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

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ABSTRACT

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

As Arne Westad has shown, the Cold War had a global impact and scholars are beginning to explore the Cold War in different corners of the world. From 1975 Angola was a major hot-spot in the Cold War (US), the Soviet Union, Cuba and South Africa all involved there in different ways. For the South African
Angola from 1975 to 1988 we now have many detailed accounts of the battles fought by the South African Defence Force (SADF) in Angola, from Operation Savannah in late 1975 to Operation Reindeer in May 1978, and the many operations from 1980, of which Operations Protea in 1981 and Askari in 1983-4 were the largest before those that took place around Cuito Cuanavale in 1987-8.

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

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

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

### Background

What happened after Angolan independence was of course shaped in part by earlier relations between to the Lisbon coup of April 1974 the Portuguese rulers of Angola had been close allies of apartheid South Africa from the 1960s and early 1970s the South African government saw Angola as a key part of the buffer of white-ruled states that separated South Africa from black-ruled Africa to the north and provided South Africa with a protective shield. South Africa’s continuing role as a white power in southern Africa was under threat from black-ruled states, from the new states of formerly white South West Africa (now Namibia) and Angola, and from black-ruled states of the continent to the north. The South Africans were anxious to keep hold of their influence in the area.

From 1968 a number of secret meetings were held between top military and security officials of the two countries. These mostly concerned how South Africa could best help the Portuguese to fight its war in Angola by providing air support and other logistical and financial assistance. In return the South Africans hoped for Portuguese help in dealing with the insurgency in northern Namibia. South African aircraft were stationed at a Joint Air Support Centre at Cuito Cuanavale, and the Portuguese military provided the SADF with maps of southern Angola, which no doubt came in useful to the SADF when planning operations in the area. Only three months before the April 1974 coup in Lisbon it was agreed that a permanent Portuguese military mission would be established in Pretoria (the Alcora mission), and on South Africa agreed to provide a large loan (R150 million) for Portuguese military equipment in Angola. Military co-operation between South Africa and Portugal increased then, until 1974, but was almost entirely secret. Even today its full extent remains unclear. In Angola, the Portuguese military thought in early 1974 that it was winning.
The single most important act of co-operation involving Angola in the years before the coup in Lisbon was the building of a large hydro-electric scheme at Ruacana on the Cunene River. Though the generating plant was not completed until 1983, the prospect of a hostile government in Luanda once the country became independent, and the growth in relations with newly independent Angola, and the South Africans continued to set up to ‘Namibianise’ the war, occupied a strip of territory along Angola’s southern border.

Relations between South Africa and Angola changed dramatically as a result of the Lisbon coup of late 1974, when the Angolans declared themselves to be the government of an independent Angola. The US not only failed to prevent what it saw as a puppet party of the Soviet Union coming to power, but the large Cuban military presence in Angola was seen by both the US and the South Africans as working under the orders of Moscow and as a threat to the expansionism of apartheid South Africa.

To the South African government the arrival of the Cubans, more than the advent of the MPLA regime, had developed in a country in the region in which it saw itself as hegemonic. It was feared in both Pretoria and Washington that either the US or South Africa opening diplomatic relations with newly independent Angola, and the South Africans continued to set up to ‘Namibianise’ the war, occupied a strip of territory along Angola’s southern border.

Despite all this, a series of meetings took place between officials of the two countries during these years. Most of these meetings have not been written about subsequently, except briefly and in passing. Cheste himself as the chief mediator on issues relating to Angola and South Africa in the 1980s, is very dismissive of the bilateral meetings between the two countries that were held in the early 1980s while he was trying to negotiate Angola separately to secure a withdrawal of the Cuban forces from Angola. He writes: ‘[I]t strained our imagination that these characters would communicate effectively, lacking a common language, agenda or political that only he could achieve anything significant and reveals his annoyance at not being included in the mediator’, he writes, ‘can hardly make full use of his skills when warring parties choose to meet bilaterally’. The memoir suggests that he knew little about the specifics of what was discussed at the bilateral meetings and Angola. His focus was, anyway, almost exclusively on the issue of Cuban troop withdrawal from Angola.

Why did the South Africa/Angola talks take place and what were they about? South Africa’s war in south Angola as a country, like Mozambique, with which South Africa should deal on matter of common interest rarely knew in advance what the military planned to do in Angola, and believed in diplomatic rather than military solutions. The Joint Management System that P.W. Botha set up as part of his Total Strategy, to deal with the various arms of government together, established, on which officials from the DFA sat along with military and intelligence officials, but the
independently, stymieing the diplomatic relations that the DFA was trying to build. When R.F. (Pik) Botha, Minister of Foreign Affairs, became involved directly on the Angola issue in the early 1980s, he went on to involve Magnus Malan, his counterpart as Minister of Defence, into the discussions, in an attempt to ensure that they did not work at cross purposes. For their part, the Angolans recognised that South Africa was the de facto ruler of Namibia and, especially given their support for SWAPO, they did not want there to be any suggestion of giving de facto recognition to South Africa’s occupation of Namibia.

**Initial Meetings**

The first meeting of officials of the two sides took place only a month after the last South African troop withdrawal from Angola. The Angolans had been engaged in an undeclared war to prevent the MPLA from coming to power. As with the discussions South African officials held with their Mozambiquan counterparts soon after power there, there was a measure of pragmatism on the South African side, a recognition that, however welcome the new government in the former Portuguese colony might be, the liberation movement had taken power and had been a long history of South African support for the colonial regime that the MPLA had posed a serious threat to the still very fragile regime in Luanda, which was attempting to rule a large country devastated by years of war. The Angolans wanted the meetings kept secret for two main reasons: they did not wish to risk South Africa and, especially given their support for SWAPO, they did not want there to be any suggestion of giving de facto recognition to South Africa’s occupation of Namibia.

For the South Africans the single most important issue was the Calueque/Ruacana scheme, which, as benefited South African-occupied Namibia. The South Africans needed Angolan co-operation because water to the hydro-electric scheme were in Angola and they wanted to complete construction at Calueque. The Angolans refused to allow construction on the dam at Calueque to continue, but in 1977 they closed the sluices in Ovamboland and in the Caprivi, and the training by the South Africans of ‘puppet forces’, meaning UNITA. The Angolans also decried the bellicose anti-MPLA propaganda emanating from South Africa.

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

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

The early 1980s

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

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

From August 1981 the border between Namibia and Angola became less of an issue because South Af
largest operation to that time into southern Angola, took control of the Calueque dam and occupied a
kilometres wide in southern Angola. In that same month the young President José Eduardo dos Santo
meeting with the new American team led by the aggressive Crocker. Almost immediately afterwards, E representative of the South African-based diamond company De Beers in Luanda that Angola wanted discussions with South Africa and to do so outside the framework of the Western Five Contact Group c now in effect been taken over by the Reagan administration. It may be that Dos Santos thought he cou Africans and Americans if he dealt with them separately. After his message was passed on to the South mining magnate Harry Oppenheimer, it was agreed that a meeting between the two countries would take place on Sal Island on 7 December 1982. Pik Botha, Magnus Malan, now Minister of Defence, ar Foreign Affairs led the South African team, while the Angolan side was led by Rodriques, who had now of the Interior, and Antonia Ndalu, the chief of the Angolan Air force. The South Africans began by saying they were ready for dialogue, but they pointed out that in previous meetings they had discus between the two countries, only to find 'a few days later' the South Africans again invading Angola. In African claim that they had no purpose in Angola other than to stop SWAPO launching attacks from An Namibia, the Angolans replied that they were committed to supporting SWAPO, adding: 'We are not SWAPO forces to the independence of Namibia. Rather than allow the Americans to take over a year to arrange that.

The Angolans stressed that they wanted their contacts with the South Africans to be kept secret for, thevery difficult to justify such contacts to those who were the victims of South African aggression. But it p a meeting at ministerial level secret, and news reached the international press that such a meeting, the take place on Sal Island on 7 December 1982. Pik Botha, Magnus Malan, now Minister of Defence, ar Foreign Affairs led the South African team, while the Angolan side was led by Rodriques, who had now of the Interior, and Antonia Ndalu, the chief of the Angolan Air force. The South Africans began by saying they were ready for dialogue, but they pointed out that in previous meetings they had discus

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

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

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

The South Africans had little knowledge of Angola, having no diplomatic representation there. At this years, the DFA speculated that the Angolan government was divided about holding talks with South Af black nationalist faction in the MPLA wanted to talk, and that the talks were opposed by the left-wing the party, who were more influenced by Marxist and Soviet ideology. The South Africans thought they with the less ideological black nationalists than with the Marxists, with their Soviet connections, and th
increased factionalism in Luanda would work to their advantage. There was also much speculation in
Dos Santos had over his government was precarious and that he was totally dependent on Cuban backing
to leave he would share the fate of Chad’s government, which fell after Gaddafi of Libya withdrew.
Island Pik Botha said: ‘the Angolans must believe him when he told them that he heard in South Africa
President Dos Santos wanted and indeed desired peace but that the Soviet Union would not allow him
Rodrigues responded:

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

The December 1982 talks mainly concerned a formal cessation of armed activities in southern Angola.
offered to withdraw their troops from southern Angola if SWAPO forces were withdrawn from the area
border and the Cuban forces in southern Angola were withdrawn even further north. The Angolans re
not able to take a decision on the matter at this meeting and would have to refer it to their governmen
Both delegations said they thought the talks had been promising and left Cape Verde expecting there t
in the near future. But this did not happen. A second ministerial meeting was arranged for 23 February
officials took place. The reason advanced by the South African government, on the eve of the further ta
ministers back to Cape Verde was that SWAPO forces, actively supported by Angolan government forces
South Africans described as a large offensive into northern Namibia.30 The South Africans therefore se
senior officials to Cape Verde, and they merely made clear that in their view no further talks could take
restraint on the part of the Angolans, the Cubans and SWAPO.

Behind the Angolan and Cuban support for SWAPO, the South Africans believed, lay Moscow. The Sou
said, as they did on other occasions, that if the MPLA government in Angola refused to allow its territori
ideology utterly alien to the people of Africa’, there would be no reason for a South African presence in
country. The South Africans claimed that they were helping to defend the people of the continent from
threat to all the African states …’. The MPLA regime was, they pointed out, unelected and unrepresenta
authority, they claimed, from ‘the military violence of alien surrogates.31 What the South Africans wou
their presence in Namibia was illegal and that if they had withdrawn from Namibia there would be no
operate from Angolan territory.

At the UN the Angolan representative regularly lambasted South Africa in the General Assembly for its
gainst his country. South Africa was barred from the General Assembly, but speaking in the Security C
permanent representative to the UN argued that his country’s objective was to protect Namibia from S
only reason South African forces were in Angola.32 If Angolan forces became targets, he said, it was be
SWAPO. The Angolans responded that their civilians and infrastructure were being targeted and that it
to cripple the economy of the country, to vent its anger against its Marxist government and to force it i
UNITA.

The Angolans now took a harder line against further talks with the South Africans, especially after the l
defeat at the hands of UNITA forces at Cangamba in Moxico provinces, some 500 kilometres from the
August 1983. Speaking in the UN General Assembly, the Angolan Foreign Minister, Paulo Jorge, blame
African aggression, saying that heavy artillery had been involved as well as ‘South African mercenaries
by the West with South Africa and the ‘puppet bandits’ operating in southern Angola. He added that si
withdrew entirely from Angola would Angola and Cuba discuss the progressive withdrawal of the Cub
interest in continuing any dialogue with South Africa.
violated. The SADF soon arose because of the slowness of the SADF withdrawal and Angolan control.

After the Lusaka meeting of diplomats, a Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC) was established, and further meetings began. However, talks were soon stopped because of differences in the implementation of the Lusaka Accord. The Angolans and the South Africans were keen to find a way to end the fighting. In 1984 more meetings took place in Lusaka, Zambia, where the South Africans and the Angolans agreed to the establishment of a joint South African and Angolan commission to monitor the withdrawal of South African forces from Angola in a step-by-step process that would see the South Africans pull back from a position over 120 miles into Angola to the Namibian border. In return Angola agreed to prevent further armed actions by SWAPO, though they were from the start skeptical of Angolan intentions. Pik Botha told the US Secretary of State that Angola, like the Soviet Union, had signed directly concerned SWAPO, which was now not supposed to operate in areas beyond 120 miles from the Namibian border. In return Angola wanted Cuban withdrawal, it should withdraw its forces from southern Angola and stop supporting UNITA. The lesson to be drawn from the discussions with him was that if South Africa wanted Cuban withdrawal, it should withdraw its forces from southern Angola and stop supporting UNITA. The suggestion was not taken up. Instead the SADF soon mounted another major incursion into Angola. Operation Askari, South African forces moved deep into southern Angola to destroy SWAPO's bases as that now offered anti-aircraft protection to them and the Angolan army. Speaking in Cahama in Angola, the chief of the SADF, Constand Viljoen, acknowledged that South African forces had moved as far as 700 kilometres into Angola. He said that SWAPO was enjoying the protection of FAPLA and the access this gave to increasingly sophisticated weapons, including Sam 8 anti-aircraft missiles, and that FAPLA, Cuban and SWAPO arms were now again bombed SWAPO's main logistical headquarters at Luanda. SWAPO forces from operating in the area from which the South Africans withdrew. Alongside the meeting of military men from FAPLA and the SADF took place at the Mulungushi conference centre in Lusaka. From the time it was signed, there was misunderstanding about the Lusaka Accord. The Angolans saw of South African troops from Angola as a step towards the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and the independence of Namibia. A statement by the Central Committee of the MPLA-Workers Party in April approved of the need to be in the interests of the full sovereignty of Angola and a settlement of the Namibian issue. The Angolan position was reiterated by Marrack Goulding, the British Ambassador in Pretoria.

1984-85

This was because both sides were keen to find a way to end the fighting. In 1984 more meetings took place than ever before. Talks first resumed on Cape Verde in January 1984, again through the good offices of President Aristide Pereira, to discuss a possible cessation of hostilities. Then on 16 February 1984 Pi and Crocker, this time in Lusaka, Zambia, where the South Africans and the Angolans agreed to the establishment of a joint South African and Angolan commission to monitor the withdrawal of South African forces from Angola in a step-by-step process that would see the South Africans pull back from a position over 120 miles into Angola to the Namibian border. In return Angola agreed to prevent further armed actions by SWAPO, whereas the South Africans assumed the agreement would stop further armed actions were from the start skeptical of Angolan intentions. Pik Botha told the US Secretary of State that Angola remained bound by a treaty with the Soviet Union and that 'gaining unilateral advantage from agreements with capitalist countries is a central principle in Marxist foreign policy doctrine. There was, he said, no reason to believe that the Soviet Union had abandoned their fundamental ideological positions; they remained totalitarian and ourselves the luxury of pretending that our neighbours have suddenly undergone a political metamorphosis could not, he told Haig, afford to 'cut corners' and accept 'any kind of cosmetic withdrawal of Cubans' ...

After the Lusaka agreement numerous other meetings between Angolan and South African officials took place. At the highest level, others were between members of the Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC), others were between technicians to discuss the restoration of the hydro-electric scheme which now came under joint Angolan control. Though Angolan and South African military personnel mostly got on well at the JMC, some were at the top level or to Goulding, Jorge, a member of the radical faction in the MPLA, had not been kept informed of the discussions which to his annoyance had been handled by the Deputy Foreign Minister and Rodrigues. In response, the leading DFA official, Dave Steward, argued that the lesson to be drawn from the discussions with him was that if South Africa wanted Cuban withdrawal, it should withdraw its forces from southern Angola and stop supporting UNITA. The SADF was adamant that SWAPO was continuing to operate in what was called the 'area of Ovamboland any longer, yet SWAPO had not been part of the negotiations that led to the agreement. Dos Santos told the MPLA party school in Luanda on 8 March that the agreement did not say that SWAPO had to suspend its operations in the area from which the South Africans withdrew. Alongside the meeting of military men from FAPLA and the SADF took place at the Mulungushi conference centre in Lusaka. From the time it was signed, there was misunderstanding about the Lusaka Accord. The Angolans saw South African troops from Angola as a step towards the implementation of UN Resolution 435 and the independence of Namibia. A statement by the Central Committee of the MPLA-Workers Party in April approved of the need to be in the interests of the full sovereignty of Angola and a settlement of the Namibian issue. The Angolan position was reiterated by Marrack Goulding, the British Ambassador in Pretoria.
Angolans were turning a blind eye to such violations. Meanwhile Angola continued to speak out at the African 'colonization' of Namibia. They said that their role as 'the unwavering championing of the Nam 'earned the Angolan people a terrible retribution from the racist regime in Pretoria'. South African agg and the systematic destruction of property in Angola was called 'vandalism of a strategic kind aimed a national reconstruction'. The idea that there was any threat to South Africa from the Cuban forces was Cuban or Angolan soldier, it was pointed out, had ever set foot over the Namibian border.39

When Pik Botha, D.F. Malan and other South Africans met Rodriques, da Moura and other Angolans in the Angolans agreed to consider sending a technical mission to Windhoek for discussions on the Ruac that meeting Rodriques hinted that the Soviet Union was hindering Angolan attempts to control SWAP question'. When Dave Steward of the DFA and Pieter van der Westhuizen, the head of South African m the Angolan head of state, Jose dos Santos, and Rodriques in Lusaka in late June, they asked for a reply proposal for a joint peacekeeping commission to succeed the JMC and expressed concern over a state Angola was not responsible for controlling SWAPO and preventing violations. Dos Santos replied by a not sticking to the agreement to withdraw, for the SADF, having reached Ngiva, had halted their withdrawal they claimed were continuing violations of the agreement. The Angolan President added that there wa continuing with anything like the JMC unless UN Security Council Resolution 435 was implemented. I SWAPO would come to power in Namibia and would be a good neighbour to South Africa. He added t cease aiding UNITA. The South Africans responded that if SWAPO violence from Angola could not be c necessary for South Africa to mount raids into southern Angola again. Further talks with Angola in Gal level were mooted but never took place, and the ideas of a permanent joint peace commission, and of African/Angolan force being stationed at Calueque, were never accepted.40

At a small ceremony on the Namibian/Angolan border on 18 April 1985, the last South African soldiers leaving only two platoons of sixty men at the Calueque pumping station. The previous month it had b men were to withdraw a month later. As South African and Angolan officers looked on from a marquee had been present at the withdrawal of the last South African forces from Angola in 1976, said that he had necessary for South African forces to cross into Angola ever again.41 On 1 May Pik Botha wrote to Rodri he was that 'we shall soon have an opportunity of renewing the discussions which we conducted last y FAPLA officials met at Calueque over the future of guarding the hydro-electric scheme after South Afr withdrawn. Within days of that meeting, however, an incident in the far north of Angola involving a So commando put an end to any further such talks.

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

The conflict in southern Angola then escalated and the Angolan government was soon accusing South armed aggression'.46 When Dos Santos addressed the UN General Assembly on 22 October 1985, he s having committed 4,000 violations of Angolan air and ground space in the past four years, including 1 invasions, ship landings and countless dropping of material from helicopters. Dos Santos denied their Angola and said that the only war was that being waged by Pretoria against Angola.47 There was now r talks with South Africa. The SADF continued to supply UNITA, the US gave UNITA Stinger anti-aircraft moved towards the major clash that took place in late 1987 on the Lomba river, at which the FAPLA for
SADF and UNITA, and then to the fierce battles close to Cuito Cuanavale where the SADF was unable to defeat Cuban forces.

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

**Conclusion**

While the earlier bilateral talks between South Africa and Angola did not lead in any direct way to the four-party talks that began in London in May 1988, it would not be correct to suggest that the earlier talks achieved nothing at all. In his highly self-justificatory memoir, Crocker is misleading in suggesting that the Lusaka agreement was entirely an American achievement. The bilateral talks between Angola and South Africa helped pave the way for that agreement, and those that followed in 1984 were part of a process of dialogue that, for a time, did halt the fighting in southern Angola. By the time began, the Angolans and South Africans involved in the talks knew each other. General Geldenhuys, with the SADF, had had years of contact with key figures in the Angolan military, long before he got to know his Angolan counterpart, Rodriques, the key figure on the Angolan side, Angola's first ambassador to South Africa after 1994, helped between the two countries in the new era, though got nowhere trying to persuade South Africa to grant reparations to Angola for the destruction it had caused in his country.

While the bilateral talks led to little meeting of minds between the Angolans and the South Africans, both the other than would otherwise have been the case. The very fact of talking to the Angolan 'enemy' may have helped suggest to the South African government that there might be merit in talking to the internal 'enemy', the ANC. By figures in the ANC were underway, both in South Africa and in Britain. While the bilaterals between the early 1980s took attention away from the role of the US and focused it on two African countries trying to make deals, nevertheless, as we have seen, suffused with Cold War rhetoric and given the Cold War context, the Cold War was not the entire story of what went on in those years, other threads, such as this one, need to be understood if the Cold War dimension is to be fully understood.

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For Savimbi’s ties with South Africa, see especially Fred Bridgland, Jonas Savimbi. A Key to Africa (n.

Namibia/Angola border, having accused Angola, had launched a SAM7 missile in South Africa. F. van Dunem, the Angolan Minister of Justice, seemed to have accepted that Angola had to look after its own interests, and that these might require talking to the South Africans.

The border had been wrongly drawn, and should have been further south. The Angolan President, seemingly without result: Steyn to Director-General, 1/22/3/19.

In January 1981 the South African ambassador in London, Marais Steyn, had met Dr F Febronie Malan and other Foreign Affairs in the office of the Angolan President, seemingly without result: Steyn to Director-General, 1/22/3/19.

The two Soviet merchant ships were damaged and a Cuban merchant vessel was sunk. The attack on Cuito Cunanvale had been repulsed after heavy fighting. The Star, 18 April 1985; South African Digest, 26 April 1985; DFA 1/22/3/29.


R.F. (Pik) Botha to Haig, 9 November 1983: DFA 1/22/3/27. The South African-government joint declaration by the two countries declaring that neither would allow military or paramilitary attacks from SWAPO in Angola and to 'inflammatory remarks' in the Angolan media, including those denouncing the continued South African presence at Calueque. The Star, 18 April 1985; South African Digest, 26 April 1985; DFA 1/22/3/29.

Angolan media, including those denouncing the continued South African presence at Calueque. The Star, 18 April 1985; South African Digest, 26 April 1985; DFA 1/22/3/29.


In 1982 SWAPO fighters had penetrated into the white farming area near Tsumeb. For details see N. N. played by the People's Liberation Army of Namibia during the Namibian struggle, 1978 to 1989' (Unpublished M.A. thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, 1999).

See esp. the speech by the permanent representative of South Africa to the UN Security Council, 16 November 1983: www.aluka.org.

Pik Botha thought Dos Santos was a Russian spy because of his Russian wife: 'you can't govern Angola with coloured people with white wives: is all coloured! 95% of blacks don't understand it.' Botha to French Ambassador Dorin, 24 October 1975.

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Harry's cousin. In January 1981 the South African ambassador in London, Marais Steyn, had met Dr F Febronie Malan and other Foreign Affairs in the office of the Angolan President, seemingly without result: Steyn to Director-General, 1/22/3/19.


The South African government joint declaration by the two countries declaring that neither would allow any training on their soil again. Magnus Malan makes no mention of this episode in My Life with the SA Defence Force (Pretoria: Protea Book Publishers, 1988).

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See especially Killen to Director-General, 1 September 1981: DFA 1/22/3/20A. The go-between was Harry's cousin. In January 1981 the South African ambassador in London, Marais Steyn, had met Dr F Febronie Malan and other Foreign Affairs in the office of the Angolan President, seemingly without result: Steyn to Director-General, 1/22/3/19.
50 The first full account of these talks appeared in Allister Sparks, Tomorrow is Another Country (Johan 1994). [Links]