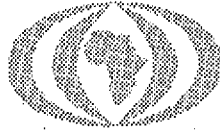


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## SETTLEMENT OF THE NAMIBIAN DISPUTE

### A Question of Political Will

Whether or not the Western-sponsored UN plan for Namibian independence is about to collapse finally, the recent problems which have held up implementation of the plan are symptomatic of the climate of intense mistrust and suspicion, which has pervaded these negotiations since they began two years ago. It is perhaps not surprising that the 33-year old international dispute has produced this mistrust on all sides, and in these circumstances the settlement proposal of the Western Five, which won general acceptance from the parties involved in the dispute, as well as Security Council endorsement, was a remarkable achievement. But the proposed settlement plan remained a fragile one, with a number of ambiguities in its terms and many possible stumbling blocks in the way of its successful implementation. Its success depended above all on the degree of political will and determination that it should succeed, on the part of the contending parties. Only the necessary political will, based on a realistic calculation by each party that a favourable balance of advantage would be gained by a settlement, overcame the many problems along the road of negotiations, and the same political will is required from all parties if the present plan (or any future one for a peaceful settlement) is to be implemented.

### The Front-Line States and SWAPO

The obvious contending parties have been the South African Government and SWAPO. But this is an over-simplification, particularly on SWAPO's side. In a real sense the front-line states, which provide sanctuary, bases, training and political support for SWAPO, are the more important actors in this contest, because clear determination on their part to reach a settlement would leave little choice to SWAPO but to comply. This relationship between them and SWAPO is admittedly complicated by the fact that SWAPO has other sources of support, particularly the Soviet Union, East Germany and other Communist powers, which supply the weapons and training, as well as political and military advice. But there is little doubt that Angola, Zambia and Botswana, especially if supported by Mozambique and Tanzania, exercise the determining influence on SWAPO, as their lead is followed by the rest of the OAU. Further, their support for the settlement plan has so far prevented the Soviet Union from effectively sabotaging the agreement, e.g. in the UN Security Council. In fact, throughout the negotiations of 1977/78 the Western Five clearly recognised the role of the front-line states, especially Angola and Zambia, and the need to obtain their agreement if SWAPO was to be persuaded to participate in a peaceful independence process.

It was necessary, therefore, to persuade these states of the overall advantage to them of a settlement of the Namibian conflict, and it is clear that Angola and Zambia came to see a settlement as being in their own interests, because of their own growing domestic problems and the possible advantages (greater stability in the region and Western aid) to be gained from co-operation

with the Western plan. This does not mean they were prepared to sacrifice SWAPO or simply allow a South African "victory" in Namibia. It was rather a case of their seeing a favourable balance of advantage for themselves in persuading SWAPO to accept some compromise and take some risks in giving up its armed struggle, in the hope (for their own sakes and also SWAPO's) that SWAPO would still win a UN-monitored election and become the new government of Namibia. However, whether their political will continues to be strong enough to control SWAPO's actions and overcome the present problems remains an open question which may be partially answered at least by the results of the meeting of front-line leaders in Luanda at the beginning of March -- results which cannot be judged simply from the SWAPO-supporting public statement at the end of the meeting.

In any case, the future course of events in Namibia depends to a large degree on the policies of these front-line states. If the settlement plan is still to be salvaged at this late stage, much will depend on their will to reach a settlement. Without that will, the plan is bound to break down sooner or later, because there is no evidence that the leadership of SWAPO alone, without strong influence on it, has the political will to reach a peaceful settlement.

The public statements of Sam Nujoma, President of SWAPO, and the military actions of his organisation -- ineffective as they may be in military terms -- seem to have been calculated to cause a South African political reaction which would lead to a breaking off by South Africa of the settlement negotiations. And South African Government spokesmen and the media have not hesitated to react more or less as SWAPO has apparently wanted them to. (Recent SWAPO attacks on South African military outposts near the Angolan border, which were singularly ineffective and which demonstrated SWAPO's military weakness, were nevertheless given such publicity that they have been transformed into political victories for SWAPO, strengthening its hand internationally.) Many political analysts have concluded that SWAPO has a good chance of winning an open UN-monitored election -- or at least of emerging as the strongest single party. But, judging by his statements, Sam Nujoma seems to have doubts about this and to prefer to stay on the road of the armed struggle (encouraged no doubt by the apparent success of the Patriotic Front in Rhodesia and the earlier successes of liberation movements in Mozambique and Angola -- all in very different circumstances, of course -- as well as by the support he receives from the Soviet bloc).

Though the Western negotiators have shown extraordinary patience in their efforts to talk to him, it is evident that he cannot be relied on in negotiations, because of his inconsistency, unpredictability, apparent Marxist political motivation and ultimately his lack of a will to settle the Namibian dispute peacefully. No doubt also, political differences within SWAPO aggravate the problem of dealing with Sam Nujoma as a reliable negotiating partner. In an editorial comment the New York Times has said that Mr. Nujoma is "hard to take seriously" and has pointed out that the front-line states have repeatedly ignored his posturing.

All this serves to underscore the fact that, if a peaceful settlement is to be achieved, then it is the governments of the front-line states which must be regarded as the effective negotiating parties in the dispute with South Africa. The South African negotiators can hardly have avoided this conclusion in their many talks with the Western Five "contact group" over the past two years, but many public statements and the reports and comments of government-supporting media still leave the impression that the Government continues to regard SWAPO as the main element on the other side of the settlement equation. Two factors may account for this. The first is the Government's obsession over many years with SWAPO as the enemy and the cause of all

problems in the Territory -- an obsession which has hampered efforts to approach the future of the Territory rationally and which has even contributed to SWAPO's growing international political and diplomatic strength. (There is little doubt, for example, that Prime Minister Vorster's many personal attacks on Sam Nujoma served to give him publicity in the UN and elsewhere, which helped to build up his political reputation in international circles, in spite of the many doubts in those circles about his real leadership abilities.)

The second factor which has given SWAPO an artificially high standing in this dispute, is the product of an international trend of the past two decades, reflected especially in the United Nations, to grant legitimacy to revolutionary liberation movements engaged in armed struggles or terrorist activities. This legitimacy has been applied to movements in Africa and the Middle East, even where there is no evidence of majority support for these movements in the countries to which their activities are directed. It is as though a "divine right of revolution" were being granted to these movements which simply claim to be acting in the interests of the people against internationally and/or domestically unpopular regimes. The international legitimisation of the armed liberation struggle, and of the movements which conduct it, was greatly reinforced by the success achieved by FRELIMO in Mozambique and the MPLA in Angola -- in spite of the fact that neither of these movements has to date been able to produce the evidence, e.g. of a general election or referendum, to support their claim to represent the majority popular will in their respective countries.

In the light of this international trend, which is now not seriously challenged in international forums -- even by Western States, it is not perhaps surprising that SWAPO is seen as the main party in contention with the South African Government for control of Namibia -- in spite of its unproven political strength and its evident military weakness. Nevertheless, the realities still dictate that, if a settlement is to be achieved, more attention has to be paid to the role of the front-line states and the means of reaching agreement with them. The time may even come, if the present Western-backed negotiations break down completely, that South Africa will have to try to negotiate directly with these front-line states, in the same way as negotiations were attempted with Zambia on the Rhodesian question in 1974/75.

#### The West and the United Nations

There is some misunderstanding, too, over the role of the five Western Powers. They negotiated an agreement between the parties to the dispute, as a "contact group" of members of the Security Council, acting in accordance with a Council resolution of 1976. Once they had achieved what they considered to be an acceptable agreement, they submitted their proposal for a settlement of the Namibian situation to the Security Council (in April 1978) and it was subsequently endorsed by the Council in July. The Secretary-General was then given the role of implementing the proposal, and he produced his plan which was in turn also approved by the Security Council in September (resolution 435) and which thus became the UN plan for a settlement process, leading to an independent Namibia. Therefore, while the Western Powers carry the responsibility of having negotiated the original proposal on which the UN plan is based, and while they have undertaken to continue to work for the plan's implementation, it is now a United Nations plan (and no longer simply a Western one). The Secretary-General is in charge of implementation, under the authority of the Security Council, and this in itself creates problems, given the long history of the dispute between the UN and South Africa and the legacy of mistrust on both sides. Further, the Secretary-General has constraints on him, which the Western Powers did not have, including various differing political positions in the Security Council (with some very hostile to South Africa) and an overwhelming majority of the full UN membership, which has expressed clear support for SWAPO in the General Assembly and which is highly suspicious of any steps thought to be favouring South Africa.

(The governments comprising this UN majority have, after all, for many years regarded South Africa's control of the Territory as "illegal".)

Moreover, the Secretary General and his staff (including Mr. Martti Ahtisaari) have no meaningful leverage over any of the parties. They themselves cannot bring any real pressures to bear to influence SWAPO, the front-line states or South Africa. This could only be done by the Security Council itself, and efforts to obtain Security Council agreement are fraught with difficulties. Hence the Secretary-General must rely on other powers to influence the parties to the dispute. Here the Western Powers continue to play a role, particularly in regard to South Africa, while the front-line states are required to deal with SWAPO. Without much leverage over the front-line states as a group and almost none over SWAPO's leadership, the Western powers cannot do much to stop new demands being made (as at present) or ultimately to prevent the agreement they achieved from disintegrating. But, provided they have the potential will, they can at least refuse to allow the acceptance of unreasonable demands by the Security Council, thus keeping the door open for further negotiations and also retaining their own credibility as fair and consistent negotiators.

### South Africa

The misunderstandings and misperceptions among South Africans about the roles of the front-line states, SWAPO, the West and the UN are matched by the lack of appreciation abroad of the constraints on the South African Government. There are various pressures on the Government, from within its own ranks and from political leaders and groups in the Territory, simply to pull out of the negotiations and "go it alone" with independence. These negative pressures are based on a complete mistrust of SWAPO and the UN, as well as on growing doubts about the reliability of the Western Powers, often without a proper understanding of the real issues involved or an appreciation of the probable consequences of unilateral action in a clearly international dispute. Nevertheless these pressures have to be taken seriously, and they threaten the Government's political will to continue to pursue the goal of an internationally acceptable settlement and not to do anything which might close the door to further negotiations. Careless Western actions and statements aggravate this situation.

The present serious problems over the monitoring of SWAPO forces outside and inside Namibia have arisen out of ambiguities going back to the original Western proposal -- ambiguities which were presumably intentional at the time, with the hope then that they would be resolved or simply overridden by the gathering momentum of the settlement plan. Therefore, the written terms of the proposal and of the UN implementation plan are open to different interpretations. The Secretary-General's latest report gives one interpretation which leans strongly toward SWAPO's position, while the South African Government has a different understanding of what was intended. After the resolution of other more difficult questions of principle during the past months, it should now be possible to find a negotiated way out of the present impasse. But the danger now is that the political will to reach a compromise settlement appears to be weakening on all sides. It cannot even be assumed that Western interest in these negotiations will be sustained, if the underlying mistrust between the parties continues to push up stumbling blocks.

The Government has maintained that the interests of the people of the Territory are paramount (a consideration which, of course, should influence the approach of all parties in the dispute). But it cannot be overlooked that South Africa also has wider interests at stake in these settlement efforts (stability in the region, relations with the West, military commitments, etc.), which must ultimately govern its policies. These vital interests will hopefully help to sustain the necessary will (demonstrated in the difficult negotiations since 1977) to pursue the goal of an internationally acceptable settlement - which will mean essentially a settlement acceptable within Southern Africa.