

# Namibia and the Global Democratic Revolution

By Michael Johns

From an American perspective, the unfortunate reality about the remarkable events currently under way in Namibia is that they attract relatively little attention and discussion in the United States. Namibia is a land far away, and besides there are many other dilemmas impinging on American security interests that compete for the attention of American policy makers — General Noriega's authoritarian reign in Panama, Soviet and Cuban military support for the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, the important internal reforms taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the recent terror unleashed against pro-democracy students in Beijing, tension on the West Bank, the changes coming in 1992 in Western Europe, and many others. Even in Africa, Namibia competes for American attention with the domestic political changes in South Africa, famine in the Horn of Africa, economic reform in West Africa, U.S. relations with its few African allies such as Zaire and Somalia, and the civil wars in Angola and Mozambique.

But it is important, nonetheless, that American policy makers deal seriously with the Namibia issue, because the Namibian independence process holds the seeds of both opportunity and potential disaster for this region. Many of the tragic events of our time — the rise of the Bolsheviks in 1917, Hitler's ascent in Nazi Germany, Iran under the Ayatollah, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, Cuba and Nicaragua under Marxism-Leninism — have developed while Americans were distracted or while they were confused about what they were supporting. Thus, the seemingly admirable efforts to do away with the regimes of the Shah, Somoza, and Batista had the not so desirable effect of creating new dictatorships, each of which was hostile to American interests, and each of which was an even worse violator of the common rights and liberties the U.S. claimed it was fostering. It is important, from an American perspective, that this does not happen in Namibia.

**Birth of a Nation.** I have just returned from a remarkable visit to Namibia. In the past several years, I have visited almost every continent on the globe, but I have never experienced the anxiety associated with the birth of an independent nation. Everywhere I went in Windhoek, the Namibian people wanted to tell me about their mixed feelings of excitement and fear concerning the immediate future of their country. There is great support for self-rule, but there is also concern about the political direction of the country once independence is achieved. There is concern about whether human and individual rights will be guaranteed under the new government. And there is concern about the strategic alignments of an independent Namibia. More than one Namibian I met with compared the independence process to a pregnancy. While there is anxiety for the pregnancy to be completed, there is also concern that the child be born healthy and without complications. Once the pregnancy is complete, there is the challenge of raising the child properly — fostering in the child the values that will enable it to have a prosperous, productive, and happy life. In a way, this is what is happening in Namibia. To say the least, it is a very tense process, filled with potential complications and problems.

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He spoke at the University of Pretoria's Institute for Strategic Studies in Pretoria, South Africa, on November 1, 1989.

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Part of the reason the potential dangers of the Namibian independence process, most notably, the rise of a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship in Namibia, receive so little attention in the U.S. is that there is a general feeling that South Africa knows about Namibia — that South Africa has carefully weighed the potential benefits and costs of granting Namibia independence, and if South Africa views the independence process as acceptable to their security interests, there is little reason for the U.S. to have further concern. Our questioning South Africa's Namibia policy is viewed a little bit like South Africa questioning our Mexico policy.

**Questioning South Africa.** I have long questioned the direction of the U.S. and South Africa in their policies toward both Angola and Namibia. In the articles I authored immediately following the signing of last December's tripartite agreement,<sup>1</sup> I argued that one potential outcome of the Angola/Namibia agreement could be the consolidation of the Marxist-Leninist Angolan regime and the rise of a new communist state in Namibia.<sup>2</sup> I still have reason to believe that this is a plausible outcome of the Angola/Namibia agreement.

It is important at this point to examine the possible benefits and negative outcomes of the Angola/Namibia agreement. First, a look at three potential benefits:

**One,** the Angola/Namibia agreement is designed to remove the estimated 50,000 Cuban troops in Angola. These troops have played a destabilizing and imperialist role in Angola. They have upheld a regime that is genuinely unpopular with the Angolan people and have been used in combat against Jonas Savimbi's National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), a resistance movement that has received support from South Africa and the U.S. The Cuban troops in Angola have also played a destabilizing role in the region. Last year, for instance, the Cuban envoy in Angola threatened Zaire with attack if Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko did not terminate his country's cooperation in supplying the Angolan resistance with weapons. The Cuban troops also were viewed as a threat to South Africa's security and perhaps to that of other African nations as well. If the Angola/Namibia agreement results in the total departure of Cuban troops from Angola, it will be beneficial for Western security interests in the region, and it may assist UNITA in achieving a favorable political settlement in Angola. The objective of the U.S. and South Africa in Angola should be nothing less than the fulfillment of the 1975 Alvor Accord, in which the Angolan regime promised free and fair elections. Should the Cubans depart, this objective would become more realistic.

**Two,** the Angola/Namibia agreement is intended to lead to Namibian independence. Though the outcome of Namibia's independence process is far from certain, the U.S. has generally favored granting the Namibian people the independence they deserve so long as it leads to genuine freedom. The independence of Namibia also removes from the international political debate one of the major indictments against South Africa, which it is to be hoped will be taken into strong consideration as Congress debates new economic

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1 This agreement was signed December 22, 1988, by the governments of Angola, Cuba, and South Africa. It called for Namibian independence by April 1990 and the departure of Cuban troops from Angola by July 1991.

2 See, for instance, Michael Johns, "Angola at the Crossroads," Heritage Foundation *Executive Memorandum* No. 219, November 17, 1988; Michael Johns, "Taking a Gamble on Angola: Where Treacherous Tripwires Lurk," *The Washington Times*, December 23, 1988; Michael Johns, "Filling the Holes in the Deal," *The World and I* magazine, February 1989, pp. 130-131; and Michael Johns, "Savimbi's Elusive Victory in Angola," *Human Events*, October 14, 1989, p. 5.

sanctions against South Africa. It is my contention that these sanctions have not served the interests of peaceful political change in South Africa, and if South Africa's conceding independence to Namibia contributes to a complete removal of these sanctions, it should assist in creating a climate more suitable to a settlement of the internal political problems here in South Africa.

**And three,** the Angola/Namibia agreement could represent the beginning of a new regional understanding in southern Africa. Bringing representatives from Angola, Cuba, and South Africa together to discuss the problems of the region was a welcome change from past approaches of confrontation. Should the Angola/Namibia agreement be fulfilled by the respective parties, it could lay the foundation for a new approach to regional differences in southern Africa.

Unfortunately, however, the Angola/Namibia agreement also contains serious flaws. These include:

**One,** the Angola/Namibia agreement has placed an extremely biased institution, the United Nations, in charge of the Namibian independence process. Having, in its Resolution 435, declared the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) "the sole, authentic representative of the Namibian people," having funded SWAPO for over a decade, and having given SWAPO observer status at the U.N., the U.N. had decided a long time ago which was the one political party that it considered representative of the Namibian people. In Western democracies, such as the U.S., this has made many analysts and policy makers justifiably uncomfortable. The objective of Namibia's independence process and this month's elections should be to enable the Namibian people to make their own decision about which of the many Namibian political parties they want as their representatives. Thus, the U.N.'s role in Namibia has been anti-democratic and even a bit imperialistic. Also, the U.N. Council for Namibia (UNCN) has refused to abide by the 1982 Impartiality Package, which would have required a more objective independence process in Namibia. While SWAPO's financial records have been difficult to analyze, there is good reason to believe that the UNCN has continued its financial support for SWAPO, which has exaggerated by 30,000 its refugee numbers in an effort to obtain even greater financial assistance from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The U.N. has done little to correct these problems, and as a result, the U.N.'s objectivity has been called into question.

In retrospect, it probably would have been preferable for Namibia's independence process to have been overseen exclusively by Western democracies, who have had practical experience in the nuts and bolts of democracy, rather than by the U.N., which had already decided, for most intents and purposes, the one party it wanted to run Namibia. Indeed, certain individuals and nations represented in the U.N. Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG), the U.N. group responsible for the independence process, have already tended to bias in SWAPO's favor. In some cases, the objectivity of Namibia's entire independence process can be called into serious question.

**Two,** the Angola/Namibia agreement called for a termination of South African assistance to UNITA. South Africa had supplied UNITA with an estimated \$80 million in annual assistance until last December's agreement.<sup>3</sup> South Africa's support had been very helpful in UNITA's struggle for self-determination in Angola, and the termination of this assistance

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3 Estimate by Marcos Samondo, UNITA's Deputy Representative to the United States, October 1989.

will no doubt have negative ramifications for UNITA's fight for freedom. American assistance for UNITA is scheduled to continue, but this assistance is estimated at only \$25 million annually, as compared with the \$1.5 billion in annual military assistance Moscow supplies the Angolan regime. In short, since the Angola/Namibia agreement required a termination of South African assistance to UNITA, why did it not require a termination of Soviet military assistance to the Angolan regime? This would have been only fair, and I believe South Africa and the U.S. were remiss in not demanding it.

**Three**, the Angola/Namibia agreement provides for elections in Namibia, but none in Angola. This is another double standard, quite a negative one for the Angolan people who wish to see the Angolan regime fulfill the promises made in the 1975 Alvor Accord to hold free and fair elections. Again, it seems South Africa and the U.S. should have been more assertive in demanding that this provision be guaranteed in last December's agreement. As it is, there is no guarantee for an internal political settlement in Angola, despite the fact that the democratic aspirations of the Angolan people are no less than those of the Namibian people. As a result of this double standard, the war in Angola continues.

**Four**, the negotiations leading up to the Angola/Namibia agreement included observer delegations from SWAPO and the Soviet Union, but none from UNITA. This may at least partly explain why this agreement is less than favorable to UNITA. As UNITA President Jonas Savimbi described the agreement to me during my visit to Jamba, Angola, last March: "That agreement is filled with loopholes. The agreement is not good at all." UNITA's concerns are absolutely justified, and they should have been aired officially in the negotiations leading to the agreement.

**Five**, the time schedules for the independence of Namibia and the Cuban withdrawal from Angola are clearly biased in Cuba's favor. Cuban troops do not have to be out of Angola until July 1991, but Namibia's independence process will be completed this coming April. To guarantee that Cuban troops definitely leave Angola, the timing of Namibian independence and the deadline for the withdrawal of Cuban troops should have been much more closely linked. Then, if Cuba tried to withdraw from its obligations, South Africa would have had some leverage to force Cuban compliance. As the Angola/Namibia agreement stands, it is possible that Cuban troops would cancel their withdrawal after having obtained the potential strategic benefits of an ally in power in independent Namibia.

**Six**, as a bilateral agreement between Cuba and the Angolan regime, the Cuban withdrawal from Angola can be renegotiated between the two parties. South Africa is a signatory only to the provision on Namibian independence, which means the Cubans could legally cancel their withdrawal from Angola before July 1991. This is completely unacceptable. South Africa and the U.S. should have pushed for a provision that unequivocally forces Cuba to withdraw its troops.

**And seven**, the personnel in both the U.N. mission in Angola (UNAVEM) and the U.N. mission in Namibia (UNTAG) comprises representatives from countries with clear biases in favor of both the Angolan regime and SWAPO. In Angola, this was perhaps best evidenced by the comment of a Brazilian general, General Pericles Ferreira Gomes, to the *New York Times* last winter. Brazil is a main arms supplier to the Angolan regime. Asked how he would go about monitoring the Cuban withdrawal from Angola, the general said:

"When the Cubans tell us there are no more troops, we will tell the United Nations that they have gone."<sup>4</sup> In Namibia, a similar problem exists. Many of the countries represented in the UNTAG force — Czechoslovakia, Cuba, the Soviet Union, Libya, Romania, Tanzania, and East Germany — have themselves never had a free and fair election. As East Germans flee their own totalitarian system in droves, it is appropriate to ask why such a country is chosen to send representatives to guide a democratic process with which it has absolutely no experience. Indeed, as was reported several months ago, not only is UNTAG composed of many nondemocratic elements, it is also composed of some individuals with their own dubious agenda. Western intelligence has already identified one UNTAG representative as a Soviet intelligence operative.

**Proceeding Peacefully.** In formulating a U.S. policy toward an independent Namibia, it is first required that Namibia's government of independence be fully alerted to the potential concerns of most American policy makers toward that nation. The U.S. Congress and the Bush Administration have been fully supportive of the independence effort, and U.S. involvement in both writing U.N. Resolution 435 and funding Namibia's independence process has been substantial. The U.S. wants this process to proceed objectively and peacefully without foreign intervention. Political self-determination is a principle that the U.S. supports universally, and American policy makers are pleased when democracy is seen to be advancing around the world.

There are three specific concerns, already being discussed in Washington, that could endanger American public support for Namibia's new government. It is important that any independent government wishing the blessing of the U.S. take these points into serious consideration when formulating policy. These concerns are:

◆ ◆ The U.S. has been deeply concerned about the heinous human rights violations committed by SWAPO against the prisoners it has held in its camps in Angola and Zambia. It is critical that Namibia's independent government respect human rights and develop a legal system that is fair and is structured to ensure due process of law. The surest way for the new government of Namibia to offend the U.S. and the West in general will be for it to show a disregard for human rights. Thus far, there are significant reasons to doubt that SWAPO is committed to defending such rights.

◆ ◆ The U.S. is concerned that the newly independent government in Namibia not become a security threat to its neighbors. Namibia's independent government will have legitimate security needs, and it will want and need to develop its own defense system. However, the hosting of hostile foreign rebel movements, the presence of hostile foreign troops, and other offensive military acts will not be welcomed in the U.S., nor presumably, by South Africa. Again, there is significant concern that, should SWAPO at some point assume control in Namibia, it would become a security threat in the region. With its close alliances with Cuba, the Soviet Union, and the African National Congress (ANC), the potential for such a turn of events clearly exists.

◆ ◆ The U.S. hopes that the independence effort under way in Namibia will lead to genuine democracy. The purpose of the independence effort, from an American perspective, is not simply substituting South African maintenance for a set of Namibian dictators. The U.S. hopes that Namibian independence will lead to a multiparty state and an ongoing genuine democratic political process. This would be a rare development in African

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4 "U.N.'s Angola Mission to Take Cuba at Its Word," *The New York Times*, January 8, 1989, p. 5.

politics, but the time for democratic political evolution in Africa is long overdue, and Namibia could play an important role in setting an example that democracy is workable in Africa, even in a nation composed of vastly diverse ethnic groups. The U.S. will not look favorably on the emergence of a one-party state in Namibia. Such a development would likely endanger relations between the U.S. and the new Namibian government.

In the light of next week's elections, it is worth looking at three potential outcomes of Namibia's independence process and some of the ramifications these outcomes may have for the regional and international security concerns of the U.S.

The first is that the noncommunist political parties, notably the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), will fair extremely well in next week's election. It is unlikely that the noncommunist parties can muster the 67 percent support they require to author Namibia's new constitution, but they may do well enough to be placed in the political driver's seat in Namibia. This would be the optimistic scenario from a U.S. perspective and the one that would be most beneficial for the political, human rights, and security concerns of the U.S. in the region. The DTA would likely seek close relations with Washington, would not be a security threat in the region, would pursue generally free market economic policies, and would likely respect human rights and liberties. The only potential danger of such a scenario is that SWAPO, seeing itself losing a stake in Namibia's political future, could return to guerrilla warfare.

**Unacceptable Scenarios.** The second possible outcome, which is perhaps the most likely, is that no political party gains a significant majority in Namibia next week. In this scenario, the DTA and other noncommunist parties would have to push to ensure that their political, economic, and security views were represented in the new constitution and in the new government. In a coalition, SWAPO's Leninist mindset could easily lead it to attempt to take control in the coalition through coercion and intimidation. This would be unacceptable for the U.S., and it would be important for the U.S. and other Western nations to take assertive actions to prevent it.

The third possible scenario for Namibia is a pessimistic one, in which SWAPO assumes a clear majority, or even two-thirds support. This scenario is not as likely as the second scenario, but perhaps more likely than the first. Such a turn of events would be a clear danger to the security interests of the U.S., and it would leave Washington with little option but to work with SWAPO to foster relations. It will be critical in such a scenario that the U.S. inform SWAPO clearly about the three concerns previously mentioned that would endanger U.S.-Namibian relations, and it will be important that the U.S. use its limited leverage in Namibia to attempt to ensure that these developments do not take place.

The emerging independence of Namibia foretells great opportunities and great potential dangers. It need not be feared by the U.S., but at the same time, the U.S. must be mindful of the potential strategic dangers that could arise and begin planning now to defend Western security interests. U.S. objectives should be to ensure that the government of Namibia does not endanger or threaten the UNITA forces in Angola, that Namibia does not become a staging ground for hostile guerrilla movements or a host to hostile foreign troops. Further, the U.S. should seek to ensure that independent Namibia becomes a nation respectful of human rights and democratic liberties. The U.S. should be prepared to employ its full political, diplomatic, and economic leverage in Namibia to achieve these objectives.

It is by no means certain that the independence of Namibia will lead to genuine democracy, but if it does, I predict that it will serve as a catalyst for democratic change

throughout this region — in Angola, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and here in South Africa. Liberty is like a forest fire. It spreads quickly. And as recent developments in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia demonstrate, the democratic revolution is truly a revolution without frontiers.

**March of Democracy.** In closing, I would like to remind you of an applicable warning that Ronald Reagan issued to global terrorists a few years ago. "You can run, but you can't hide," he told them. I think this warning also applies to autocrats here in southern Africa who feel they are isolated from the democratic winds currently blowing throughout the world. Dictators like Kenneth Kaunda, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, and Joaquim Chissano can run, but they cannot hide much longer from the march of the democratic revolution. This revolution is based on the growing global realization that, in Thomas Jefferson's words, "the God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time." Next week, Namibians will stand in the desert in places like Luderitz, Grootfontein, and Gobabis, waiting to participate in this democratic process and reconfirming the truth inherent in Jefferson's credo. It is a day many thought would never come. "Democracy can never work in Africa," the skeptics told us. Well, the burden is now on the shoulder of Namibians — and all of us — to prove them wrong.

