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INSIDE NAMIBIA

SOUTH AFRICA DIGS IN FOR A LONG STAY

DAVID L. GOODMAN

Rundu, Namibia

The tarred road, we were assured, was safe. South African soldiers had swept it for mines that morning. We drove north to the Namibian-Angolan border through a landscape that bore the scars of a full-scale war. The countryside had been defoliated and depopulated by the South African Defense Force (S.A.D.F.) about a year ago in an effort to "pacify" the area. Only scattered remains of the peasant communities were left. The South Africans have methods for dealing with rural inhabitants who refuse to leave voluntarily. First they destroy a village's water pump, a lifeline in Namibia's often arid climate, giving the villagers the choice of leaving or dying. As a last resort, there is the crude but effective technique of leveling the entire area with bulldozers.

Here in this small border town, perched on a river embankment overlooking Angola, the social impact of the war is everywhere in evidence. Alcohol flows as steadily as the near-by Okavango River. The drab color of S.A.D.F. trucks, tanks and uniforms is ubiquitous. The whites from South Africa mingle uncomfortably with the black Namibians, unsure of who their friends are in this desert outpost.

Proceeding deeper into the bush, we pass a heavily guarded and fortified compound. Inside the barbed-wire fence, the trappings of white civilization serve to remind the S.A.D.F. soldiers of what they are fighting for: rose gardens, manicured lawns and domestic servants. Outside the fence, in the words of South African author J.M. Coetzee, the "barbarians" lie in wait.

(*Continued From Front Cover*)

Namibia has been dragged from its periodic oblivion in world politics to center stage in recent weeks. On April 18, South African President P.W. Botha formally declared his intention to establish a new government in Namibia composed of a number of so-called internal parties. There are few surprises in Namibia these days, and that move was not one of them. Since the creation of the Multi-Party Conference in late 1983, political figures in Namibia have anticipated that those parties, widely accused of being puppets of the South African government, would be recognized by Pretoria in order to thwart attempts at achieving internationally sanctioned independence in the territory. Among those who claimed surprise, however, were the Americans, for whom the unilateral decision by Pretoria represented a dramatic rejection of the Reagan Administration's policy of "constructive engagement" in South Africa, one of whose ostensible goals was independence for Namibia.

Namibians expected that constructive engagement would fail to produce the promised results. Independence for Namibia has never been one of the Reagan Administration's central concerns. U.S. policies follow in the tradition of foreign exploitation of Namibia, picking up the pieces of a tragedy that began in the nineteenth century, when Germany and Great Britain vied for the territory known as South West Africa. Germany controlled most of the area until after World War I, when South Africa acquired it under a League of Nations mandate. Pretoria has ruled the country ever since, in defiance of U.N. resolutions revoking its mandate and calling on it to end its "illegal occupation." In 1978 the Security Council passed Resolution 435, which called for free elections under U.N. supervision and the creation of a peacekeeping force to oversee the withdrawal of the S.A.D.F. and the guerrilla fighters of the Namibian liberation movement, the South West Africa People's Organization (Swapo). Although Pretoria agreed to the resolution, it continued to stall. Nevertheless, independence seemed close at hand.

The election of Ronald Reagan shattered those hopes. With a friendly American President in office, South Africa was in no hurry to relinquish its prized possession. In January 1981, its representatives walked out of the Geneva talks on the implementation of Resolution 435.

The Reagan Administration moved quickly to establish closer ties with Pretoria. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chester Crocker, a conservative specialist

David L. Goodman is a freelance journalist based in Boston. He recently spent four months in southern Africa, including three weeks in Namibia.

on Africa from Georgetown University, announced the policy of constructive engagement. It relaxed export controls to permit sales of equipment to the South African military and police, encouraged trade between the two countries, provided greater opportunities for investment and loans to South Africa, increased the number of military attachés each country sends to the other and opened additional South African consulates in the United States. Crocker proclaimed that the policy would also achieve Namibian independence, force Pretoria to relax its apartheid policies and bolster regional security.

But constructive engagement placed a large stumbling block in the way of Resolution 435: Washington insisted that independence for Namibia be linked to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from neighboring Angola. Even the South Africans, who are masters at stalling, had to be impressed by that maneuver. The "contact group" of diplomats from Great Britain, France, Canada, West Germany and the United States, which was negotiating with the South Africans on behalf of the United Nations, was eased out of the picture, and the fate of Namibia is now being decided by Washington and Pretoria.

Washington's support for Pretoria has made the minority regime bolder in its dealings with the occupied territory. In the north of the country, where the majority of black Namibians live, cars share the road with S.A.D.F. convoys. Military roadblocks and checkpoints are set up at a soldier's whim; it is not uncommon to be stopped by gun-toting troops of the notorious counterinsurgency unit Koevoet (Afrikaans for "crowbar"). If the occupants of the car are white, they may be let off after being asked for a cigarette. If they are black, they are subjected to repeated searches and interrogations.

On March 11, South Africa announced that the entire northern border region of Namibia would become a "security zone," with access allowed only to those who have a police permit. That will give the occupying troops a freer hand in their dealings with the native people and will place severe restrictions on church workers, journalists and local residents.

The S.A.D.F. justifies its callous treatment of black Namibians by claiming it is looking for guerrillas. In the liberation war Swapo has been fighting against South Africa since 1966, 10,000 Namibians—1 percent of the population—have been killed and more than 100,000 have fled the country. Although hundreds, possibly thousands, of South African soldiers have been killed, the government is deeply committed to this unwinnable war, currently deploying an estimated 100,000 troops in the territory. South Africa claims it is spending $900 million a year on "infrastructure and defense" in Namibia, while Swapo insists the figure is closer to $1.5 billion. Estimates on what the war costs South Africa range from $1.6 million to $4.8 million a day.

Measured against its proclaimed goals, constructive engagement has been a resounding failure. State violence in South Africa increased dramatically in the past eight months; regional security has continued to deteriorate due to South Africa-backed insurgencies in the frontline states; and despite the objection of the Reagan Administration, Namibia has been subjugated to the authority of Pretoria's puppet government. But the public objectives of constructive engagement tell only part of the story of why the United States is so interested in Namibia. There is another agenda being served well.

The Reagan Administration's strategic and economic interests in Namibia converge with the South African regime's. Both governments want the territory to serve as a buffer state against guerrilla activity by the African National Congress (A.N.C.) and against hostile neighbors to the north. Defense Minister Gen. Magnus Malan has stated that a South African withdrawal from Namibia would "shift the operational area from the Cunene River in southern Angola to the Orange River," on South Africa's northwestern border. Chester Crocker has sounded a similar warning. In 1980, he wrote that the United States must support "evolutionary change as distinguished from revolutionary cataclysm."

Namibia is also of crucial economic importance to both countries. The territory contains vast natural resources, including the world's largest open-pit uranium mine, the world's largest supply of raw diamonds, and extensive zinc, copper and tin deposits. Two multinational corporations, Consolidated Diamond Mines of South Africa and the U.S.-based Tsumeb Corporation, control more than 90 percent of all mining operations in Namibia. Multinationals skim off an estimated one-third to one-half of Namibia's gross national product.

In the small town of Tsumeb, perched on the edge of the so-called operational area, or war zone, of northern Namibia, the corporate presence is abundantly in evidence. The town is an oasis of suburban life in the midst of the harsh Namibian landscape. Towering above it is the Tsumeb copper mine. Today, fewer workers pour through the rusty mine gates than ten years ago. The mine, which is owned jointly by the Newmont Mining Corporation and American Metal Climax (AMAX), both U.S.-based, has been slowly but steadily sucked dry. Between 1966 and 1981, total ore output from Tsumeb dropped by almost one-third, and the copper content of the ore has dropped by 62 percent since the mine opened in 1947. Those statistics lend credence to Namibians' fear that the multinationals are trying to extract as much of the territory's natural resources as they can before majority rule comes. The foreign concerns are operating in defiance of a 1974 U.N. decree which declared that "no animal resource, mineral, or other natural resource produced in . . . Namibia may be taken from the said Territory . . . without the consent and permission of the United Nations Council for Namibia. This efficient plunder assures the corporations' and the U.S. government's continuing involvement in the country. It has been championed by Crocker, who has written about "the need to retain and expand U.S. and Western access to a reliable supply of imported minerals [from southern Africa] at reasonable prices."

In geopolitical terms, the Administration's policy rep-

resents an attempt to bolster America's position in what it sees as the struggle against the Soviet Union for control of the African continent, particularly southern Africa. Having failed to stem the rise to power of socialist governments in Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe between 1975 and 1980, State Department cold warriors see in Namibia an opportunity to restore Western influence in the region. They hope the expulsion of Cuban soldiers from Angola will force that country's President, José Eduardo dos Santos, to reach a settlement with the pro-Western, South Africa-backed guerrilla movement Unita, headed by Jonas Savimbi. The overall strategy is to neutralize the socialist governments in Angola and Mozambique by supporting proxy forces waging destabilization campaigns. The impact of a progressive Swapo government in Namibia, which South African intelligence concedes would follow if free and fair elections were held in the territory, would then be offset by a less hospitable political climate in the region. It would also insure that support for guerrillas of the A.N.C. could not easily be provided from rear bases in countries bordering on South Africa.

Thus the motive behind constructive engagement has little to do with inducing the Pretoria regime to make reforms or with winning Namibian independence. It is a policy of regional containment, aimed at keeping southern Africa, and ultimately the entire continent, free of anticapitalist influences. Reagan is determined not to allow an outpost of capitalism to be lost merely because of the aspirations for independence of a sparsely populated African country.

Namibians are the discounted party in the U.S. strategy. Their suffering continues unabated, and S.A.D.F. atrocities against civilians—documented by the Council of Churches in Namibia, Amnesty International, Swapo and the South African Catholic Bishops Conference—continue to mount. Even in remote parts of the northern war zone, illiterate villagers will ask an American why his country is opposed to Namibian independence. Many Namibians see the United States as an ally of Pretoria, and that is why constructive engagement will backfire. As Anton Lubowsky, a white Windhoek attorney who is a member of Swapo, remarked: "The U.S. has a choice in Namibia of aligning itself with the past, which is South Africa, or with the future, which is Swapo. Once again, it appears to have sided with the past."

And so, as American and South African officials scramble to kill time before granting Namibia independence, the daily horrors of the South African occupation go on. As Bishop Kleopas Dumeni, a Lutheran leader in the northern part of the country, concluded bitterly after last November's U.S. elections, "The re-election of your President is the re-election of our suffering." □