

CENTRO DI STUDI STORICI E POLITICI SU AFRICA E MEDIO ORIENTE

## **The USSR and Southern Africa during the Cold War**

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Vladimir Shubin, *The USSR and Southern Africa during the Cold War*

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This paper<sup>\*</sup> is devoted to the role of the Soviet Union in the liberation struggle and a defence of the sovereignty of the independent African states in three decades (1960-1990). Fortunately at long last some serious steps have been taken in writing the history of this struggle, in particular by the South Africa Democracy Education Trust (SADET) and Archives of Anti-Colonial Resistance and Liberation Struggle (AACRLS) in Namibia, as well as by the project, initiated by the Southern African Development Community under the patronage of Brigadier Hashim Mbita on a regional level.

However often the role of Moscow in Southern Africa, especially of the Soviet military, is either overlooked or distorted. To set the record straight, apart from his personal experience and notes, the author uses primary sources, such as documents from Russian official and personal archives, and especially memoirs and oral history, discussions with participants of the events in question both from the USSR/Russia and the countries of Southern Africa.

1960 became known as “Africa Year”, it witnessed independence of 17 countries of the continent. However when the “wave of liberation” reached the borders of Portuguese colonies, Rhodesia, South Africa and South-West Africa, it was stopped by intransigence of Lisbon, Salisbury and Pretoria. So, the liberation organisations in Southern African countries had to begin using the armed forms of struggle.

The first shots fired were by the forces of liberation on February 4, 1961, when an abortive attempt to storm prisons in Luanda took place. It was followed by the “use of violence” by ANC in South Africa, FRELIMO in Mozambique, SWAPO in Namibia and ZAPU and ZANU in Zimbabwe.

So, the USSR had to determine its attitude to the liberation struggle in Southern Africa, and it began rendering its political and practical support assistance to those, who, in its opinion, was fighting for a just cause. The second reason for involvement seems to be evident too: a rivalry with another powerful country, with Moscow’s “Cold War” adversary, the USA. Nevertheless the Soviets did not look at the assistance to the liberation movements and African Front Line States just as fighting “the Cold War”. In the language of those days such actions were regarded as a part of the world “anti-imperialist struggle”, which was waged by “Socialist community”, “the national liberation movements”, and “working class of the capitalist countries”, and not just in the light of the Moscow-Washington confrontation.

Moreover, the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggle was neither instigated nor prompted by Moscow. I recall how ANC President Oliver Tambo used to remind that his organisation was

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<sup>\*</sup> This paper is based on my earlier presentations at the XXXIII International Conference on Military History (Cape Town, 2007) and Workshop “Liberation Struggles in Southern Africa: New Perspectives” (Cape Town, 2008).

founded five years before the 1917 revolution in Russia. The decision on the “use of violence” was also taken by the leaders of the liberation movement themselves.

As far as South Africa is concerned, when in October-November 1961 Moses Kotane and Yusuf Dadoo, leaders of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and of the Congress Alliance, headed by the Africa National Congress (ANC) looked for a Soviet opinion on the feasibility of the armed struggle in South Africa, they did it after a relevant decision had been already taken by the group of the ANC leaders headed by Nelson Mandela and the SACP leadership.

Moscow’s approach is clearly seen from the words of CPSU International Secretary Boris Ponomarev: “You know better”. Having been very cautious, Ponomarev requested official permission from the Central Committee to convey the following to his interlocutors: “Taking into account the situation [in South Africa] we agree with the opinion expressed by comrades Kotane and Dadoo. At the same time the intention of the SACP to take a course of armed forms of struggle places on the Party great responsibility. It is necessary not to counterpoise one form of struggle to the others but to combine skilfully all these forms. The armed struggle is a struggle of the broad people’s masses. It means that in the conditions of the preparation for the armed struggle the political work to win the masses acquires decisive importance. Without consistent political and organisational work among the masses victory is impossible. The winning of the masses to your side and preparation for the armed struggle are two sides of the same question. Both these tasks should be accomplished in close interconnection”.<sup>i</sup>

Moscow’s position in respect to the developments in Angola was similar. MPLA leaders, Mario de Andrade and Variato de Cruz came to Moscow to request Soviet assistance in July 1961 that is several months after the beginning of the armed struggle. They raised a number of important issues such as financial assistance, provision of arms, training of party cadres in the Soviet Union in various fields.<sup>ii</sup> Equally sovereign were decisions taken on strategic issues by other liberation movements – FRELIMO in Mozambique, SWAPO – in Namibia, ZAPU and then ZANU in Zimbabwe.

By mid-1960s armed struggle began in all these countries and under these circumstances the USSR Ministry of Defence had to play increasingly greater role in Moscow’s co-operation with the liberation movements. In particular, a special unit was created within its structure for this purpose and operated for almost the next 25 years. For many years it was headed by Major-General Ivan Plakhin, a Second World War veteran, who personally visited liberated areas of Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau in the early 1970s and then Angola during the South African intervention there.

At the meeting with Kotane and Dadoo they requested assistance in training military instructors and they were also informed that the USSR would be able to render it “using for this in particular the facilities in some friendly African countries, for example in Guinea and Ghana”.<sup>iii</sup>

Nevertheless to arrange training on the African soil proved to be rather difficult. P. Nel claims that "training personnel" from the USSR "reached the newly established ANC camps in Tanzania and Zambia" in 1964<sup>iv</sup>. The source of this, rather "sensitive" information, indicated by him, is supposedly credible - a book by K. Campbell, then a Harvard University fellow, published by Macmillan<sup>v</sup>. But that "fellow" refers to a secondary source, to the book of the US academic Kenneth Grundy.

A merry-go-round? No, rather a *cul-de-sac*, because the reference to Grundy's book is utterly irrelevant. He writes about Chinese and Cuban involvement in training guerrillas in some African countries and then just adds one sentence: "Russian instructors were also present in early 1960s"<sup>vi</sup>. Grundy does not specify either the year, or the venue, or the name of organisation that they were involved with, i.e. the ANC is not mentioned at all! Anyhow, the truth is that the Soviet instructors in the ANC camps appeared only 15 years later, in 1979, moreover, not in Tanzania or Zambia, but in Angola.

This fact alone would make us discuss Moscow's relations with Angola, however in any case the developments in that country played a great role in the destiny of Southern Africa.

As it was mentioned above, the USSR began assisting the MPLA in the early 1960s, though the history of their relationship is probably more complicated than with other liberation movements and sometimes far from “rosy”. It included Nikita Khrushchev's attempt to recognise a so called “Revolutionary government of Angola in exile” (GRAE) formed by the MPLA's rival – FNLA, a crisis in relations caused by signing of the 1972 agreement between the MPLA and “pro-western” FNLA and splits in 1973-1974.

Indeed the confused situation in the ranks of MPLA made those, who were involved in supporting it rather critical. Army General Victor Kulikov, the Chief of General Staff (a former adviser in Nkrumah's Ghana and future Marshal of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact Commander-in-Chief) in his letter to the CPSU Central Committee wrote about “actual termination of the liberation struggle in Angola due to a split in the MPLA party”<sup>vii</sup>. Petr Yevsukov, known to many Africans as “Camarada Pedro”, who had been responsible for contacts with the liberation movements in Portuguese colonies during 15 years wrote in his memoirs: “In our opinion, the achievement of agreement between A. Neto<sup>viii</sup> and [his rival] D. Chipenda was necessary and possible. The decision was taken to send a group of Soviet comrades from the International Department of the CPSU CC and GRU [Main Intelligence Department of the General Staff]. All our efforts to reconcile these two men for the sake of common cause have not produced a positive result.”<sup>ix</sup>

Therefore after the April 1974 revolution in Portugal took Moscow several months to repair its relations with Neto-led MPLA. In late December Moscow received an MPLA delegation headed by Henrique (Iko) Carreira (after the proclamation of independence he became first Angolan Minister of Defence). As he put it during our discussion, the developments after 25 April “freed the political potential of the people” and “the friends of MPLA” understood “the reality inside Angola”.<sup>x</sup>

Soviet supplies to the MPLA were resumed and a core of the brigade, manned by the its activists, underwent a crash course of training in the USSR,<sup>xi</sup> in “Vystrel” Higher Officers Courses near Moscow and in the training centre in Perevalnoye in the Crimea.

Some Western authors claim that Soviet advisors were present in Angola as early as August 1975. Arthur Klinghoffer claims that Igor Uvarov, a TASS correspondent “was actually a member of a Soviet military intelligence (GRU) and the director of the Soviet arms program in Angola”<sup>xii</sup> It was not difficult to link up Uvarov with the Soviet military because earlier he had served at the Soviet military attaché office in Morocco, but the second allegation is utterly wrong.<sup>xiii</sup>

Uvarov came to Luanda in the beginning of January 1975, on the eve of the formation of the Transitional government and stayed there for about two months.<sup>xiv</sup> His presence was vital for proper assessment of the state of affairs there. In Uvarov’s own words “Moscow by that time knew nothing properly about the situation in Angola.”<sup>xv</sup> He began sending telex messages to TASS describing and analysing the situation, moreover soon he managed to re-connect with MPLA, including the FAPLA Chief of Staff “Xietu” (Joao Luis Neto). A bit later he was introduced to Neto and finally was given a chance, once a week or so, to transmit more confidential messages (in addition to ordinary telexes) to the Soviet Embassy in Brazzaville (and so to Moscow) via MPLA radio stations there and in Luanda. Then, to report personally on the situation, in the absence of regular reliable flights to neighbouring countries he managed in late February to charter a small plane and come to Brazzaville. After listening to his story Ambassador Yevgeny Afanasenko suggested to recall him to Moscow for de-briefing.<sup>xvi</sup>

The next Soviet officer to come to Angola was Navy Captain Alexey Dubenko<sup>xvii</sup> who arrived to Luanda in March and stayed there also for a couple of months or so. Igor Uvarov was supposed to return to Luanda in July, but he got stuck in Brazzaville for three weeks, waiting for a chance to fly to the Angolan capital, that is for a plane “connected with MPLA” which from time to time flew there.<sup>xviii</sup> Dubenko followed him in October,<sup>xix</sup> however neither of them played advisory role.

It was on only on 1 November 1975 when the first group of the Soviet military specialists headed by Captain Evgeny Lyashchenko, arrived in Congo-Brazzaville from Moscow on the way to Angola. Its mission was pure technical and defensive: to train Angolans in the use of “Strela”

portable anti-aircraft missile launchers (Zaire, which supported FNLA obtained Mirages from France and the MPLA leadership anticipated air raids on Luanda)<sup>xx</sup>. Then, on 16 November another group headed by Colonel Vassily Trofimenko joined them in Point-Noir and on the same day, that is five days after the proclamation of Angola's independence, over 40 first Soviet military specialists arrived at Luanda by An-12 military transport plane (of course, again with Aeroflot markings)<sup>xxi</sup>.

The history of the Soviet military involvement in Angola is still to be written. A first step in this respect was a conference held with the participation of the Institute for African Studies and publication of representations made there mostly by the veterans.<sup>xxii</sup> According to General Roberto Leal Ramos Monteiro 'Ngongo', then the Angolan Ambassador in Moscow (and now Minister of Interior), all in all, over 6 000 Soviets came to Angola "to teach in military schools and academies and to train our regular units" and over 1 000 Soviet military visited it for "shorter periods of time" while 6 965 Angolans underwent military training in the Soviet Union<sup>xxiii</sup>. Figures, provided by the Moscow Institute of Military History are even higher: "up to 1 January 1991 10 985 Soviet military advisors and specialists visited Angola, including 107 generals and admirals, 7 211 officers, 1 083 warrant-officers and midshipmen, 2 116 sergeants, petty officers and privates and 468 civilian employees of the Soviet Army and Navy" (most of them served with the Angolan government army, but some with the ANC, SWAPO and, earlier, ZAPU as well); 6 985 Angolans were trained in the Soviet/Russian "military educational institutions" up to 1 January 1995<sup>xxiv</sup>. As to military supplies, according to the Soviet archives they amounted to 3, 7 billion Roubles from 1976 to February 1989 and arms for 600 million Roubles were to be delivered in 1989-1990.<sup>xxv</sup>

If we have to believe many Western and South African authors, the most famous Soviet serviceman in Angola was "General Konstantin Shaganovitch". Fred Bridgland, a well-known British journalist, even took "General Shaganovitch's offensive" as the title for a whole section of his book describing military actions in Angola. Moreover, "Konstantin Shaganovitch", who according to Bridgland came to Angola in December 1985<sup>xxvi</sup>, was "a known chemical warfare expert", and this was used to substantiate the claim that the Angolan brigade that faced the SADF had "chemical weapons in its armoury"<sup>xxvii</sup>.

The same author wrote also about "Shaganovitch"'s subordinate "Mikhail Petrov, first deputy in the Soviet Politbureau in charge of counter-insurgency policy"<sup>xxviii</sup>. Perhaps Bridgland meant Army General (and future Marshal) Vassily Petrov, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Ground Forces and later the First Deputy Defence Minister? If so, Petrov was first and foremost "in charge of" regular warfare, and could by no means be described as a junior to 'Shaganovitch'.<sup>xxix</sup>

“Konstantin Shaganovitch” and “Mikhail Petrov” go from one publication to another. A couple of “Sovietologists”, Michael Radu and Arthur Klinghoffer even claimed that after the “failure” of the Angola offensive against UNITA “General Shagnovitch’s career may have reached a premature end”.<sup>xxx</sup> “Shaganovitch” appears not only in a rather silly book by Riaan Labuschagne, who claims to be a successful spy for the racist Pretoria government,<sup>xxxi</sup> and in a “masterpiece” of pro-Pretoria propaganda by Willem Steenkamp<sup>xxxii</sup> but even in an official presentation to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission by a group of former top commanders of the SANDF – Magnus Malan (former Minister of Defence!), Konstand Viljoen, Jannie Geldenhuys and Kat Liebenberg.<sup>xxxiii</sup> This year another “reputable expert”, Al Venter followed them.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

Stephen Ellis, a British academic (and a former editor of the African Confidential) and his co-author, a renegade from the ANC and SACP who used an ambitious (and deceiving) pen-name “Sechaba” (“People”) improved Bridgland’s story: they claimed in their “Comrades against Apartheid” that “a Soviet General Konstantin Shaganovitch” supervised “in part” “the Angolan government offensive against the SADF-backed UNITA in September 1987.”<sup>xxxv</sup>

The reality, however, is very far from these statements. With the growth of numbers of instructors and advisors from the USSR, Major-General Ilya Ponomarenko<sup>xxxvi</sup> was appointed in the head of the newly created Soviet military mission in early 1976. His (and his successors’) official title was Chief Military Advisor – Advisor of the Minister of Defence. The next people to occupy this position were Lieutenant-General Vassily Shakhnovich<sup>xxxvii</sup> (1978-1980) and then Lieutenant-General Georgy Petrovsky (1980-1982).

For his excellent service during the World War Two Petrovsky received the highest Soviet award - a Gold Star of Hero of the Soviet Union and before coming to Luanda he occupied an important post of the Chief of Staff of the Transcaucasian Military District. But having left for holidays in 1982 he did not return to Angola, ostensibly for health reasons. So, in May that year came a new GVS (a Russian abbreviation of Glavnyi Voennyi Sovetnik - Chief Military Advisor).

I hope I will not be accused of “great power chauvinism” if I say that in the Soviet Union there was a very popular and very unofficial series of jokes in a form of questions and answers - “Radio of Armenia”. So, when I read stories about “Konstantin Shaganovitch” I recalled one of them.

“Is it true that locksmith Abramian won 10 thousand Roubles in the state lottery?” a question comes. “True, very true, however, it was not locksmith Abramian, but Academician Ambartsumian<sup>xxxviii</sup>, he has not won, but lost, not 10 thousand Roubles, but just ten, and not in the state lottery, but playing cards. Otherwise it is very true...”



So, stories by Bridgland, Klinghoffer, Labuschagne, name it, are also “very true”, however General Konstantin’s family name was not “Shaganovitch”, but Kurochkin, he did not come to Luanda in December 1985, but left in June that year,<sup>xxxix</sup> he was not “a chemical warfare expert”, but (prior to coming to Angola) had been for ten years First Deputy Commander of the famous Soviet VDV (Vozdushno-desantnye voiska – Paratroopers).<sup>xl</sup> Otherwise it is very true...

At the same time Bridgland (and his informers) grossly miscalculated the number of the Soviet military in Angola: “Intelligence agencies estimated that Shaganovitch had about 950 fellow Soviets in command and training posts in Angola”<sup>xli</sup>, while the man in charge of them, General Kurochkin said that the strength of “the Soviet advisory apparatus” he had headed was “about 2 thousand persons”<sup>xlii</sup>.

As to Ellis and “Sechaba”’s claim “General Konstantin” indeed came to Angola in 1987 for a short time at the head of the group of 17 Soviet officers, but later, after the failure of that offensive, and his mission was somewhat of damage control.<sup>xliii</sup>

So it seems that Bridgland, Ellis, ‘Sechaba’ and their followers made a miracle: they managed to merge a deceased person, Vassily Shakhnovich, who died soon after his return to the USSR, with the living Konstantin Kurochkin! As different as these “creators” of “Konstantin Shaganovitch” people are - academics, journalists, top generals, and a failed spy - they all have one thing in common: none of them indicate a source of that “wonder”. Yet it cannot be anything else but faulty intelligence by Pretoria and/or its Western partners. Faulty indeed, because Soviet documents captured by South Africans during their invasion into in August 1981 in Angola, shared by them with the US authorities and finally published as an addendum to the Report by Senator Denton, Chair of the “Sub-Committee on Terrorism” contain a reference to “Chief Military Adviser in the People’s Republic of Angola Lieutenant-General V. Shakhnovich”, dated April 1980.<sup>xliv</sup> Alas, the authors in question did not care about primary documents; they preferred to rely on their informants.

Another “improved” version was published by a traitor, former Cuban Air Force Brigadier General Rafael del Pino, who fled to the USA. He wrote about “Army General Konstantinov”,<sup>xlv</sup> thus “promoting” Kurochkin to four-star General and making his first name a basis for his family name. Taking into account that, just as every turncoat, Del Pino is serving now his new masters, we can guess, that the US intelligence information on the Soviets in Angola was hardly better than that of Pretoria.

Del Pino also claimed that with the arrival “Konstantinov” “all the military coordination with soviet assessors [advisors] of FAPLA in Angola with Cuban troops were totally severed... The problem, of course, was not Konstantinov who was following instructions from the Soviet government”.<sup>xlvi</sup>

This is just one example of distortions of the Soviet-Cuban relations in Angola. For many years, in spite of denials by Moscow and Havana the Western leaders, academics and mass media claimed that Cubans acted in Angola as Soviet “proxies”. A devastating blow to these claims was delivered by an excellent book by Piero Gleijeses based on the Cuban archive documents.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Indeed, the first contact between Soviets and Cubans in Angola was almost accidental. Against the background of stories about “Soviet proxies”, Uvarov’s narrative about it looks really fascinating. On the request of Neto he flew in an old Dakota (DC 3) plane to Henrique de Carvalho (now Saurimo) in the east of Angola. The Portuguese army had already left this region and it came under MPLA’s control. He was asked to see whether an airport there could be used in future for bringing in supplies from the USSR. The runway was in a good condition, but all the navigation equipment was taken out or destroyed. There Uvarov met two persons, who asked the MPLA commander who was the white man with him. “A France-Press correspondent”, the Angolan replied. But when Uvarov in his turn asked the commander, who these two people were, he told the truth: “Cubans” and by Uvarov’s request introduced him to them. These two Cubans’ mission was to put the radio station in order, but as Uvarov found out, when he was flying back to Luanda together with one of them, the Cuban had earlier spent about six months in Moscow, studying quite different subjects.

He told Uvarov that he was a member of a group of seven, an advisor and six instructors, who were training local cadres. All in all by that time (it happened, most probably, in early September) about 80 Cubans were stationed in the Lobito and Mocamedes, coastal cities controlled by the Portuguese who were sympathising with MPLA. Thus, contacts were established and before long Cubans, in uniforms and with Kalashnikovs in hands, called Uvarov at the hotel. Their Commander was Raoul (Díaz Argüelles) who was later killed in action. Soon Uvarov met Polo (Leopoldo Cintra Frias), who replaced Raoul as the head of the Cuban military mission.<sup>xlviii</sup>

This was the beginning of 15 years of co-operation between the Soviet and Cuban military in Angola. Each and every Soviet veteran of the Angolan war underlines the warmth of this relationship. However, this is not to say that heads of the two missions and their subordinates did not have differences. Moreover, I believe, Soviet-Cuban differences are exaggerated nowadays, after the political changes in our part of the world.

For example, when on 6 December 1983 Pretoria launched Operation Safari, intensifying its intervention in South Angola, these developments brought about some differences between Kurochkin and “Polo”. The Angolan brigades were (initially) effectively repelling enemy attacks.<sup>xlix</sup>

These actions vindicated Kurochkin’s earlier reluctance to transfer units from Southern Angola. However, South Africans managed to occupy Cuvelai and to defeat the Angolan 11<sup>th</sup> brigade there.<sup>1</sup> The Cuban commander suggested withdrawing three Angolan brigades to the north, where air cover

could be provided. However, “General Konstantin” thought that it would be wrong to leave well-equipped positions and that these brigades were powerful enough to rebuff even a numerically stronger enemy.<sup>li</sup>

Angola Minister of Defence, Pedro Maria Tonha “Pedale” supported Kurochkin’s approach<sup>lii</sup>, however, “Polo”’s views were confirmed in Fidel Castro’s message to Dos Santos divulged by the Cuban Commander to the GVS on 7 January 1984. He regarded the withdrawal of the Angolan brigades close to the area of deployment of Cuban Forces (Jamba-Matala-Lubango) as the only way out.<sup>liii</sup> That message was a response to Dos Santos’s request for the opinion of Havana and Moscow on the situation. The Soviet reply was quite different: “By no means should the brigades of the 5<sup>th</sup> Military District be withdrawn... By no means should the territories up to Mocademes-Lubango-Menonge line be given up to South Africans, because it is fraught with political consequences”<sup>liv</sup>.

Following this line Kurochkin told Cubans that the question of the withdrawal of the brigades of the 5<sup>th</sup> Military District to the North is outside the competence of the [Soviet] Chief Military Advisor and the Commander of the Cuban Military Mission.<sup>lv</sup>

The Cubans were not happy either. In his discussions with the author “General Konstantin” was very candid: “My relations with Cubans were complicated initially and, through their seniors in Havana they even expressed [to Moscow] their displeasure with my activities. Then a serious commission headed by Army General Valentin Varennikov, First Deputy Chief of the [Soviet] General Staff came. This commission [it consisted of 11 persons who arrived on 13 January 1984 and spent several weeks in Angola] visited all military districts, got acquainted with the work of our specialists and came to the conclusion that I was right.”<sup>lvi</sup>

Varennikov and his team’s mission in Angola are described in detail in his memoirs.<sup>lvii</sup> According to him in initially, when Fidel’s proposal on withdrawal of troops to the north communicated to Moscow by Angolan President, was discussed by the CPSU Politbureau. It was suggested to agree to it but nevertheless Varennikov had to go and make a study of the situation on the spot. Having visited the forward areas he found that the local Angolan Command, just as “General Konstantin”, opposed this idea. So he had to look for a way out – not to aggravate relations with the Cuban top leadership but at the same time not to make wrong decisions. He did find it: at the meeting with Angolan and Cuban Command to the surprise of those present he spoke in support of “Fidel’s wise idea”<sup>lviii</sup> but transformed it into a proposal to create several echelons of defence between the front line and the area of deployment of Cuban Forces. Such a “face saving” action satisfied everybody, including Cubans. According to Varennikov Jorge Risquet told him “I knew that everything, as always, would end happily. The Soviet comrades can find a way out, even where there is no one.”<sup>lix</sup>

However, in spite of the agreement, achieved more than once, in particular during “General Konstantin”’s visit to Havana in about the need of forming common Soviet-Cuban position, the differences continued. One of the points of disagreement was the nature of war in Angola. At the meeting with the Angolan President and military leaders on 29 September 1984 Kurochkin stated that combat actions in the south-eastern part of Angola had acquired “a classical character”: UNITA was attacking in battalions, armed with Chinese-made sub-machineguns, both its offensive and counter-offensive were supported by artillery.

“Polo”’s position was quite opposite: “The war in Angola is not classical. It has a guerrilla character”. Such a contradiction was noticed well by the Angolan President: “Here we see two different concepts of the conduct of war”. He admitted that UNITA had found out the plan of FAPLA’s operation, withdrew its forces from the area under attack and entered the areas of oil and diamond production and coffee plantations. In his opinion the defence of economic projects became a priority, especially of the Benguela railway. So Dos Santos took a decision to cease the operation, begun in other area.<sup>lx</sup> Thus, “Polo” won this time, though at the next meeting with Kurochkin he correctly underlined that it was “the President’s own decision”,<sup>lxi</sup> whatever opinion Soviet and Cuban “assessors” expressed, the final word would be always with the Angolan leadership.

Speaking in 2005, on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cuban Military Mission in Angola, Fidel Castro quite correctly said: “Angola’s post-victory [in early 1976] prospects without the political and logistic support of the USSR were non-existent”. However, he continued: “This is not the right time to discuss the differing strategic and tactical conceptions of the Cubans and the Soviets. We trained tens of thousands of Angolan soldiers and acted as advisers in the instruction and combat operations of Angolan troops. The Soviets advised the military high command and provided ample supplies of weaponry to the Angolan armed forces.<sup>lxii</sup> Actions based on the advice given at the top level caused us quite a few headaches. Nonetheless, great respect and strong feelings of solidarity and understanding always prevailed between the Cuban and Soviet military.”<sup>lxiii</sup>

The last sentence is very correct, but the previous ones deserve some comments. The Soviets’ role was not limited to advising “the military high command” and supplies of weapons. They also trained thousands of Angolans both in the training establishments and in the field, serving just as Cubans, as “advisers in the instruction and combat operations of Angolan troops”. On the other hand, Cubans constituted an important element of the Joint Command Post, housed in the Angolan President’s residence and directly subordinate to him<sup>lxiv</sup> and took part in discussing important discussions with the Angolan leadership.

The most critical stage of the war in Angola in 1980s began with the offensive against UNITA's stronghold in South-Eastern part of the country in 1987. It was stopped by the South African troops. FAPLA suffered serious losses, two Soviet officers, Colonel Andrey Gorb and Lieutenant Oleg Snitko were killed<sup>lxv</sup> and several wounded and shell-shocked.

Two extracts from a book by Igor Zhdarkin, the Soviet officer, who himself was shell-shocked at Cuito Cuanavale are worth quoting:

“They [South Africans], by the way, being remarkable gentlemen, bombarded only the Angolan brigades. In other words, the bombardment of our camp, I think, was not envisioned in their plans. Perhaps they didn't want to risk international complications, or complications with the Soviet Union, or something else again. But this evidently was a motive only as far as concerned our own camp, whereas in the case of all the others, it was war as usual. In other words, if the Soviet advisor goes to his brigade and suffers there from bombardment – nothing to do – war is war!

Although they sent us an ultimatum before the 11th of March, 1988 – “Soviets, leave Cuito Cuanavale, we don't want to touch you.” The leaflets were in English. The Angolans brought these leaflets to us and said “these are written in English so we don't understand them...”

And from Luanda, an order arrived – “Look after your own security.” But how? In what way if the road to Menongue was cut off? In fact, the road from Cuito Cuanavale to Menongue – 180 km long– was controlled by UNITA. We were encircled. How could we look after our own security! In what way?”<sup>lxvi</sup>.

However, some actions of the SADF could hardly be regarded as “gentlemen's behaviour”:

“29.10.87 ...at 14:00, we received frightening news. At 13:10, the enemy had bombarded the 59th brigade, situated in our vicinity, with chemical weapons containing poison gas. As a result, many people had been poisoned. Four had lost consciousness and the brigade commander was coughing blood. The Soviet advisors in the brigade were also affected. The wind was blowing nearby and everyone was complaining of violent headaches and nausea. This news greatly disturbed us since, you see, we didn't have any gas masks whatsoever.”<sup>lxvii</sup>

SADF and UNITA units approached the town of Cuito Cuanavale and shelled it for several weeks but could not take it. Fidel Castro declared that a failure of South African and UNITA forces to capture this town was a turning point: “From now on the history of Africa will have to be written before and after Cuito Cuanavale”.<sup>lxviii</sup>

The failure of the FAPLA's offensive and further developments proved once more the existence of differences between Moscow and Havana, especially between their military commanders towards

the military strategy in Angola, but, just as in the cases discussed above, they were differences between comrades-in-arms, and not between the rivals.

In his speech, quoted above Fidel paid a special attention to the fighting at Cuito Cuanavale and further developments: “Desperate calls were received from the Angolan government appealing to the Cuban troops for support in fending off presumed disaster; it was unquestionably the biggest threat from a military operation in which we, as on other occasions, had no responsibility whatever. Titanic efforts by the Cuban political and military high command, despite the serious threat of hostilities which hung over us as well, resulted in assembling the forces needed to deliver a decisive blow against the South African forces...

So while in Cuito Cuanavale the South African troops were bled, to the southwest 40.000 Cuban and 30.000 Angolan troops [and PLAN as well], supported by some 600 tanks, hundreds of pieces of artillery, 1.000 anti-aircraft weapons and the daring MiG-23 units that secured air supremacy, advanced towards the Namibian border, ready to literally sweep up the South African forces deployed along that main route...<sup>lxix</sup>

The resounding victories in Cuito Cuanavale, especially the devastating advance by the powerful Cuban contingent in southwest Angola, spelled the end of foreign aggression.”<sup>lxx</sup>

Let us try to evaluate these developments. Critics of Moscow’s actions regard the very idea of the offensive in the remote areas of South-Eastern Angola as mistaken due to long lines of supplies, lack of roads, etc. Indeed, several of them failed. However, “General Konstantin” believes that it was correct to attack the area where main forces of UNITA were concentrated.<sup>lxxi</sup>

Quite probably, when the Soviets advised the top Angolan Command to carry out an offensive operation in the South East, towards Mavinga and Jamba, they underestimated the threat of massive involvement of the SADF. But this very involvement, an overt, as distinct from 1975, intervention by Pretoria gave a “moral right” for the Cubans to cross for the first time in many years the “red line” and to begin advancing to the Namibian border.

Ten years later, in 1998, Fidel Castro criticized the actions of the Soviets: “The advisors... thought they were waging the Battle of Berlin, with Marshal Zhukov in command, thousands of tanks and 40,000 cannons. They did not understand, nor could they understand the problems of the Third World, the setting of the struggle and the type of war that must be waged in that setting.”<sup>lxxii</sup>

With all my due respect I have to say that this assessment is not fair. The Soviets advisors could and did understand “the problems of the Third World”, the Soviet military were involved in one way or another in dozens of conflicts there, and in particular (unfortunately) they had to acquire a very rich experience in counter-guerrilla warfare in Afghanistan.

As for tanks and cannons, according to another statement of Fidel the Cubans themselves concentrated under his overall command 1 000 tanks, 1 600 anti-aircraft weapons and artillery pieces, and 1 000 armoured vehicles in Southern Angola; and on March 10, while the South Africans continued to be bogged down in Cuito Cuanavale, with the support of aviation they began advance towards the Namibian border.<sup>lxxiii</sup> This offensive carried out by many thousands of Cuban, Angolan and SWAPO troops was exactly a regular warfare operation!

Moreover, to the best of the author's knowledge these actions were not received negatively in Moscow, at least among those, who were directly dealing with Southern Africa. Adamishin, then the Deputy head of the Foreign Ministry, which was traditionally more "cautious" than the CPSU International Department notes that at his meeting with Chester Crocker in Lisbon in May 1988 the US representative was worried by the Cubans' advance towards the Namibian border. Crocker was interested in urgently stopping this "dangerous game", however, Moscow's interests were different: "not to hamper it, even help it in every possible way, but to see to it that it does not go out of control".<sup>lxxiv</sup>

Risquet writes: "It was more obvious than ever [by May 1988] that the military situation has compelled the South Africans to accept a solution that would prevent the liberation of Namibia from being achieved through war..."<sup>lxxv</sup> Adamishin virtually confirms this view: "We had a secret understanding with the Cubans that they would not cross the border with Namibia. But – it was also agreed upon – there was not reason to declare it publicly".<sup>lxxvi</sup>

Richard Bloomfield, a former American diplomat, in his by and large sober assessment of the situation in Angola (a rather rare case among Western academic) wrote in 1988, before the conclusion of the talks: "It is ironic that if the US [and USSR] - brokered settlement comes into effect, it will be in large measure due to the fighting ability of the very Cuban forces that the United States insisted for so long were the chief obstacle to such an agreement and to a decision by the Soviet Union that Angola was not such a strategic prize after all".<sup>lxxvii</sup> His is right on the first case, but hardly on the second one; thus the archive documents show that on 7 February 1989 the Soviet Politbureau discussed "additional measures" needed "not to allow to weaken the defence capability of Angola as Cuban troops withdraw from the country".<sup>lxxviii</sup>

Indeed, it was after the debacle of the SADF at Cuito Cuanavale (and later in other areas of Angola) that talks about the political settlement in South-Western Africa moved forward, opening the way for the implementation of the UN resolutions on achieving the independence of Namibia.

However, the war in Angola continued for 13 more years and peace came to the country only in 2002, when government troops indeed had defeated main forces of UNITA as the Soviets advisors suggested earlier.

Let us come back now to another case, the struggle against the regime of apartheid in South Africa. The distortions of the nature of Moscow's relations with African National Congress and South African Communist Party are no less than those with Angola. Thus, Ellis and "Sechaba", referring to a police agent Gerard Ludi's "unpublished document on the CPSA" that claimed that "the Freedom Charter was sent to Moscow Africa Institute for approval".<sup>lxxix</sup> The author would be proud of his Institute's association with such an important historical document, however the decision to establish the Institute was taken in June 1959, after the discussion between William Dubois and Nikita Khrushchev, that is exactly four years after the Freedom Charter had been adopted!

The first discussions on practical assistance to Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) took place when MK prominent member Arthur Goldreich and Vella Pillay, the SACP representative in Western Europe came to Moscow in January 1963. Goldreich recalls that his consultations in Moscow were "in a very practical sense influenced by the draft Operation Mayibuye [launching the armed struggle] plans", though it does not imply, he underlines, that this plan to develop the armed struggle depended on the mission to Moscow.<sup>lxxx</sup> Contrary to claims by some Western authors that he "successfully lobbied the Soviet Union and its allies for an estimated \$ 2, 8 million in aid"<sup>lxxxi</sup> [Estimated by whom? No references, as usual], Goldreich in a letter to the author emphasised, that at that stage "the scope and scale of specific needs discussed in Moscow, were of very limited nature though (they) covered issues of wider significance and touched upon possibilities of continued assistance"<sup>lxxxii</sup>. In particular, the Soviet side insisted that the supplies to Umkhonto should be organised through the governments of independent African countries<sup>lxxxiii</sup> and not to be transferred "on high seas" as he rather adventurously suggested<sup>lxxxiv</sup>.

Certainly, the teamwork between the SACP and the ANC was an important factor for the decision makers in Moscow, but it does not mean that assistance to the ANC would not be provided otherwise. Soviet assistance was provided to the peoples of other countries, where communist parties were not in existence, such as Namibia.

In fact large scale co-operation between the USSR and the ANC started after the visit of Oliver Tambo, the ANC Deputy President General and Head of its External Mission in April 1963. Following it the first groups of Umkhonto we Sizwe cadres came to be trained in Moscow and especially Odessa, where 328 MK fighters were trained in 1963-1965 in two groups.

The Russian press has calculated that, from 1963 to 1991, 1.501 ANC activists were trained in Soviet military institutions.<sup>lxxxv</sup> However this figure is not all-inclusive and in reality is well above two thousand. Beginning from 1986 a big number of the Umkhonto cadres were admitted for long-term officer training, including courses for Air Force pilots and Navy officers.



Besides, about two hundred ANC members completed training in Soviet tertiary institutions, mostly with Masters and some with PhD degrees.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Two hundred more South Africans studied at the Institute of Social Sciences, and dozens in trade union and youth schools. Several hundreds visited the USSR for rest and medical treatment.

Supplies of arms and equipment and financial assistance also started and continued for over 25 years. According to the official data, the total value of assistance to the ANC (from 1963 to 1990) was about 61 million roubles, including 52 million supplies (36 million - “special equipment” and 16 million - civilian goods). The rest is “technical assistance”, mostly training of ANC cadres in the USSR and sending Soviet specialists to Angola.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Nonetheless these figures are not all-embracing; they do not include the material assistance provided by the Soviet Communist Party and non-governmental organisations, such as the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee. Moreover even the accurate figures would not reflect the true picture, because the simple conversion of roubles into dollars at any given rate of exchange can only further distort the picture: many goods, especially military supplies, were exceptionally cheap in the USSR.

A more detailed description of the equipment might give a clearer picture: several thousand AK-47s of various modifications, 3362 Simonov self-loading carbines (SKS), six thousand pistols, 275 grenade-launchers, 90 Grad-P missile launchers, over 40 Strela 2M anti-aircraft missile launchers, 20 Malyutka anti-tank rocket launchers, over 60 mortars, etc.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

The history of Soviet involvement in training of MK cadres is distorted over and over again. Terry Bell claims in his *Unfinished Business. South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*, written with Dumisa Buhle Ntebeza that “there were also reportedly [Reported by whom? When and where?] agreements in place between the US and USSR. These restricted any military aid provided to the ANC to conventional training involving artillery and tanks – not much use in the conditions of the time”,<sup>lxxxix</sup> because Moscow held ANC and SACP “in reserve as surrogates in the global game of superpowers”.<sup>xc</sup>

This is entirely wrong. Archibald Sibeko, an MK leading member, recalls his experience in Moscow: “We were taught military strategy and tactics, topography, drilling, use of firearms and in guerrilla warfare. We also covered politics, with heavy emphasis on skills needed [for] construction and use of explosives, vehicle maintenance, feeding a mobile army and first aid in the field: everything necessary for survival under guerrilla conditions”.<sup>xci</sup>

A similar opinion was expressed General Sphiwe Nyanda, first African Chief of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), who came to the USSR over two decades later, in 1985, with the group of the MK commanders, which included Charles Nqakula who is now South African Minister of Defence and Nosiviwe Maphisa Nqakula, incumbent Minister of Home Affairs:

“In the USSR, we were staying in an apartment on Gorki street, Moscow [now renamed back into Tverskaya, it is the main street in the capital], where the lectures were conducted. For the practical exercises, we went to a place outside Moscow... We studied MCW (Military and Combat Work) as part of an abridged Brigade Commanders’ course.

The course covered the following subjects, among others,

- (1) Communications
- (2) Underground work
  - Surveillance
  - Secret writing
  - Secret meetings
  - Photography
- (3) Military work
  - Ambush
  - Attack
  - Artillery effectiveness
  - Small arms

All were useful.”<sup>xcii</sup>

One telling detail: of the first group of the ANC commanders incorporated into the new SANDF in 1994 at general’s level everybody underwent military training in the USSR except one who had been trained in the GDR and by the Soviets in Angola.

However, in the mid-1960s, having trained hundreds fighters in the USSR and elsewhere the ANC leadership faced fundamental obstacles in bringing them back home. Soviet-trained cadres took part in attempts to come to South Africa via Mozambique in 1967 and via Zimbabwe, in co-operation with ZAPU, in 1967-1968<sup>xciii</sup>. A failure of them forced the ANC and SACP leadership to revive the idea of using a sea route to transfer a group of MK cadres to South Africa. As cautious as the Soviets were, following continual requests Moscow agreed to support the plan<sup>xciv</sup>, which included training of personnel, reconnoitring suitable sites for landing, assisting in acquiring a vessel<sup>xcv</sup>, supplying the necessary equipment, and training the landing party. However, “Operation J”, as this project was called,<sup>xcvi</sup> just like “Operation Chelsea”, an attempt to save at least some preparation efforts failed.<sup>xcvii</sup>

A rare success was the “penetration” into South Africa and then into Lesotho in 1974 by Chris Hani, a military and political leader of ANC, and Assistant General Secretary at the SACP. Even though the Soviets were not directly involved in this operation, his studies in the USSR were vital.

Hani recalled: “We had undergone a course in the Soviet Union on the principles of forming an underground movement; that was our training: the formation of the underground movement, then the building of guerrilla detachments. The Soviets put a lot of emphasis on the building of these underground structures, comprising at the beginning very few people”<sup>xcviii</sup>.

A new stage in Moscow’s co-operation with the ANC began when Tambo-led delegation which visited Moscow in late 1978 requested assistance of the Soviets in the actual organisation of training of MK cadres in Angola.

The head of the group of the Soviet military specialists, who came to Angola in October 1979 and soon became very popular among the ANC cadres there, was “Comrade Ivan” – Navy Captain Vyacheslav Fyodorovich Shiryaev.<sup>xcix</sup> Others followed, replacing each other in two or three-year shifts<sup>c</sup>, altogether over 200 persons in 1979-1991<sup>ci</sup>. There can be no doubt that the direct involvement of Soviet officers helped to raise the level of combat readiness of ANC armed units and, especially, of the organisers of the armed underground. The names of “Comrade Ivan”, “Comrade George” (Colonel German Pimenov), “Comrade Michael” (Colonel Mikhail Konovalenko), “Comrade Victor” (Colonel Victor Belush), who succeeded each other as “chief advisors”, became house names in the ranks of MK.

The development of Moscow’s military co-operation with SWAPO and ZAPU and their military wings – PLAN and ZIPRA<sup>cii</sup> went a rather similar way. Most of their top commanders studied in the USSR. Apart from military training in the USSR and supplies of arms and equipment which commenced in mid-1960s, a group of the Soviet military specialists stayed with PLAN in Lubango, south Angola from 1977<sup>ciii</sup> and with ZIPRA also from 1977 in Luena, eastern Angola and from 1978 in Lusaka. Vassily Solodovnikov, former Soviet Ambassador to Zambia (and former Director of the Institute for African Studies) writes: “Outwardly, for the public, the group [headed by Cololel Lev Kononov] was prescribed to Zambia’s Defence Ministry, but it didn’t work even a single day there. In reality, the military specialists worked as councillors to the Chief Commander of the People’s Revolutionary Army Joshua Nkomo. These people were first-class specialists in the guerrilla warfare”<sup>civ</sup>.

Earlier we pointed to the motives of the Soviet policy. However, some Western scholars, especially “Sovietologists” measure it by their own standards. Kurt Campbell believes “it is inconceivable that the Soviet Union does not demand a quid pro quo from the ANC for this assistance”.<sup>cv</sup> Nevertheless what is “inconceivable” for this scholar was quite “conceivable” for the Soviet political and military leadership. Naturally, the political changes in South Africa and other countries of the region, the formation of the governments, led by liberation movements would be favourable for Moscow and

would facilitate the establishment of friendly and mutually beneficial relations. But the relations between the USSR and them were always free from sheer mercantilism or a patron-client model.

Whatever the figures of Soviet military assistance to the liberation movements and independent African states are, more important is the fact that Moscow's support was often vital, when and where other countries could not or did not want to do it. Just a couple of examples. South African pressure was apparently one of the main reasons for a sudden decision of the Tanzanian authorities to close the ANC camps in that country in 1969. Unfortunately, not a single African country was ready to house the remaining core of Umkhonto, and MK cadres had to spend about two years in the Soviet Union on "refresher courses".<sup>cvi</sup>

Another example is the Soviet involvement in the Operation Vula, aimed at the creation of an armed underground network inside South Africa. It signified a mutual trust between the ANC top leadership and Moscow. Thus, on 11-12 July 1989, when Pretoria and Western propaganda were claiming that the USSR had "dropped" the ANC, Moscow was still the safest place for Oliver Tambo and other ANC leaders to meet Mac Maharaj, the head of their underground machinery.

Siphiwe Nyanda, who headed the Vula machinery together Mac Maharaj and Ronnie Kasrils later commented: "The Moscow visit of 1988 was the final leg of my preparation to infiltrate the RSA. It afforded me the opportunity to brush up on my disguises and gain more confidence on these. More identities were added to existing ones, enabling me to shed some of them as I advanced from Moscow to Schipol (Holland) to Nairobi (Kenya) and to Matsapa (Swaziland), thus breaking the trail and preparing for a safe infiltration into the RSA... From an operational point of view, the Moscow leg was probably the most important for my cover story.

Without exception, those who were not privy to the information believed I was in the Soviet Union for [military] studies. The enemy therefore never expected me to be right on his doorstep!"<sup>cvii</sup>

Nyanda's words flatly rebuff fair (or not so fair) tales written by some authors. Ellis and "Sechaba" do not refer to any source when they assert that at the Gorbachev-Reagan summit in Reykjavik in October 1986 "redefining zones of influence" took place and Moscow "committed itself to withdraw its forces or to refrain from seeking the overthrow of the existing order [in South Africa], leaving the field to the USA and its allies on the ground".<sup>cviii</sup> They even claim that South Africa was included in Reykjavik "in the category of countries where the USSR would henceforth refrain from aggression (sic!)".<sup>cx</sup> However, the minutes of Gorbachev-Reagan discussions published in Moscow later shown that South Africa had not been mentioned at all by either of them!<sup>cx</sup>

The Soviet support to the Southern African liberation movements was vital, especially in the military field. However, it would be wrong to reduce it to this aspect only. Hundreds of Africans from the region graduated in the USSR, mostly with Master degrees, many studied for a shorter

time in the Institute of Social Sciences or in the Young Communist League Higher School.

Apart from the annual quota detailed by the CPSU, the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and other NGOs received Africans for rest and medical treatment in the USSR. Besides, on the initiative of the SAASC, wounded and sick ANC activists were admitted to the Soviet military hospitals as well. In some case the treatment was fairly long, for example, many months in the hospitals and several operations were required for Timothy Makoena (General Godfrey Ngwenya, incumbent Chief of South African National Defence Force to recuperate after an attack by the UNITA on the ANC convoy in Angola.

Besides, doctors and nurses were trained in the USSR, among them Manto Tshabalala-Msimang who served as South African Minister of Health (she was promoted recently and became Minister in the Presidency) and late Lieutenant General Themba Masuku, who headed SANDF Medical Service, Soviet doctors were sent to the ANC and SWAPO camps in Angola.

One should not forget also Moscow's consistent political support and diplomatic support of the liberation struggle in South Africa, be it at the UN, other international organizations, or bilateral contacts. It would be proper to compare Moscow's attitude with the stand of the major Western powers at that period. A circular sent from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office to a number of British embassies in Africa stated: "...you are at liberty to maintain overt but reasonably discrete contact with the political leaders [“of various Freedom movements from Southern Africa”], though you should not offer assistance to them.” Moreover, the definition of this “reasonably discrete contact” was rigid enough: “You may speak to leaders of freedom movements if you happen to meet each other on neutral ground; You may receive them if they come on legitimate business to your office (though you may think it better to depute a member of your staff to do this in most cases); You should not be seen to take the initiative in seeking a meeting; You should under no circumstances invite them to your own residence and members of your staff should refer to you before inviting them.”

In particular the Office warned British diplomats: “Greater circumspection needs to be observed in regard to South African and Portuguese Africa groups, than in the case of South West African and Rhodesian ones, which are opposed to Governments of more or less dubious legitimacy.”<sup>cx1</sup>

One more example: when Anthony Mongalo was sent to represent the ANC in Italy in 1970, his status was initially “semi-legal”. An Italian non-governmental organisation “MOLISV” (Movement for Liberation and Development) provided accommodation, but he could not obtain a long-term visa. It was necessary for Mongalo to enlist the help of Johnny Makatini (the ANC representative in Algiers) and so acquire an Algerian passport that entitled him to stay in Italy without a visa for 90 days at a time. The result was that he had to leave the country periodically for a short time and then

return.<sup>cxii</sup>

Prof Vassily Solodovnikov recalls that when he came as the Soviet Ambassador to Lusaka in 1976, his colleagues, Western ambassadors used to say: “Why are you dealing with ANC? ...ANC does not have any support inside the country”. In his opinion “the Western countries maintained their unfriendly attitude towards ANC almost until the end of the 1980s, and only when they saw that the ANC was rapidly advancing to victory they hurried up to make ‘friends’ with it.”<sup>cxiii</sup>

There would not be an exaggeration to say that politically Moscow supported the struggle against colonialism and racism from the first days of the 1917 revolution. According to the USSR Constitution “supporting the struggle of peoples for national liberation and social progress” was regarded as one of the aims of the Soviet foreign policy.<sup>cxiv</sup> I strongly believe that Moscow’s most important contribution to the elimination of apartheid in South Africa was not political and material assistance, training facilities or other steps, as described above, but the encouragement of non-racism in the ranks of the liberation movements.

Let us try to summarize. Indeed, there is a tendency to look at the liberation struggle in Southern Africa mainly through the distorting glasses of a ‘superpowers’ rivalry’ during the ‘Cold War’. Thus, Chester Crocker, former Assistant Secretary of State, writes in the preface to his memoirs: “This book tells the story of peacemaking in Africa the 1980s. It is a record of an American diplomatic strategy which helped us to win the Cold War in the Third World”<sup>cxv</sup>. But if to use this militaristic terminology, who actually achieved a victory? Who is at the helm of the Southern African countries now, Moscow’s friends or Washington’s protégés? Who is ruling in Namibia now: SWAPO or so called Democratic Turnhalle Alliance? And in Mozambique: FRELIMO or RENAMO? Who is President of Angola: Dos Santos or Savimbi? Who became the first President of democratic South Africa: Mandela or Buthelezi?

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<sup>i</sup> Russian State Archive of Modern History (hereafter RSAMH), Decisions taken by the instruction of the Secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee without recording in the minutes, N 478, 28 November 1961, collection 4, inventory 18, file 1017, p.61-63. Moreover, according to the archive documents even this position was conveyed to the South Africans after the first armed actions were taken by newly formed *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) on 16 December 1961 (Ibid. a note on p.61).

<sup>ii</sup> State Archive of the Russian Federation (hereafter SARF), collection 9540 sg, inventory 2 s, file 40, p.141.

<sup>iii</sup> RSAMH, collection 4, inventory 18, file 1017, p.61-63

<sup>iv</sup> Nel. P. *Soviet Embassy in Pretoria? The Changing Soviet Approach to South Africa*. Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1990, p.43

<sup>v</sup> Campbell, K.. *Soviet Policy Towards South Africa*. Macmillan, Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 1986;, p.41

<sup>vi</sup> Grundy, K. *Guerrilla Struggle in Africa*. Grossman, New York, 1971, p.51

<sup>vii</sup> RSAMH, collection 89, inventory 46, file 104, pp. 4-6.

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- <sup>viii</sup> Agostinho Neto became MPLA President in late 1962, replacing de Andrade.
- <sup>ix</sup> Memoirs of P. Yevsyukov (unpublished), p.33.
- <sup>x</sup> The author's notes of the discussion with MPLA delegation headed by H. Carreira, Moscow, 30 December 1974.
- <sup>xi</sup> Presentation by Roberto Leal Ramos Monteiro 'Ngongo', Angola's Ambassador to the Russian Federation at the meeting with the Soviet veterans at the Angolan Embassy in Moscow on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence, 13 November, 2000.
- <sup>xii</sup> Klinghoffer. A. *The Angolan War: A Study in Soviet Policy in the Third World*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1980, p.23.
- <sup>xiii</sup> I met Igor Uvarov for the first time as a fellow student of the Institute of International Relations. He was three years older than me but both of us were specializing in Afghanistan and studying Pashtu and Farsi. I could not imagine that later both of us would come to Northern Yemen, though in different periods of a civil war there, and finally meet again as Africanists. The farewell to Colonel Uvarov took place in Moscow with all military honours on 8 December 2006.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Discussion with I. Uvarov, Moscow, 23 October, 2003
- <sup>xv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xvii</sup> I asked Dubenko whom I knew since 1960, the days when he was Assistant Military Attaché in Egypt, how could he get a visa. He said that he went to Angola ostensibly "to study the local educational system". Dubenko soon received a rank of Rear Admiral and became the first Soviet military attaché in Angola.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Ryszard Kapuscinski, a well-known Polish journalist, claims that in September 1975 "there was one person from Eastern Europe – me [in Angola]" (Kapuscinski, R. *Another Day of Life* (San Diego, New York, London: A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1987), p.7); for some reason he "forgot" about Uvarov, though they stayed next door to each other.
- <sup>xix</sup> Discussion with I. Uvarov, Moscow, 23 October, 2003.
- <sup>xx</sup> A detailed story of this mission was described in: [Colonel] Tokarev A. *Komandirovka v Angolu* (Mission to Angola), *Aziya i Afrika segodnya*, no 2, 2001, pp. 36-41.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Ibid. p.33
- <sup>xxii</sup> *40 let vooruzhennoi borby angolskogo naroda za natsionalnyu nezavisimost i sovetsko-angolskoe voennoe sotrudnichestvo* (in Russian). (40 years of the Armed Struggle of the Angolan People for National Independence and Soviet-Angolan Military Co-operation) Moscow, Lean, 2002.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> *Vystuplenie E.P. Posla Angoly v Rossiiskoi Federatsii g-na Roberty Leala Ramusha Monteiru "Ngongo" na konferentsii "40 let vooruzhennoi borby angolskogo naroda za natsionalnyu nezavisimost i sovetsko-angolskoe voennoe sotrudnichestvo"*, (in Russian). (Presentation by H.E. Roberto Leal Ramos Monteiro 'Ngongo', Angola's Ambassador to the Russian Federation at the conference "40 years of the Armed Struggle of the Angolan People for National Independence and Soviet-Angolan Military Co-operation", Moscow, 29 March, 2001, p. 4-5.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> *Rossiia (SSSR) v lokalnyh voinah i voennuh konfliktah vtoroi poloviny XX veka* (in Russian). (Russia (USSR) in Local Wars and Military Conflicts of the Second Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century). Moscow, *Kuchkovo Pole and Poligrafresursy*, 2000, p. 104.
- <sup>xxv</sup> RSAMH, Collection 89, inventory 10, file 20, p.2.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Bridgland F. *The War for Africa. Twelve Months that Transformed a Continent*, Ashanti Publishing House, Gibraltar, 1990, p. 62. For many years Bridgland had been "lionising" Savimbi, but finally he had to face reality and began to catalogue the murders Savimbi committed inside UNITA. It resulted in so serious death threats to him, that "De Klerk's people had given him security minders." (*Harding J. The Late Jonas Savimbi. London Review of Books*, Vol 24, No 6 dated 21 March 2002.)
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Bridgland F. *The War for Africa. Twelve Months that Transformed a Continent* , p.17.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxix</sup> By the way, Mikhail Petrov did exist, and did serve in Southern Africa, but as the first Soviet resident Ambassador to Botswana.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Radu M. and Klinghoffer A. *The Dynamics of Soviet Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa* (New York / London: Holmes and Meir), 1991, p.62.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> Labuschagne, R. *On South Africa's Secret Service* (Alberton: Galago, 2002), p. 112-113. The book is really silly: Labuschagne claims that he recruited the Soviet military attaché in Botswana (p.13), but such a post has never existed, he writes about supply of ten Su-23 aircraft to Angola (p.111), but there is no such a plane, Sverdlovsk is not a family name, as he claims (p.158), but a Soviet city, and so on and so forth.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Steenkamp, W. *South Africa's Border War*, pp.148-150.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> ASSESSMENT OF THE PROBABLE RESULTS OF ACTIVITIES OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION (TRC) AS PERCEIVED BY FORMER CHIEFS OF THE SADF. <http://www.rhodesia.nl/trurec1.htm>. Consulted on 22 September 2007. There is again "General Mikhail Petrov, first deputy on the Soviet Politburo" in this submission as well.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> Venter. A. *How South Africa Built Six Atom Bombs (And Then Abandoned its Nuclear Weapons Program)*, Johannesburg: Ashanti Publishing, 2008.

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<sup>xxxv</sup> Ellis S. and Sechaba T. *Comrades against Apartheid: the ANC and the South African Communist Party in exile*. (Bloomington: J. Currey, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), p.183.

<sup>xxxvi</sup> In his outstanding *Prologue, Post-Prologue and Continuation of the book by Professor Gleijeses* (p. 16) Jorge Risquet calls Ponomarenko “Soviet Marshal”, while Odd Arne Westad in his *Moscow and the Angolan Crisis, 1974-1976: A New Pattern of Intervention* (Cold War International History Project. Bulletin 8-9) calls him “Vice-minister”. Both are mistaken, before coming to Angola Major-General Ponomarenko was Chief of Staff the 8th Guards Army, a formation consisting of several divisions.

<sup>xxxvii</sup> By the way, it was not his first assignment to Africa; in the late 1960s-early 1970s he headed the Soviet military mission in Somalia. His former subordinates admired his activities in Angola, including assistance in creation of the ANC camps there. He was heavily wounded during World War Two and, though Angolan President and Defence Minister wanted him to prolong his mission in Angola, he replied “My wounds demand rest, I can’t stay longer in hot Angola, I would like to go home”. (Interview with V. Kostrachenkov, Moscow, 22 February, 2002, taken by G. Shubin)

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Academician Ambartsumian was a real person, a prominent astronomer and President of the Armenian Academy of Sciences.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Kurochkin came there in May 1982.

<sup>xl</sup> *40 let vmeste*, p. 22; Discussions with K. Kurochkin, Moscow, 10 February and 25 September 2001. As for “Shaganovitch”’s expertise in the chemical weapons, on the contrary, it was South African/UNITA troops that used them Angola.

<sup>xli</sup> Bridgland F. *The War for Africa*, p. 17.

<sup>xlii</sup> *Osnovnye napravleniya i rezultaty deyatelnosti sovetskogo voennogo apparata v NRA v 1982-1985 gg.* (in Russian). (Main Directions and Results of the Activities of the Soviet Military Apparatus in the PRA in 1982-1985’). Presentation by Colonel-General K. Ya. Kurochkin at the conference “40 years of the Armed Struggle of the Angolan People for National Independence and Soviet-Angolan Military Co-operation”, Moscow, 29 March, 2001, p.2.

<sup>xliii</sup> Discussion with V. Kazimirov, former Soviet Ambassador to Angola, Moscow, 14 November 2006.

<sup>xliv</sup> The role of the Soviet Union, Cuba and East Germany in fomenting terrorism in Southern Africa, The US Government Printer, Washington, vol.2, Addendum, p.801. I explained the case of “Konstantin Shaganovitch” in the first edition of my book, “ANC: a View from Moscow”, published over nine years ago, but he appeared in publications again and again.

<sup>xlv</sup> *CAMCO message to all active, inactive and retired members of FAR by General de Brigada (FAR) Rafael del Pino, CAMCO Vice – Chairman*, January 31, 2003. <http://www.camcocuba.org/news/EN-RAF.html>. Consulted on 16 February 2006. CAMCO is so called “Cuban-American Military Council”, a subversive organisation aimed at the Cuban military.

<sup>xlvi</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xlvii</sup> Gleijeses, P. *Conflicting Missions. Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press. 2002.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Discussion with I. Uvarov, Moscow, 23 October, 2003.

<sup>xlix</sup> K. Kurochkin’s notebook 3, p. 25. General Konstand Viljoen, then the SADF Chief called this response “unexpectedly fierce” (Quoted in: Minter, W. *Apartheid’s Contras. An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press. Johannesburg; London and New Jersey: Zed Books, 1994, p.44.)

<sup>l</sup> K. Kurochkin’s notebook 3, p. 26. It was found that the acting brigade commander gave an order to retreat as soon as communications had been cut off; as Kurochkin said to Dos Santos, “the brigade ran away not during the combat, but after it. If the brigade had stayed on its positions, South African troops would retreat.” (*Ibid.* p. 33)

<sup>li</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.

<sup>lii</sup> K. Kurochkin’s notebook 3, p. 27.

<sup>liii</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>liv</sup> *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>lv</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>lvi</sup> Discussion with K. Kurochkin, Moscow, 18 September 2001; K. Kurochkin’s notebook 3. p. 34.

<sup>lvii</sup> Varennikov, V. *Nepovtorimoye* [Unrepeatable], Part 6. Moscow: Sovetsky pisatel, 2001, pp.264-288.

<sup>lviii</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>lix</sup> *Ibid.* p. 288.

<sup>lx</sup> *Ibid.* K. Kurochkin’s notebook 3, pp. 72-73, 76.

<sup>lxi</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.

<sup>lxii</sup> According to Soviet archives from 1976 to February 1989 these supplies amounted to 3, 7 billion Roubles and arms for 600 million Roubles were to be delivered in 1989-1990. (RSAMH, Collection 89, inventory 10, file 20, p.2)

<sup>lxiii</sup> Risquet, J. *Prologue*, p.28.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Speech by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz, President of the Republic of Cuba, at the ceremony commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cuban Military Mission in Angola and the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the landing of the ‘Granma’, Revolutionary Armed Forces Day, December 2, 2005.



- <sup>lxiv</sup> Ibid. p. 74. The creation of this post was suggested by the Cuban side and supported by the Soviets, although Kurochkin made a reservation: the responsibility for the success of operations should have remained with the Angolan leadership.
- <sup>lxv</sup> Two persons and not 27 as UNITA claimed. General “Ngongo” stated that all in all 15 Soviet military (including aircraft crew members) had been killed in Angola in the period up to 1991 (Presentation by H.E. Roberto Leal Ramos Monteiro ‘Ngongo’, p.5); according to Russian military historians by the same date 51 persons was killed or died and 10 were wounded (*Rossiia (SSSR) v lokalnyh voynah*, p. 104.)
- <sup>lxvi</sup> Zhdarkin, I. “We didn’t see it even in Afghanistan”, Moscow: Memorias, 2008, pp. 362-363.
- <sup>lxvii</sup> Ibid. p.269.
- <sup>lxviii</sup> Quoted in: Steenkamp, W. *South Africa’s Border War. 1966 – 1989*, p. 163. Cuito Cunavale probably had a symbolic value for Pretoria, from 1960s its airport was used by South African Air Force and a Portuguese-South African command centre was established there for operations against Angolan and Namibian fighters (Bridgland, “Savimbi”, p. 82 )
- <sup>lxix</sup> Colonel Jan Breytenbach, former Commander of 32<sup>nd</sup> Battalion admits that South African forces in Northern Namibia were “suddenly faced with a major threat... The SADF’s preoccupation with saving Savimbi had left its Owamboland flank wide open”. (Breytenbach J., *The Buffalo Soldiers. The Story of South Africa’s 32-Battalion 1975-1993*. Aberton: Galago, pp. 316-317.
- <sup>lxx</sup> Speech by Dr. Fidel Castro Ruz .
- <sup>lxxi</sup> Discussion with K. Kurochkin, Moscow, 18 September.2001.
- <sup>lxxii</sup> Castro, F. Speech in Mandela Park, Kingston, Jamaica, July 30, 1998. *Granma*, Havana, 7 August 1998.
- <sup>lxxiii</sup> Castro, Fidel, *Vincicaci3n de Cuba* (Cuba’s Vindication), Editora Pol3tica Publishers, Havana, 1989, p. 404. According to Soviet archives Cuban command in Angola in February 1989 had in its disposal over 1 000 tanks, 200 APCs, over 500 pieces of artillery and rocket-lanchers, 70 anti-aircraft missile installations and 44 combat aircraft (RSAMH, Collection 89, inventory 10, file 20, p.2)
- <sup>lxxiv</sup> Adamishin, A. *The White Sun of Angola*, p. 117.
- <sup>lxxv</sup> Risquet, J. *Prologue*, p. 35.
- <sup>lxxvi</sup> Adamishin, A. *The White Sun of Angola*, p. 110. Anatoly Adamishin, describing his meeting with Fidel in Havana on 28 March 1988, quotes Fidel’s words: “[South Africans are] Such fools, they attacked us [at Cuito-Cuanavale] on 23 March, while from 18 March we were advancing south, getting into their rear”. (Adamishin. A. *Beloye solntse Angoly* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2001), p. 98.)
- <sup>lxxvii</sup> Bloomfield, R. (ed.). *Regional Conflicts and US Policy: Angola and Mozambique*. Algonac: Reference Publications, 1988, p. 220.
- <sup>lxxviii</sup> RSAMH, Collection 89, inventory 10, file 20, p.2)
- <sup>lxxix</sup> Ellis S. and Sechaba T. Op. cit., p.27
- <sup>lxxx</sup> A. Goldreich to V. Shubin, 24 August 1993.
- <sup>lxxxi</sup> Davis S. *Apartheid Rebels. Inside South Africa’s Hidden War*, Craighall: A.P.Donker, 1988.
- <sup>lxxxii</sup> A. Goldreich’s letter to the author, 24 August 1993.
- <sup>lxxxiii</sup> This is exactly the way it was done, initially through Tanzania and Zambia and later through Mozambique and especially Angola.
- <sup>lxxxiv</sup> A. Goldreich to V. Shubin, 24 August 1993.
- <sup>lxxxv</sup> *Segodnya*, no 3, 1993.
- <sup>lxxxvi</sup> The official figure is smaller, but it does not include those South Africans who were registered as citizens of Lesotho, Zambia and other Southern African countries.
- <sup>lxxxvii</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 8 August 1992.
- <sup>lxxxviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>lxxxix</sup> Bell, T. with Ntebeza, D.B. *Unfinished Business. South Africa, Apartheid and Truth*. (London-New York: Verso, 2003), p. 119.
- <sup>xc</sup> Ibid. p. 274.
- <sup>xci</sup> *Freedom in our Lifetime* by Archie Sibeko (Zola Zembe) with Joyce Leeson, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/zz1.htm>.
- <sup>xcii</sup> S. Nyanda to V. Shubin, 10 December 2002.
- <sup>xciii</sup> On these attempts see: *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*. Volume I: 1960-1970. (Pretoria: SADET, 2005), pp. 487-528.
- <sup>xciv</sup> The decision of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee P 58/52 of 18 October 1967, item 1, referred to in: RSAMH, Minutes of the Secretariat, N 103, item 24g, 20 July 1970; the decision of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee P 183/13 of 20 October 1970 and the order of the USSR Council of Ministers 2217s of 20 October 1970, referred to in: RSAMH, Minutes of the Secretariat, N 103, item 24g, 20 July 1970 as a proof of fulfillment of the latter.
- <sup>xcv</sup> 75 thousand pounds were allocated for the purchase of the ship. (SACP to CPSU, 6 September 1970. Referred to in: Maloka, E. *The South African Communist Party in exile*, p.29.)
- <sup>xcvi</sup> It was named so by Oliver Tambo in honour of Joe Slovo, its main organiser..

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- <sup>xcvii</sup> See: *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*. Volume 2, [1970-1980], Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2006, pp. 457-459.
- <sup>xcviii</sup> *Echo*, 21 February 1990. These words are very far from fallacies spread by Bell and Ntebeza!
- <sup>xcix</sup> Discussion with V. Shiryaev, Moscow, 2 April 2003; Shiryaev, V.F. *Menya zvali tovarishch Ivan*. [They called me Comrade Ivan]. In: *VVITKU VMF. Vospominaniya vypusknikov 1961 goda*. [Red Banner Higher Naval Engineering and Technical College. Reminiscences of graduates of 1961] (Moscow, 2005), pp. 88-92.
- <sup>c</sup> Kasrils R. *Armed and Dangerous. From Undercover Struggle to Freedom*. Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2004, p. 202.
- <sup>ci</sup> *Segodnya*, Moscow, no 3, 1993.
- <sup>cii</sup> People's Liberation Army of Namibia and Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army.
- <sup>ciii</sup> The most famous of them was "Colonel Nikolay"; later Nikolay Kurushkin became Major-General.
- <sup>civ</sup> Solodovnikov, V. The Cold War in the Southern Africa: 1976-81. In: IAS Newsletter, no 4, 1998, p.2.
- <sup>cv</sup> Campbell K. *Soviet Policy Towards South Africa*, p.46
- <sup>cvi</sup> RSAMH, Minutes of the Secretariat, N 99, item 128gs, 28 May 1970; Mayibuye Collection of Historical Papers (MCHP). ANC Lusaka Collection, The report of the Secretariat covering the last two years (1971), p.5.; Ibid. African National Congress National Consultative Conference. President's Statement, p.19.
- <sup>cvi</sup> S. Nyanda to V. Shubin, 10 December 2002. More on the Soviet role see: *ANC: A View from Moscow*, pp. 332-338, 360, 381.
- <sup>cviii</sup> Ellis S. and Sechaba T. *Comrades against apartheid*, p.182.
- <sup>cix</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>cx</sup> *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* (World Economy and International Relations), Moscow, 1993, nos. 4, pp. 79-86, 5, pp. 81-90, 7, pp. 88-104, and 8., pp. 68-78.
- <sup>cx</sup> National Archives. FCO 45/1016. Circular 0 229/69. London, 16 September 1969. AFRICAN FREEDOM MOVEMENTS.
- <sup>cxii</sup> Discussion with A. Mongalo, Johannesburg, 26 November 1993. No doubt, when Mongalo came to Italy as the Ambassador of the democratic South Africa three decades later he was received in a different way.
- <sup>cxiii</sup> *Sovetskaya Rossiya* [Soviet Russia], Moscow, 23 September 2004. This is correct not only with reference to diplomats. Thus, the African National Congress was not even included in the Index in the book "*Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup, published in 1980* (Seiler, J (ed.), Boulder, Westview Press, 1980)
- <sup>cxiv</sup> Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Adopted at the Seventh (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Ninth Convocation on October 7, 1977. Article 28.
- <sup>cxv</sup> Crocker C. *High Noon in Southern Africa. Making Peace in a Rough Neighbourhood*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1993, p.17.