled in the early conflict in southern Africa. In fact, both the U.S. and the USSR were active participants in the events in Angola even before South Africa, the regional hegemon, invaded Angola. The Ford administration had authorized covert arms shipments to the FLNA as early as January 1975 out of fear that the Soviet Union would escalate its commitment to the MPLA as tensions rose. Ford worried that if the Soviet Union gained influence in Angola it could leverage that

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<sup>1</sup> Odd Arne Westad, [The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times](#) (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 209-210.

<sup>2</sup> Conversation between Soviet Diplomat Evgeny I. Afanassenko and MPLA President Agostinho Neto, July 4, 1975, Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI), [Wilson Center Digital Archive](#), [digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112138](https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112138); Westad, [The Global Cold War](#), 214-215.

influence to spread Marxism-Leninism to numerous other newly decolonized countries in Africa. Even before the first shots were fired, this conflict was steeped in Cold War tensions.<sup>3</sup>

As the MPLA rose in power in Angola, the United States and South Africa became increasingly fearful of the potency of the Marxist doctrine in Africa. The South African government in Pretoria “feared that the USSR had a grand design to bring all southern Africa within its sphere of influence.” At the behest of CIA and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, South Africa intervened in Angola on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1975, aiming to topple the MPLA regime. The invasion failed miserably – Angolan and Cuban forces quickly repelled South Africa. South Africa’s attack on Angola marked the beginning of this conflict becoming truly regional, as this was the first armed clash since Portugal left Angola. In a memorandum to President Ford in late December 1975, National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft held out hope that the Soviets would show restraint in southern Africa, but acknowledged that Moscow was “willing to go a significant distance to support an MPLA victory” to cement a Marxist influence in the region. As détente failed in the mid and late 1970’s, America increasingly sought to thwart the spread of Marxism in the region. The US prepared to increase its involvement in this conflict and the USSR did the same.<sup>4</sup>

Though the level of commitment from America and the Soviet Union was

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<sup>3</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, "Early Angola Aid by U.S. Reported." The New York Times, December 18, 1975. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-103-6-2-8.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Susan Onslow and Christopher Saunders, “The Cold War and Southern Africa, 1976-1990,” in The Cambridge History of the Cold War v. III, ed. by Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 225, 229; National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft to President Gerald Ford, December 28, 1975, The White House, CIA Reading Room, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-104-1-4-0.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2017).

increasing, the most direct involvement came from Cuba. Starting back in 1965, Cuba sent material aid, military strategists, and even troops to Angola (among other newly decolonized African nations). Its intention was purely ideological; Castro genuinely cared about “aiding [Angola, Mozambique, and others] in their struggle for independence.” He sent thousands of troops to stymie the South African invasion in 1976. Cuba would remain in southern Africa throughout the regional conflict to protect Angola and Namibia and try to rollback South Africa’s influence. In terms of manpower, materiel, and ideology, Cuba was becoming the most committed foreign power in the regional conflict.<sup>5</sup>

### Quiet Phase

After the initial South African invasion of Angola, through the late 1970’s and early 1980’s there seldom occurred an armed international clash. From 1976-1985 the regional conflict appeared less contentious than when it started. However, inter-factional violence was very active in Angola and prevalent in Namibia, too. Even though much of the violence during this period seemed to be domestic, the interconnectedness of the future of Angola’s leadership and South Africa’s continued occupation of Namibia made these domestic conflicts into regional ones. As these conflicts maintained and intensified in this span, both the Soviet Union and United States perceived “almost apocalyptic fear of the consequences if the opponent won.”<sup>6</sup>

This fear was emblematic of the superpowers’ third world dynamic. Both countries “saw their mission as part of a world-historical progression” towards the goal of modernizing world order – although they differed greatly on which system would bring about modernity. Moreover, they each sought to prevent their adversary from spreading

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<sup>5</sup> Fidel Castro and Ignacio Ramonet, My Life (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 314.

<sup>6</sup> Westad, The Global Cold War, 397.

what each country viewed as a fundamentally destructive system. In the case of southern Africa, the desire to spread ideology and prevent the enemy from doing the same caused both nations to deepen their involvement.

Neither side could resist meddling in southern African affairs while the opportunity to spread ideology was ripe. President Jimmy Carter's desire to let the southern African nations "solve their problems without outside interference," was merely a platitude as America continued covert assistance to the FLNA and then to UNITA when the factions merged. The Soviets became the preferred arms supplier for SWAPO, the dominant paramilitary group in Namibia, and the Cubans sent military training instructors and troops to Angola to assist the MPLA. Just as the United States felt it needed to respond to Soviet commitment, the Soviet Union acted reflexively to American overtures. They each feared a shift in the global balance of power if their adversary's client gained influence in the region. A victory for UNITA and South Africa was an achievement for capitalism and the West. The opposite was true for an MPLA win. When the Americans committed resources, the Soviets felt they had to respond with increased commitment of their own. Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister L.F. Illichev charged that the "rising threat of neocolonialist...maneuvers by Western powers" in Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, and Angola prompted the Soviet Union to redouble its commitment in arms to the MPLA and others. Mutual distrust caused both superpowers to increase involvement in the far south of Africa.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> President Jimmy Carter to Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, February 14, 1977, The White House, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111269> (accessed April 4, 2017); Westad, The Global Cold War, 72; Report on Soviet Delegation to Tanzania, Zambia Mozambique, and Angola, February 6, 1976, German Federal Archives, Wilson Center Digital Archive, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121060> (accessed April 4, 2017); Onslow and Saunders, "The Cold War and southern Africa, 1976-1990," 231.

Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 further strained the tense U.S.-Soviet relationship. An ardent anti-Communist since his days as president of the Screen Actors Guild, Reagan brought blustering rhetoric and deep cynicism towards the Soviet Union to the White House. The Carter administration often begrudgingly undertook its commitment to southern Africa. Given the escalation of Soviet commitment and the growing Cuban military presence, the adversarial East vs. West dynamic prompted Carter to respond. However, President Reagan was much more eager to engage with South Africa. The apartheid government in Pretoria abhorred communism because it had attracted wide appeal among blacks since it arrived in South Africa in 1921. Empowering the black majority with a legitimate political structure and purpose posed a grave threat to the very existence of apartheid. The minority government required obeisance from the majority group to survive. Thus, Pretoria repeatedly rooted out communism within its borders and zealously opposed Marxist encroachment in neighboring countries. Despite its racial politics, Reagan readily supported the staunchly anti-communist, white government in Pretoria to diminish Soviet influence in a region of newly independent countries.<sup>8</sup>

Assistant Secretary of State Chester A. Crocker was the primary formulator of U.S. policy towards southern Africa within the Reagan administration. A Georgetown professor of Foreign Service, Crocker brought a scholarly background, pragmatism, and years of experience analyzing American foreign policy towards the region. His preferred policy formulations were named constructive engagement and linkage. The doctrine of

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<sup>8</sup> Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011), 106-108; CIA Working Group on Angola, April 2, 1976, CIA Reading Room, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-104-3-8-4.pdf> (accessed April 4, 2017); Gordon D. Aeschliman, *Apartheid Tragedy in Black and White* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1986), 117-124.



Constructive engagement sought to engage with the minority government in South Africa to foster productive business and governmental relationships to strengthen the capitalist beacon of southern Africa. Crocker hoped that engaging with Pretoria in this way would create positive relationships that would position America to push Prime Minister P.W. Botha and his government to undergo reforms to end apartheid.<sup>9</sup>

Linkage pertained to South Africa's occupation of Namibia, one of the key contentious dynamics that sustained the regional conflict. Having conquered Namibia from Germany in 1915, South Africa subjected Namibia to apartheid laws and tied the country's economy to that of South Africa. Pretoria ended the interregnum by establishing "a militarized police" under "an unelected administrator" to forcefully lead over Namibia. As Namibian nationalism rose in the 1960's and 1970's, the United Nations, SWAPO, and other organizations challenged South Africa's occupation. International pressure continued to grow in the 1970's. As it did, South Africa's rule over Namibia became increasingly tenuous.<sup>10</sup>

The doctrine of linkage accepted that the 1978 UN Resolution 435 for Namibian independence was the most realistic, unbiased option to deal with Namibia. Knowing that international pressure to support the resolution was high (and increasing), Crocker tied the support of Namibia's freedom to that of Angola; he would advise South Africa to withdraw its colonial regime from Windhoek, Namibia on the condition that Cuban troops left Angola. Crocker wanted both to promote majority rule in Namibia and to "[counter] Soviet-Cuban adventurism." Crocker endeavored to further American interests

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<sup>9</sup> Chester Crocker, High Noon in Southern Africa, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 58-62.

<sup>10</sup> Keith Gottschalk, "Restructuring the Colonial State: Pretoria's Strategy in Namibia," in Namibia in Perspective, eds. by Gerhard Töttemeyer et al. (Windhoek: Council of Churches in Namibia, 1987), 27-34.

by helping South Africa emerge from the regional isolation it had experienced on account of Namibian occupation and the failed invasion of Angola in 1975. Overseeing the execution of Resolution 435 while removing Cuban troops from Angola would reduce the threat of a communist takeover in southern Africa.<sup>11</sup>

Crocker's implementation of constructive engagement and linkage became a discreet affair. In a coordinated effort between Crocker, CIA Director Bill Casey, Secretaries of State Alexander Haig and George Shultz, and National Security Advisor William Clark, the execution of diplomacy with South Africa "was purposefully kept out of the public gaze." As South Africa became increasingly reviled in the U.S. Congress, the administration tried to engage without drawing too much attention to the relationship. Crocker rightly feared that his ability to execute diplomacy in southern Africa would be jeopardized if the public knew the extent to which he hoped to engage with the apartheid government. The executive branch was able to do engage so quietly, also, because the actual fighting in the region dwindled in the early 1980's, so southern Africa faded from the public interest. For President Reagan's first term, constructive engagement and linkage continued without a significant challenge. Despite hopes for increased U.S.-Soviet trade during Reagan's first term, mistrust and tension between the two superpowers remained high. Southern Africa reflected this tension; as the superpower relationship deteriorated in the late 1970's and early 1980's, the impasse between South Africa, Namibia, the Angolan factions, and Cuba deepened. Nearly a decade of rising tensions made the region susceptible to hot war at any moment.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Crocker, High Noon in Southern Africa, 64; *ibid.*, 68.

<sup>12</sup> Donald R. Culverson, "The Politics of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the United States, 1969-1986" in Political Science Quarterly, 1996, 141; Alex Thomson, U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 126-128; Geoffrey P.

Part Two. Lit Aflame: Tensions, Bullets, and the Settlement of the Regional Conflict in Southern Africa, 1985-1988

A Shift in Perception of South Africa

Mark Mathabane grew up in Alexandra, one of apartheid South Africa's most notorious townships. His youth was characterized by feeling "abandoned and betrayed by a world that...seemed to hold out nothing to [him] but hunger, pain, violence and death." Growing up he lived in constant fear of police raids in the middle of the night in which enforcement officers would assiduously search for his mother whose "pass" — her personal identification booklet — was incomplete. His mother would often hide in a dresser or flee out of a window. If she were caught, Mark's father would be taken to tribal lands in rural South Africa or Namibia to do months of hard labor to pay off her debt. A vicious cycle plagued townships. Arbitrary pass laws ruled the land for which compliance was necessary to get a job but jobs were unavailable to those without proper passes. This treatment drove Mark to figure out how to leave South Africa, but many others in Mark's position were driven to join paramilitary groups to oppose the minority government.<sup>13</sup>

In 1984-1985, township residents revolted against the government in a series of uprisings in South Africa. People like Mark's friends could no longer contain their frustration over the lack of opportunity and constant degradation that the apartheid

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Levin, "Before Soviet Jewry's Happy Ending: The Cold War and America's Long Debate Over Jackson-Vanik, 1976-1989," in *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* v.33 issue 3 (Spring 2015), accessed April 11, 2017, DOI 10.1353/sho.2015.0023

See also "U.S.-Soviet Relations, 1981-1991," U.S. Department of State, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1981-1988/u.s.-soviet-relations> (accessed April 05, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 167.

system brought upon black people. Black South Africans violently rebelled against the white government's pass laws and constant surveillance, just as they had in the 1976 Soweto Township Uprising. Prime Minister Botha issued a State of Emergency in 1985 in response to the rise of clashes between township residents and enforcement officers. The South African government heavily deployed its police force and military to townships across the country, brutally suppressing the revolt and killing many of its citizens. The white government exerted control over its black citizenry. This was a public spectacle of violence. It reminded the world that the government in South Africa was a repressive, racist regime.<sup>14</sup>

The Reagan administration responded minimally to the outbreak of violence in South Africa. Though Crocker, Shultz, and Reagan were all aware of the ferocious suppression of the uprisings, they did not want to take harsh economic action for fear of causing negative externalities for black South Africans. In their view, sanctions would further alienate South Africa from the global trade market, which would most directly affect blacks. Constricting access both to markets and to capital for South Africa would result in fewer available jobs and blacks would be the first to lose their incomes. Politically, they feared that reproaching Pretoria would squander their ability to constructively engage with the country's leaders. Condemning Botha and cutting off political ties would effectively "let Pretoria off the hook" without giving the US a chance to use diplomacy to influence South African actions. Secretary Shultz described this logic in 1986 to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar saying, "The consequences of a lack of action are terrible to contemplate. So even though the

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<sup>14</sup> "Liberation Struggle in South Africa," South Africa History Online, July 21, 2015 (accessed April 24, 2017), <http://www.sahistory.org.za/article/state-emergency-1985>.

probability [of pressuring the South African government to abandon apartheid] is low, it seems to me that we have to work with that probability.” This was consistent with President Reagan’s broader third world policy in which he, as Duke Professor Hal Brands said, favored the “ability to blunt Soviet geopolitical momentum” even if that meant partnering with human rights abusers. The administration sacrificed taking an immediate moral stand for a long-term strategy that required engagement.<sup>15</sup>

The administration knew, though, that it had to take at least some action to respond to the crackdown in South Africa. Reagan and his team attempted to denounce Pretoria while not jeopardizing the relationship or hurting black South Africans. Continuing their strategy of quiet diplomacy would reinforce the sentiment that the administration tacitly supported the apartheid government, so Reagan took measures to reassure Congress and the American public that it condemned apartheid. He recalled U.S. Ambassador Herman Nickel in June 1985 and issued Executive Order 12532, which applied light sanctions to Pretoria, three months later. With these actions, the administration sought to preempt congressional action, which they assumed would have been more drastic than their light reprimand. Reagan, Crocker, and Shultz hoped that these concrete measures, along with a shift to more clear rhetoric outlining their

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<sup>15</sup> George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Scribner, 1993), 1117; Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 291; U.S. Congress, Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. *Situation in South Africa: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*. 99<sup>th</sup> Cong. 2<sup>nd</sup> sess., 1986, 88-89; Glenn Frankel, “Sanctions Stir Emotions in S. Africa,” *The Washington Post*, Sept 8, 1985, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/09/08/sanctions-stir-emotions-in-s-africa/3a9c43a0-0125-4aa8-ad75-2b7fc3485c83/?utm\\_term=.15b92bfc8529](https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/09/08/sanctions-stir-emotions-in-s-africa/3a9c43a0-0125-4aa8-ad75-2b7fc3485c83/?utm_term=.15b92bfc8529); for more on Reagan’s new rhetoric see “Transcript of Talk by Reagan on South Africa and Apartheid,” *The New York Times*, July 23, 1986, <http://www.nytimes.com/1986/07/23/world/transcript-of-talk-by-reagan-on-south-africa-and-apartheid.html?pagewanted=all>; Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 113.

intentions in South Africa, would mollify Congress and the American people.<sup>16</sup>

Before the township uprisings, Congress did not impede the administration's diplomatic mission. Congress' overall foreign policy making power was in decline through much of Reagan's presidency. This was a sharp break from the assertive character of Congress in the mid-1970s. An intellectual movement in Congress called new internationalism fought to build foreign policy making prowess in response to executive overreach towards the end of the Vietnam War. They "attempted to use congressional power to remake American foreign policy, abandoning... [the] military-centered anti-Communism of the Cold War era" in favor of "promoting human rights and democracy overseas." Starting in the early 1980's, the trend of the new internationalists seemed to falter as the administration took control of foreign policy. The July 1985 repeal of the Clark Amendment, which allowed the executive to uninhibitedly provide extended aid to Jonas Savimbi and UNITA, seemed to corroborate the rollback of congressional foreign policy power that the new internationalists worked to build in the 1970's.<sup>17</sup>

By the second half of 1985, however, Congress began to reclaim control of foreign policy. Influenced by interest groups speaking out as well as the American public favoring more forceful action against South Africa, Congress responded severely to the crackdown. Senators condemned apartheid for "state supported mass executions" and enacting arcane security laws that were "not legal and they sure [were] not the way to promote security." Members of Congress often employed the rhetoric of human rights,

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<sup>16</sup> Crocker, High Noon in Southern Africa, 273; George P. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State (New York: Scribner, 1993), 1117.

<sup>17</sup> Robert David Johnson, Congress and the Cold War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 241; *ibid.*, 282-285.

and they condemned engaging, however constructively, with a racist regime.<sup>18</sup>

In October 1986, Congress showed that it was completely unwilling to let the administration continue its engagement with South Africa. It would no longer tolerate supporting a government that only 8% of Americans agreed we should support. Following the new internationalists' lead, Congress banded together behind a stronger sanctions package called the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act. Congress intended to undermine the apartheid government and provide various forms of aid to victims of scheme. Legislators defiantly passed the bill over a presidential veto on October 1986. This was a clear shift away from what Congress broadly considered a foreign policy failure in constructive engagement. The fact that constructive engagement had not achieved any moderation of the South African government and the regional conflict remained tense (and expensive), Congress wanted to develop a new strategy. Its' dramatic reclamation of foreign policy power was emblematic of a shift away from support for the South African regime and towards reconciliation in southern Africa.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from Congress, Cuba's southern African policy was further validated as South Africa descended into violence and repression. Cuba sent troops to Angola in response to the South African invasion in 1975 that America privately supported. Fidel Castro had a fervent ideological drive to protect decolonized Angola – the underdog –

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<sup>18</sup> Culverson, "The Politics of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the United States, 1969-1986," 140-150; Letter from Howard W. Pollack to President Reagan, "Open Letter to the President [Regarding U.S. Policy in Southern Africa with Respect to Support for "Anti-Communist" Movements]" in [Wilson Center Digital Archive](#); 1986 embargo poll in NBC News/Wall Street Journal, NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, Aug, 1986 [survey question]. USNBCWSJ.082686.R06, NBC News/Wall Street Journal [producer], Cornell University (Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research), iPOLL [distributor], (accessed April 26, 2017); Senator Levin, 100<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> session, *Congressional Record*, 13968, accessed through Proquest Congressional.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, [Congress and the Cold War](#), 282-285; Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, Gallup/CCFR Survey of American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy 1986, Oct, 1986 [survey question], USGALLUP.86CFRP.R35, Gallup Organization [producer]. Cornell University (Ithaca, NY: Roper Center for Public Opinion Research), iPOLL [distributor], accessed April 26, 2017).

from colonial aggression. Though the initial turnaround of South African forces in 1975-1976 was successful, Cuba maintained a presence in Angola because its adversaries continued to occupy Namibia, repress its own black citizens, and provide aid to UNITA.<sup>20</sup>

Cuba felt its presence in Angola was even more necessary as the township uprisings further proved the intransigence and harshness of P.W. Botha and his government. Pretoria's intensification of its repressive practices proved it was unresponsive to the pressure that Reagan administration supposedly applied. South African conduct vindicated Cuba's presence in that it was not safe for Cuban forces to leave Angola while Pretoria displayed aggression and the Washington supplied aid to UNITA. Increased repression at home coupled with two waves of South African attacks on Angola exemplified the rise in South Africa's hostility. CIA Director Casey corroborated that South Africa's behavior was unruly when he surmised that even pressure to curtail repression from the white business community *within* South Africa made "little perceptible effect on Botha." These actions led to what "Pretoria's Republican supporters in the administration and on the Hill feared most:" Castro more than tripled his troop count in Angola to 50,000 men. Adding legitimacy to the Cuban cause justified increased involvement in the region over the course of the 1980's. The Cubans' physical presence grew and thus their impact on the conflict grew with it. South Africa had relit the flame in the region with increased violence.<sup>21</sup>

### A New Day in the Soviet Union

<sup>20</sup> Castro and Ramonet, *My Life*, 313.

<sup>21</sup> Castro and Ramonet, *My Life*, 313; CIA NSPG Regarding South Africa, September 6, 1985, CIA Reading Room, <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP88B00443R000200890002-4.pdf>, (accessed 6 April 2017); Thomson, *U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Apartheid South Africa, 1948-1994*, 173; J.E. Davies, *Constructive Engagement?* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), 157.



The trajectory of the Cold War would be forever changed when Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev took office as the general secretary of the Soviet Union in 1985. Though his first two years in office did not represent a stark departure from previous Soviet leaders, starting in 1987 Gorbachev took steps that would fundamentally alter the superpower dynamic and Soviet commitment to Third World conflicts. By abiding by a framework of ‘new thinking’ in Soviet diplomacy, Gorbachev exhibited his ideological commitment to ending Soviet involvement in regional conflicts.

Vladislav Zubok, an influential historian of Soviet foreign policy, describes Gorbachev’s transformation from another conservative Soviet leader to a genuine reformer. Zubok claims that the combination of “the deterioration of the Soviet economy” and his “romantic notions of international affairs” pushed Gorbachev to institute new foreign policy conceptions. Specifically, Gorbachev genuinely wanted to engage with Ronald Reagan and forge a new relationship with the United States. He also wanted to scale back Soviet commitment in the third world and focus on domestic improvement. As the Soviet system deteriorated in the 1980’s, Gorbachev came to appreciate that third world involvement strained the already declining Soviet economy. Though Gorbachev represented a generational turnover in Soviet leadership, growing up in a generation that was less scarred by the German invasion in World War II than his predecessors, he also was adaptable to developments in geopolitics and intent on improving affairs. This leadership from the general secretary would be critical to relaxing tensions in southern Africa.<sup>22</sup>

‘New thinking’ had profound effects on U.S.-Soviet relations. Gorbachev

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<sup>22</sup> Vladislav Zubok *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 302; Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 412-414.

gradually reformulated his views on foreign policy as his relationship with Ronald Reagan changed and the Soviet economy worsened. Through a growing relationship of trust fostered by personal interaction at their multiple summits, Gorbachev came to see Reagan and the US as a partner rather than a foe in the third world. He realized that the United States did not have the sinister designs that made former Soviet leaders nervous. This helped facilitate Gorbachev's changing perception of Soviet security. The Kremlin did not feel the same encirclement or threat from the United States that had sustained Cold War anxieties for decades. This propelled Gorbachev to seek ways to withdraw from regional military conflicts without damaging Soviet prestige. He came to believe that "progress on these issues would be of mutual benefit" to both the United States and the Soviet Union. The destructiveness of "zero-sum diplomacy was nearing its end." Thus, Gorbachev believed that a partnership with the United States could actually improve the Soviet situation, rather than imperil it. This allowed for a changed dynamic between the U.S. and the USSR.<sup>23</sup>

For the administration to believe that the "evil empire" had actually changed, actions needed to corroborate words. A clear indication that the doctrine of 'new thinking' would have a profound effect on the relationship came on December 8, 1987, when President Reagan and Secretary Gorbachev signed the INF treaty at the Washington Summit. This agreement eliminated an entire class of nuclear weapons from each country's arsenal. President Reagan was "proud to be part of a genuinely historic moment" that capped off "the best summit [he had] ever had with the Soviet Union." The INF treaty benefitted Gorbachev by allowing him to begin cutting military expenditures –

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<sup>23</sup> Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 321; Martin McCauley, *Gorbachev* (London: Longman, 1998), 138; Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 129; Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 409, 417 462.

a prominent goal of domestic restructuring – and both leaders enjoyed an further improved security environment. Having experienced a momentous success together, Gorbachev and Reagan found a more willing partner in their counterpart.<sup>24</sup>

The most significant sign of a changed Soviet approach to foreign affairs came when Gorbachev announced that the Soviet Union would withdraw from Afghanistan. In a memo to Secretary Shultz on March 20, 1987, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Michael Armacost reported that during a consultation on foreign diplomacy with Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, he categorically declared that the Soviets “should get their troops out of Afghanistan promptly if they are serious about promoting real change in East-West relations.” Pursuant to Gorbachev’s drive to focus Soviet efforts inward and stop the financial bleeding of external conflicts, the general secretary announced in April of 1988 that the Soviet Union would withdraw its forces from Afghanistan in an even faster manner than Shevardnadze described to Armacost.<sup>25</sup>

Gorbachev’s interaction with Afghan President Mohammad Najibullah, the former leader of the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan, reinforced that a changed ideology, rather than just fiscal practicality, motivated withdrawing from Afghanistan. In a July 1987 conversation between the two leaders, Gorbachev demonstrated a growing understanding and acceptance of pluralism and of the problems that had plagued socialist governments. At the highest levels of the PDPA, Najibullah admitted, “narrow-mindedness of views, a lack of initiative, a disinclination to free themselves of the

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<sup>24</sup> Reagan, *An American Life*, 699; *ibid.*, 701 (Quoting himself from his personal diary); Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy?*, 133.

<sup>25</sup> “Memo from Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Michael Armacost to Secretary of State George Shultz,” March 20, 1987, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume VI, Soviet Union, October 1986-1989, Office of the Historian, 96, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v06/d2> (accessed April 06, 2017).

burdens of past mistakes, and conservatism” hurt the Party’s goals in Afghanistan and the prospects of Soviet withdrawal.<sup>26</sup> When Najibullah stated “national reconciliation required new approaches and an abandonment of stereotypes and methods which have outlived themselves,” he was clearly talking about socialism. Gorbachev was quick to agree. The leader of the socialist world was coming to terms with the notion that socialism had inherent flaws. As a result, Gorbachev increasingly focused his efforts inward on the Soviet Union to repair his faltering system, rather than remain involved in expensive third world conflicts.

Gorbachev announced on 8 February 1988 that if the Soviets could strike a multilateral understanding of the terms for withdrawal, he would begin removing troops by 8 May 1988. In the interim between the announcement and intended start date, Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Shultz, and National Security Advisor Colin Powell met. The tone of this meeting was very cordial. Unlike in previous meetings such as the Geneva Conference in which third world support proved to be a source of discord for the two countries, in this meeting the leaders spoke more as partners than as adversaries. In fact, Shevardnadze called this conversation “a meeting of the minds” on Afghanistan. Gorbachev substantiated his commitment to withdrawing from third world embroilments by announcing removal of Soviet troops from the most prominent third world conflict.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Conversation between PDPA Najibullah and General Secretary Gorbachev, July 20, 1987, Gorbachev Foundation Archives, [Wilson Center Digital Archive](http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117237), <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117237> (accessed April 06, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> Svetlana Sevranskaya and Thomas Blanton, “Afghanistan and the Soviet Withdrawal 1989, 20 Years Later,” February 15, 2009, in [The National Security Archive](https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB272/), The National Security Archives Electronic Briefing Book no. 272, <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB272/> (accessed May 1, 2017), Melvyn Leffler, [\*For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, The Soviet Union, and The Cold War\*](#) (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 383; “Memorandum of Conversation,” May 31, 1988, [\*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1981-1988, Volume VI, Soviet Union, October 1986-1989\*](#), Office of the Historian, 873, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v06/d139> (accessed May 1, 2017).

The superpowers started showing a willingness to come to agreements on third world issues. Gorbachev sought to focus Soviet efforts inward rather than allocate resources he did not have to third world conflicts that were not his main concern. As the regional conflict in southern Africa became more and more tense in 1987 and 1988, this newfound cooperation would prove useful in that the Soviets would not interfere in the negotiating process. Moreover, the modulation of the US-Soviet relationship in the third world allayed both countries' fears that their adversary was committed to spreading their system throughout the world. This led to a changed security environment that was more favorable to resolving the conflict. Despite these momentous changes, though, another country held even more leverage than the US or the Soviet Union.

#### The Cuban Factor

Cuba had been a mainstay in southern Africa throughout the regional conflict. As the only outside power to send troops to the region, Cuba established authority distinct from other external players. In 1975-1976, the Cubans successfully fended off the initial South African invasion in Angola. They chose to stay to and continue to protect the MPLA. To Cuba, the partnership between America's support of South Africa and of UNITA endangered Angolan and Namibian freedom. Castro would not remove his troops while these threats remained active and supported. Thus, Cuba would stand by its southern African allies for fourteen years.<sup>28</sup>

Cuba remained in Angola as a defensive force and was prepared to counterstrike at any moment. In the summer of 1987, South Africa invaded Angola to defend the faltering UNITA military. The South African military stepped up to battle FAPLA – the

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<sup>28</sup> Piero Gleijeses, Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, and Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976-1991 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 180-183.

military wing of the MPLA – at the MPLA military base in Cuito Cuanavale. The SADF turned around FAPLA, which safeguarded Jonas Savimbi and UNITA. Savimbi and General Geldenhuys rejoiced in victory, thinking they had routed the Angolan forces and secured the base. However, their military intelligence, which had been informed almost totally by UNITA reports, was insufficient. Actually, the Cubans hurriedly sent troops and armaments to repel the South Africans from Cuito Cuanavale.<sup>29</sup>

Cuba exhibited strength through defense. U.S. intelligence analysts telegraphed to Secretary Shultz their knowledge that Cuban forces were storming towards Cuito Cuanavale. The telegram noted that “the Cuban press has been careful to emphasize that Cuban troops [had] not been involved in combat.” They were advantageously positioned to ward off a South African strike, but would not engage the adversary until it struck. Only after the SADF crossed the Namibian border and attacked Cuito Cuanavale did Cuba mobilize its forces in Angola to reverse the offensive. Far from blustering and bluffing as Crocker saw the Cuban leader, Castro had been slowly increasing his military presence to defend against this kind of unprovoked attack. By the time the South Africans invaded Angola again in 1987, Castro had 55,000 troops ready, and they handily repelled the attack. Cuba proved its military hegemony.<sup>30</sup>

Castro’s decision to send more Cuban troops and weaponry strained Cuban-Soviet relations. The Cubans had hoped that the Soviets would provide arms in the face of South African aggression. The decision to commit its forces to repelling the attack was an

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<sup>29</sup> Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 396-408.

<sup>30</sup> Confidential Telegram from USINT Havana to Secretary of State George Shultz, ‘Cuba Describes Geographic Position and Military Role of its Forces in Angola’, December 7, 1987, National Security Archive, [Wilson Center Digital Archives](http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118169), <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/118169> (accessed April 06, 2017); Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, 368-370; Castro and Ramonet, *My Life*, 329.

arduous one in which Castro and his generals had to decide if the situation was dire enough to risk Cuban lives to save this town from South African invasion. An icy summit meeting between Castro and Gorbachev in Moscow resulted in Cuba accepting the fact that if they were to respond they would be doing it alone. Castro was undecided about sending troops until he returned to Cuba and read General Arnaldo Ochoa's sobering assessment that "if the morale and the fighting capacity of the units are not reestablished, a catastrophe is inevitable." Thus, the Cubans – without notifying the Soviets – struck back in Cuito Cuanavale and reversed South Africa's advance. With this decision, Cuba established that it would act independently of the Soviet Union and take on a greater role in the southern Africa conflict.<sup>31</sup>

The Reagan administration knew that the Cubans had a strong military presence in southern Africa, but it still underestimated how essential the Cubans would be to the region. Crocker acknowledged that the Cubans were a "force that you could say was in some way going to be able to challenge the South African conventional forces."<sup>32</sup> The extent to which Castro and the Cubans would gain leverage in the southern African, though, was beyond what Crocker had expected. Defying the Soviets and operating as an independent entity, Cuba asserted itself as the dominant foreign power. Cuba gained leverage after Cuito Cuanavale as it displayed its military superiority. A cold silence ensued in the Cuban-Soviet relationship in which the Cubans asserted their dominant role in southern Africa to the Soviets. After nearly two months of silence, the Soviets had come to terms with the fact that southern Africa was now "a Cuban campaign, the

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<sup>31</sup> Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom*, 406-410.

<sup>32</sup> "Assistant Secretary Chester Arthur Crocker," Charles Stuart Kennedy, *The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project*, June 5, 2006, <http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Crocker.%20Chester%20Arthur.toc.pdf> (accessed April 6, 2017), 67.

Cubans alone would direct it, the Soviets would be informed, but they would not be consulted.”<sup>33</sup>

Gorbachev, who was committed to ratcheting back the Soviet Union’s commitments in the third world, accepted this reality. Cuba’s strength forced the Soviets to take lesser role in the region, which Gorbachev could justify by conserving resources to focus on their domestic problems. The Soviets could quietly extricate themselves from this conflict without causing damage to Soviet prestige. When Cuba and the United States pressured South Africa to come to the negotiating table, the Soviets closely watched the proceedings, but they would not directly participate. Rather, the United States was able to freely mediate the talks without Cold War impulses, and Cuba possessed the critical negotiating strength.

#### Negotiations: How the Conflict Ended

South Africa’s status as a pariah state, Cuba’s military dominance, and the improvement to the US-Soviet relationship in the third world provided the necessary pretext for the negotiations that ended the regional conflict in southern Africa. South Africa’s failed invasions and increased repression at home weakened its credibility with the United States. Congress’ more hardline stance on South Africa and Pretoria’s near universal condemnation left it abandoned when it came time to negotiate. Cuba’s reversal of South Africa’s advances established it (along with its MPLA partners) as the military hegemon. Cuba thus entered negotiations with strength and authority. The Soviet Union’s changed security environment allowed it to accept that Cuba would not act as a Soviet client. Moreover, having relaxed competition with the United States in the third world,

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<sup>33</sup> Gleijeses, Visions of Freedom, 420; Crocker Oral History, 178-179.



the United States was able to be a more effective negotiator because it did not fear Soviet adventurism. 14 April 1988 marked the beginning of an eight-month process of negotiations.

By March 1988, the Reagan administration no longer overtly supported South Africa. Congress had usurped much of the administration's formal policymaking power, but Reagan, Shultz, and Crocker still covertly engaged with the South African leaders. Crocker met with South African Foreign Minister Pik Botha in March of 1988 in Geneva. He hoped to "help Botha persuade his truculent leadership to come back into the [negotiating] process." However, this round of negotiations would be different from previous talks between Angola, South Africa, and the other actors. In a letter from George Shultz to Pik Botha, Shultz "expressed dismay at the renewed internal repression, urging Botha to avoid a gratuitous confrontation with Western governments and public opinion." The secretary's letter conveyed to Botha that the US would not support Pretoria as it had in the past. In these negotiations, the US would truly mediate but not overtly influence on South Africa's behalf.<sup>34</sup>

The huge losses that South Africa suffered in the Battle of Cuito Cuanavale pushed some leaders of the ruling National Party to seek withdrawal from Angola. Cuban military power induced South Africa to come to the negotiating table, which it did in London in May 1988. In London, though, the South African delegation, headed by senior Foreign Ministry Official Neil van Heerden, was "not yet ready to negotiate" in any real capacity. Van Heerden hastily concocted a delegation which included General Geldenhuys, who just days before fought in Cuito Cuanavale. The interlocutors included

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<sup>34</sup> Crocker Oral History, 150; Crocker, High Noon in Southern Africa, 379-381.

Cuba, Angola, and South Africa, with Chester Crocker from the US as the mediator. The Soviets, conspicuously absent talks, would play a decidedly backseat role throughout the negotiations. Though the London talks did not lead to significant progress, they did mark the beginning of the essential negotiation process.<sup>35</sup>

The next two meetings, at Brazzaville and Cairo, South Africa came to the negotiating table intending to recoup authority. It looked to assert strength by demanding that the linkage between the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and Cuban troop withdrawals be the basis for negotiation. But Cuba, armed with geostrategic superiority, did not immediately respond to South Africa's bluster at Brazzaville. The Cuban delegation took time to formulate a strategy. When the parties met again in Cairo, Cuba entered with a clear goal: to pressure the South Africans to agree to a plan for Namibian independence and withdraw its troops from Angola and Namibia. Cuba would leave Angola once South Africa met both of those conditions. It reoriented the negotiations around this plan and hoped the possibility of further military advancement would cause Pretoria to concede. Though Castro and his team had been willing to negotiate with the South Africans in London and Brazzaville, in Cairo they looked to project strength. Castro called Pretoria's bluff.<sup>36</sup>

By the time the Cairo talks occurred, the Soviets and Americans clearly had the same goals. Both countries wanted South Africa and Cuba to withdraw their forces, for Angola to settle its internal struggle politically rather than militarily, and for Namibian independence to come to fruition in the coming months. This convergence of goals was

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<sup>35</sup> Westad, The Global Cold War, 391; Onslow and Saunders, "The Cold War and Southern Africa, 1976-1990," 240; Gleijeses, Visions of Freedom, 452; Jannie Geldenhuys, A General's Story (Jeppertown: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1995), 240.

<sup>36</sup> Geldenhuys, A General's Story, 262; Gleijeses, Visions of Freedom, 460-467.

significant in that the Soviet Union felt comfortable taking a secondary role in the negotiations. Chester Crocker offered Soviet diplomats like Anatoly Adamashin and Vladlen Vasev greater involvement in the negotiations, but they demurred, preferring “to distance themselves from whatever went wrong while keeping a close eye on the talks by talking with [the US] and with their socialist allies.” The Soviets did not need to prolong the conflict, for their original goals of countering American adventurism and establishing a Marxist stronghold (which Cuban involvement was facilitating) were no longer their primary concern.<sup>37</sup>

The Cuban agenda mostly aligned with the American and Soviet one. All three countries wanted an independent Namibia and withdrawal of foreign troops from Angola and Namibia. Their objectives only substantively diverged in that the Cubans would not withdraw before South Africa categorically accepted Resolution 43. Thus, Cuba had reversed the American policy of linkage. Whereas the Americans initially pushed for Cuba to leave as a prerequisite for South Africa accepting Resolution 435, Cuba’s geopolitical advantage meant it had the leverage to reverse the parameters of the negotiation. It would certainly withdraw, as was Cuba’s ultimate goal, but on its terms.<sup>38</sup>

The South Africans then made a critical military mistake. On 26 June 1988, they again invaded Angola in a desperate effort to regain a strategic advantage in southern provinces of Angola. In doing so the SADF killed 10 Cuban troops. The Cubans

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<sup>37</sup> “Memorandum of Conversation,” May 31, 1988, FRUS, 1981-1988, Volume VI, Soviet Union, October 1986-1989, Office of the Historian, 1093,

<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1981-88v06/d161>

For an indication that the two powers were starting to see eye to eye months before, see also “Record of a Conversation of M.S. Gorbachev with US Secretary of State G. Shultz,” February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1988, Gorbachev Foundation Archives, Wilson Center Digital Archives, <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/117248> (accessed April 7, 2017); Crocker Oral History, 177-178.

<sup>38</sup> Gleijeses, Visions of Freedom, 338.

responded tactfully and powerfully, forcing the SADF to retreat. At this point, the South African people had become disillusioned by the repeated failed invasions. Rather than continuing to absorb military defeats, Pretoria shifted the battleground from Angolan soil to the South African press. P.W. Botha's government designed a propaganda campaign to bolster anti-Cuban sentiment and maintain support for South Africa's regional adventurism. However, disapproval of South Africa's involvement in Angola grew, and pressure – both domestic and international – mounted for the government to come to an agreement. The failure of this military strike cemented Cuba's military dominance and proved to be a crucial turning point in the negotiations.<sup>39</sup>

The next two meetings, in New York and Cape Verde, featured a changed South African delegation. Having realized the extent of their military inferiority after the June attack, the South Africans adopted a more conciliatory tone in New York. They attempted to squeeze at least some concessions out of the Cuban delegation to placate hardliners in Pretoria. The Cubans remained rigid, confident in their superior position, and forced the South Africans' hands. Crocker, free from Cold War pressures to forstall the Soviet goals, skillfully mediated the negotiations. The talks in New York led to an informal ceasefire, and, more importantly, the South Africa delegation "accepted the Cuban demands" in full.<sup>40</sup>

Cuba – and therefore Angola and Namibia – had won the diplomatic struggle. The South African forces started to withdraw from Angola and Namibia in August 1988, and completed that process in November of the following year. Southern Africa was mostly free from regional violence and international influence. In December 1988, the foreign

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<sup>39</sup> Gleijeses, Visions of Freedom, 468-470.

<sup>40</sup> Gleijeses, Visions of Freedom, 475.

ministers of Cuba, the MPLA government in Angola, and South Africa signed the Angola-Namibia Accords. This agreement formally ended foreign involvement in the two countries and put in motion the implementation of Resolution 435. The United States and the Soviet Union achieved their shared goals in the last round of negotiations. The conflict was over.

### Conclusion

The domestic conflicts in southern Africa that undergirded the forthcoming regional conflict were never truly domestic. In the Cold War era, the dipolar world order dictated that the two superpowers would compete in vulnerable areas. Ideological rigidity characterized the first decade of the conflict in southern Africa; both the Americans and the Soviets sought to counteract their foe from gaining influence in the region. Both sides distrusted each other and supported client governments accordingly.

After 1985, the outlook of the regional conflict changed. South Africa's increased repression further isolated the country from the international community. Cuba repelled several South African invasions and bolstered its military hegemony. And 'new thinking' in the Soviet Union and a mutual changed security perception in the third world eased the tensions between the US and USSR in the latter half of the 1980's. This opened the door for Cuba to emerge as the dominant power the peacemaking process. The easing of tensions was useful in that it allowed Cuba to redefine the terms of negotiation without external interference, and made the US comfortable shepherding the negotiations towards peace as a less biased mediator.

Cuba's commitment to Angola and Namibia, both in thought and in action, proved to be effective. Its' decisions were central to the end of the conflict. Cuba usurped

power from the Soviet Union, got the South Africans to the table, and ultimately established the terms of the peace in southern Africa. In the negotiations, the US was free to act as a mediator rather than a committed partner to South Africa as a result of the modulated superpower relationship. 'New thinking' and a new Soviet leadership provided the impetus to redefine the terms of that relationship. The regional conflict ended due to Cuban strength, American and Soviet cooperation, and South Africa's repression and intransigence.

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