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THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION AND NAMIBIA: POLICY OR PLOY

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The inability of the Reagan Administration to bring about a Namibian settlement should not be a surprise to political analysts of the Southern African scene. The administration has never had a policy which was designed to produce such a settlement. Its so-called Namibia policy was designed with other objectives in mind. These objectives were first, to remove the Cuban troops from Angola; and second, to win South Africa's confidence and address its concerns by limiting SWAPO influence in an independent Namibia.

Towards acquisition of these goals, Washington and Pretoria have recently intensified their propaganda campaign against SWAPO, the national liberation movement in Namibia. SWAPO is increasingly portrayed as the intransigent party forming the major obstacle to implementation of the new plan proposed by the Reagan Administration. At the same time, the policy of "constructive engagement" is being credited with encouraging the South Africans to move toward a Namibian settlement. Such movement is cited as evidence of South Africa's willingness to end their illegal control over the territory.

However, the basis of South African cooperation with regard to Namibia is in actuality another indication of the extent the U.S. is willing to go to gain South African approval. In an attempt to satisfy the South Africans, the U.S. has replaced the United Nations as the chief negotiator in the efforts to produce a Namibian independence plan. Chester Crocker, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs has replaced the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. as the principal negotiator. Indeed, even the Contact Group has played an increasingly lesser role in the negotiating process. Through their discussions, the U.S. and South Africa have become the major designers of the new three-phase plan for Namibian independence. This new plan substantially changes U.N. Resolution 435, which calls for an election for a constituent assembly to write a constitution and a ceasefire. Phase one of the plan calls for constitutional principles to be agreed upon before an election and for a new electoral plan; Phase two calls for resolution of the U.N. impartiality question and outlines the role of the U.N. peacekeeping force;

Phase three outlines a transition leading to the election of a constituent assembly, followed by the formal writing of a constitution, and culminating with a new government and actual independence.

Phase one, which provides for constitutional protection of white minority rights and an electoral system based on one person with one vote counted twice has been accepted by the South Africans. However, SWAPO has refused to accept this phase of the new plan, recognizing the threat the proposed system holds for a clearcut SWAPO electoral victory. This new plan is not a realistic policy initiative. It is, rather, an unfair proposal used as a ploy to induce SWAPO's refusal and shift the onus for stalled negotiations away from the South Africans. Issues that would have exposed South Africa's intransigence were moved back in the negotiating process. So it is now SWAPO which appears to be the major obstacle to a settlement and the South Africans are using the extra time to gain diplomatic mileage and to intensify their propaganda campaign. There are disturbing indications that they are doing both successfully with the help of the Reagan Administration.

In March, Senator Jeremiah Denton (R-AL), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Internal Security and Terrorism held hearings on SWAPO and ANC in an attempt to prove they were Soviet-sponsored terrorist organizations. These hearings provided the South Africans with a platform to attempt to delegitimize SWAPO as a liberation movement and bolster their own claims of a "total onslaught" by communist forces.

Interestingly, one of the largest press stories generated by the hearings focussed on SWAPO. Jack Anderson, in his March 29th Washington Post column wrote: "SWAPO's present leader Sam Nujoma is virtually a Soviet puppet. Internal SWAPO documents indicate that Nujoma has to get Moscow's permission before dealing with his own subordinates." The script for the hearings, with its strident right-wing diatribes from Denton and John East (R-NC), supplemented by testimonies from ex-SWAPO members could have been written in Pretoria. These hearings also helped the Reagan Administration justify its claim that the Southern African region faces the danger of Soviet expansion and, therefore, South Africa is a necessary and strategic Western ally. Denton, in fact, opened the hearings by

acknowledging and thanking both the State Department and the South African government for their assistance in arranging the hearings. Even though SWAPO's refusal to accept Phase one is due to legitimate concerns regarding the electoral plan, the Reagan Administration has not failed to capitalize on the issue. State Department officials have tended to emphasize Sam Nujoma's refusal to meet with Crocker in Luanda on April 1st. Crocker has also stressed the point that Nujoma's decision to go to Cuba instead of holding the scheduled meeting with him was an "embarrassment" to the Angolans. The fact that a meeting between other SWAPO representatives and Crocker took place has become a secondary issue to Nujoma's not appearing for the scheduled talks. This fact is ironic when one considers that for over a year top U.S. administration officials have travelled throughout Southern Africa, making no attempt to meet with Nujoma or other SWAPO officials. Reagan's Namibia policy in essence denied SWAPO and the front-line states any input into the design of the new plan. Thus, it would appear that the objective of this plan was to put SWAPO on the defensive, rather than to bring about genuine Namibian independence.

The result of the administration's strategy is an erosion of support for SWAPO in important influential circles. After his return from Luanda, Crocker held a meeting with leading newspaper journalists. Subsequently, on April 12th, Anthony Lewis wrote a column in the New York Times commenting on SWAPO's refusal to accept the electoral plan: "There is no evidence of any bias against SWAPO or toward ethnic politics in the proposal. If SWAPO support is as strong as most people in Namibia say, the proposed system will duly reflect that fact For years everyone has been trying to get South Africa to make a basic commitment to a genuine national election in Namibia. Now according to diplomats, South Africa has made that commitment. Why risk seeing it slip away while you argue a mere detail?"

However, the electoral process being rebuffed by SWAPO is not a "mere detail." The system being proposed could erode much of SWAPO's support, giving it a marginal victory, at best. This would have a significant impact on its post-electoral influence. Given both Washington and Pretoria's frequently expressed fears of a SWAPO victory, SWAPO is well justified in its suspicious

of any electoral plan which they have approved. The question posed by a Christian Science Monitor editorial (May 19, 1982): "If a two-track voting process is democratic enough for West Germany, shouldn't it be democratic enough for an emerging African state?", denies the legitimacy of SWAPO's concerns, and suggests that the refusal of the plan is being dictated by the Soviet Union.

The concessions granted by SWAPO in the past, as well as South Africa's illegal control of Namibia and its continual devastating military attacks on SWAPO are critical issues being swept aside as the propaganda campaign against SWAPO mounts. This current campaign is calculated to achieve the following:

- 1) Crocker's statement that the Angolan's were "embarrassed" by Nujoma's cancelling of the scheduled meeting reflects an attempt by the administration to exploit differences within the MPLA and alienate some of SWAPO's support among the front-line states. Although the front-line states have endorsed SWAPO's rejection of the electoral plan, they are making increasing sacrifices to continue their support for the struggle. Recognizing this, the administration may well be trying to persuade them that the onus for a settlement now rests with SWAPO rather than South Africa.
- 2) By emphasizing SWAPO intransigence the Contact Group, specifically the U.S., can pressure the front-line states to have SWAPO accept further concessions in order to get the talks moving again. The idea is to put the ball solidly in SWAPO's court, absolving South Africa of blame for the stalled negotiations.
- 3) During their initial bilateral talks, the Reagan Administration informed South Africa that a closer relationship with the U.S. along with the removal of South Africa's "international polecat status" would have to be predicated on movement towards a Namibian settlement. Both parties can now claim to the international community that South Africa has demonstrated its willingness to do just that, thereby deflecting criticism over South Africa's continued illegal control of Namibia. While SWAPO loses diplomatic and public support, South Africa gains, and criticism against a growing US/South African alliance will be muted.
- 4) While the talks stall, South Africa continues to build its bases in Northern Namibia strengthening its military force. The "Windhoek Observer", a Namibian paper, editorialized on April 8th: "Anyone who by virtue of his position keeps a close watch on developments knows how futile these Western efforts are. While they talk in Windhoek ... the great earth-moving machinery is ... building yet another great military base in the North West" ... there is emerging yet another enormous runway that can take any military jet, that can handle the take-off of several fighter interceptors at the same time." The delays provide additional time for the military weakening of SWAPO.

CONCLUSION

Despite the machinations of the South Africans and the U.S., support for SWAPO is growing inside of Namibia as it launches successful attacks against South African aggressors. However, it is crucially important that SWAPO supporters in this country formulate strategies to counter the propaganda campaign waged against SWAPO. Efforts to maintain support in Congress for SWAPO is important to insure continuing funding of U.N. programs for the movement. Decreased Congressional support for SWAPO can be particularly harmful. For instance, Congressman Ben Gilman (R-NY), has introduced an amendment to the 1983 Foreign Aid Bill requesting that U.S. contributions to U.N. Programs for SWAPO be reduced. There is presently an annual struggle to obtain funding for the U.N. Institute for Namibia. The present political climate will increase the funding difficulties.

The most important point to remember is that your input can make a difference. The biggest danger to SWAPO is for its supporters to become disheartened and discouraged. We must hold fast to the sure knowledge that Namibia will be free and independent, and do everything we can to facilitate that process.
