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SOUTH WEST AFRICA/NAMIBIA

The South African Government's Response to the
U.N. Secretary-General's Report on the
Implementation of the Western Proposal

THE GOVERNMENT'S STATEMENT

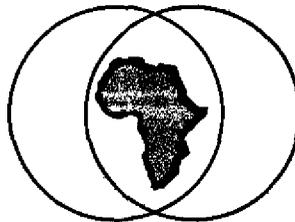
of 20 September 1978

and

AN ANALYSIS

by André du Pisani

THE SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



DIE SUID-AFRIKAANSE INSTITUUT VAN INTERNASIONALE AANGELEENTHEDE

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U.N. Secretary-General's Report on the
Implementation of the Western Proposal

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STATEMENT ON SOUTH WEST AFRICA ISSUED BY THE HON. B.J. VORSTER, PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, ON 20 SEPTEMBER 1978

South West Africa never formed part of the territorial sovereignty of South Africa. As from 1920 the Territory was administered as a mandated territory and, after the League of Nations was dissolved in 1946, successive South African Governments made it their policy to continue administering South West Africa in the spirit of the mandate, i.e. the Territory should be so administered as to promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants.

The emphasis has thus, as far as South Africa is concerned, throughout been placed on the furtherance of the interests of the inhabitants of South West Africa. This is also the reason why it is the Government's basic point of departure that the inhabitants of the Territory should themselves freely decide on their political future.

This cornerstone of our policy was formulated as follows ten years ago in an official publication, *South West Africa Survey 1967*, which was given world wide distribution:

"[It is not] necessary to embark on speculation as to what the ultimate future political pattern will be - i.e. whether and to what extent there may be amalgamations or unions of some kind, federations, commonwealth or common market arrangements, etc. *The peoples themselves will ultimately decide.*"

These were indeed prophetic words, especially when it is taken into account that they were written in 1967. Thus the political future of the Territory lies in the hands of the inhabitants. All options are open to them. The South African Government does not prescribe policy for South West Africa.

Through the years we have honoured this commitment and encouraged and assisted the peoples of South West Africa on the road to self-determination. In August 1976 the elected representatives of the people of South West Africa requested independence by 31 December 1978.

In an effort to resolve the 31 year old dispute with the United Nations over South West Africa and also in the hope of realising international recognition for an independent South West Africa, the South African Government, seventeen months ago, entered into negotiations with the five Western powers in the Security Council. In these discussions, efforts were made to resolve the issues of principle which had in the past made a solution impossible. As stated by me in Windhoek in May 1975: Perhaps the South African position was not so far removed from that of the U.N. to make agreement impossible. Over the years the main elements of the dispute centred around the following issues:

- a unitary state;
- universal adult suffrage;
- the removal of discrimination based on colour;
- the holding of free and fair elections;
- the urgency of achieving independence;

- the right of all South West Africans to return to participate peacefully in the political process;
- the release of detainees wherever held.

South Africa has committed itself to doing all this and has already gone a long way towards making possible the realisation of these goals.

It is therefore a cause of great concern and disappointment to the South African Government that, in spite of what has been achieved and the clear wishes of the people of South West Africa, we are now caught up in arguments far removed from the main questions of principle.

I say this because as far back as 25 April 1978, my Government accepted the proposal of the five Western countries, in its final and definitive form, in good faith and in time to allow for the implementation of the proposed schedule leading to independence. The people of South West Africa expected the early implementation of the proposal and thereafter international recognition of an independent South West Africa.

In terms of Security Council Resolution 431, dated 27 July 1978, adopted on the Western proposal, the Secretary-General's Special Representative visited South West Africa in August 1978 for the purpose of submitting a report on the implementation of the proposal. During his visit he received the full co-operation of the Administrator-General and the authorities concerned.

The Secretary-General's report to the Security Council, based on his Special Representative's recommendations, deviated substantially from the proposal of the Five. The most striking deviations concerned:

- the size of the U.N. military contingent;
- the introduction of a U.N. civil police component;
- the lack of consultation with the Administrator-General;
- the election date.

I do not wish to refer extensively to these matters, since they have all been dealt with in communications addressed by my Foreign Minister to the Secretary-General and the Five, as well as in discussions with them.

As far as the U.N. military component is concerned, it should be made absolutely clear that never during the discussions with the Five was a figure higher than 3 000 mentioned by them, and South Africa for its part had indicated that it could not accept a figure exceeding 2 000. It will be appreciated that in these circumstances the figure of 7 500 put forward by the Secretary-General came not only as a surprise but also as a shock. Indeed, I am aware that those who had been negotiating with us all this time must have been equally surprised. The people of South West Africa are now being confronted in the Secretary-General's report with a military component which virtually amounts to an operational peacekeeping force or an occupation force.

South Africa's objection to this figure stems from the fact that the guiding principle in the Western proposal is the establishment of a visible peace. Under such circumstances the need for a large military presence is obviated as, indeed, the Five pointed out to South Africa when they sought

a reduction in our troop numbers. By the same token the order of numbers now being suggested by the Secretary-General in his report is totally unacceptable to South Africa.

During the lengthy negotiations the Five were repeatedly reminded of the political and psychological effect of such a large number of U.N. personnel on the people of South West Africa. The impartiality of the U.N. is rendered suspect by the continued and sustained assistance to SWAPO to the exclusion of all other political parties in South West Africa. Thus, for example, SWAPO is recognized by the U.N. General Assembly as "the sole and authentic representative" of the people of South West Africa and receives considerable financial assistance. Furthermore, it enjoys extensive facilities to beam propaganda to the Territory and elsewhere. Indeed the U.N.'s whole information system itself supports SWAPO.

The proposal of the Five specifically defines that during the transitional period the maintenance of law and order would rest with the existing police forces. There is no provision in the proposal for a U.N. police contingent as proposed in the Secretary-General's report, and while subsequent exchanges were somewhat reassuring in this regard, there is still an insistence on the figure of 360 civil police - an unnecessarily high number.

In the course of the negotiations with the Five, it was often stressed that the underlying idea was that the Administrator-General and the Representative of the Secretary-General should, in keeping with the vital requirements of close co-operation and mutual trust, consult each other in many fields, including the composition and size of the U.N. military component. We received specific assurances from the Five in this regard. Nevertheless, no such consultation took place in determining the figure of 7 500, nor has there as yet been any consultation on the composition of the U.N. forces.

The report of the Secretary-General does not offer any real hope that it might be possible to reach consensus on the timing of elections in South West Africa. In fact, it creates the impression that the date for elections is unimportant.

A full three months lapsed after South Africa's acceptance on 25 April before the proposal was, for the first time, referred to the Security Council. This in itself made it impossible to adhere to the programme envisaged for the electoral process and at the same time to observe the independence date. This delay was caused by SWAPO's intransigence.

The Five tell us SWAPO has accepted their proposal. In fact only last weekend Nujoma repudiated the proposal. The reason is that the proposal provides for free elections in the Territory and SWAPO has no confidence that it can win an election. SWAPO feels the only way it can assure itself of assuming power is by disorder and violence. The proposal definitively provides for elections and independence by 31 December at the latest and for a run-up period of seven months before elections.

As already stated, this programme was possible when South Africa accepted the proposal. The registration of voters, a long drawn-out process which SWAPO strenuously opposed, has virtually been completed. The registration of voters is opposed by SWAPO and others despite South Africa's willingness to allow the process to be fully examined by the U.N. Again this testifies to SWAPO's delaying tactics.

SWAPO wants to build up bases and supplies of weapons and to train terrorists to attack South West Africa.

SWAPO's firm intention is to keep on delaying elections. The people of the Territory, however, do not want to delay elections.

I reiterate, South Africa has always accepted the principle that it is for the people themselves to determine their own future. It is not for the Secretary-General or the United Nations or any other entity to delay the process leading to self-determination and independence.

South Africa accepted the proposal of the Five in good faith, but no-one can blame the South African Government for being unwilling to accept extended and amended provisions of a proposal which was described to us as being final and definitive. Indeed, the Five pledged that they would stand by their proposal.

During the past few days the most strenuous efforts were made by the South African Foreign Minister and the Five to overcome the differences. Regrettably these efforts have not succeeded. While the South African Government does not wish to close doors, it cannot allow this impasse to continue indefinitely.

Bearing in mind the consequences of these developments for the people of South West Africa as well as those of Southern Africa as a whole, the Government has given its most serious attention to all the alternatives. The Cabinet in its deliberations yesterday concluded that the people of South West Africa in accordance with their wishes would have to be given the opportunity to elect their own representatives. This will be done on the basis of universal adult suffrage in countrywide elections in order to establish unequivocally who has the right to speak for the people of South West Africa.

The people of South West Africa have clearly signified their desire to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and independence. Thus more than 85% of the estimated eligible voters in the Territory have enthusiastically registered to vote, this notwithstanding intimidation from certain quarters not to do so.

All options remain open to them. We will not prescribe to them.

The body to be elected may:-

- decide to draw up a constitution or postpone the drafting thereof;
- decide to proceed with the implementation of the proposal of the Five;
- decide to accept the Secretary-General's report.

They will, of course, also be free to express themselves on numerous other matters, which will be dealt with in the relevant proclamation to be issued shortly.

AN ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICA'S DECISION ON NAMIBIA

André du Pisani

Introduction

South Africa's recent decision to go it alone on the elections in Namibia now belongs to history. Some observers typified it as an ominously orchestrated decision, with likely consequences too ghastly to contemplate. For others it constituted a justifiable and rational response to the double-dealings of the Western Powers, SWAPO and the United Nations. Still other observers viewed it as a logical response to an escalating threat of Marxist intervention in the Southern African arena. Be it as it may, this decision is bound to have unforeseen consequences for the whole of Southern Africa.

The purpose of this brief paper is neither to justify nor to rationalise this decision, but to attempt an explanation. Why was it taken? Which variables constituted the overall cognitive map on which the Pretoria Government had to operate? What were the other options open to Pretoria? Ultimately, what may be the implications of the decision?

Before attempting to answer these questions, a general comment relating to the absence of *mutual trust* that characterised the negotiations themselves, seems warranted. Compromise can only succeed in an atmosphere of mutual trust and mutual commitment to reach agreement. The choice and success of diplomatic techniques to induce agreement becomes far more critical, where objectives are fundamentally incompatible and both sides maintain strong commitments to their respective positions.

Pretoria's cognitive map

Let us now attempt a reconstruction of Pretoria's cognitive map that provided the information inputs for this decision. Bearing constantly in mind, however, that the psychological perception of decision-makers of their operational environment is far more significant than that environment itself.¹ In my view, the following premises and variables constituted part of Pretoria's assessment of the Namibian situation:

- (a) Pretoria quite clearly operated within *a set of domestic restraints*. She had to cope with her own propaganda of a firm commitment to independence for Namibia within a specified time dimension. Clearly Pretoria became in a sense a victim of her own propaganda. Secondly, Pretoria was faced with the danger of an erosion away from the centrist DTA (Democratic Turnhalle Alliance), which she clearly supports overtly, while a DTA-government is construed to be compatible with her own national interests. The fragmentation in white politics in Namibia and the realization that a prolonged transitional process would favour the radical forces, could well have caused concern in Pretoria. Furthermore, an internationally recognized independence would imply participation by radical forces, such as SWAPO, which could result in a SWAPO victory. And if SWAPO were to win, then a redistribution of wealth, nationalisation and the introduction of African socialism would follow. This in turn might trigger a white exodus, and lead to socio-economic and political instability in the Territory, which are clearly not in Pretoria's own interests.

- (b) *SWAPO's political behaviour.* The missile attack on Katima Mulilo in August and the consequent death of ten South African soldiers, confirmed South Africa's perception that SWAPO subscribes to the dictum that power flows from the barrel of a gun. Andreas Shipanga's reaction to the Katima Mulilo attack "as an attempt by Sam Nujoma to wreck a settlement", must have been welcomed as support for Pretoria's view, while his remark - that Sam Nujoma "does not want to come back and subject himself to an election" - fitted into the South African assessment of SWAPO's future political behaviour.

Shortly after Katima came Sam Nujoma's message read at the *Namibia Day* on Saturday 26 August, 1978, in which he reiterated that SWAPO would not take part in elections until the South African forces were "totally withdrawn from Namibian soil". Nujoma also gave a renewed commitment to the continuation of the armed struggle "until the Territory as a whole is liberated from South Africa's illegal occupation". This was followed by statements by Justice M.T. Steyn that SWAPO would not abide by a truce, not even under UN supervision.

- (c) *SWAPO's logistical and military capabilities.* The South African military assessment was probably that, following the military incursions into Angola - directed at the SWAPO bases of Cassinga and Vietnam - and the latest one into Zambia, SWAPO would require several months to re-establish its supply, training and administrative infra-structure in Southern Angola (which may be an under-assessment of Soviet capacity to reinforce SWAPO). Any delay in the transitional process would thus expose Namibia to renewed SWAPO attack. Furthermore, South Africa's military assessment of the conflict situation seems to be based on the premise that South Africa will be in a position to contain any foreseeable escalation in the military situation for a considerable time.
- (d) *South Africa's perception of the Western proposal.* The South African Government viewed the Western proposal as "final and definitive". The diplomatic implication of this perception was clearly that once all the parties involved had accepted the proposal, they should be morally bound to honour the "letter and the spirit" of the proposal. In South Africa's view, UN Secretary-General Waldheim's report contains important deviations from the Western proposal accepted on April 25, 1978. According to the Prime Minister's statement of 20 September, these are:-
- (i) the size of the military component of UNTAG (UN Transition Assistance Group);
 - (ii) the introduction of a UN civil police component of 360 officers;
 - (iii) the lack of consultation with the Administrator-General; and
 - (iv) the election date.
- (e) *The nature of political change in Southern Africa (Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia) in general and Namibia in particular.* This has constituted a traumatic experience for South Africa's policy-makers, because it has removed the traditional *cordon sanitaire* between the Republic and a hostile Black Africa. In the case of Namibia, South Africa has had to face many hard decisions and developments: e.g. the policy of ethnic particularism was largely abolished; Pretoria had to amputate part of

itself by abandoning the National Party of SWA; the Turnhalle experiment did not quite work out the way Pretoria wanted it to. Then the growing realization that SWAPO might govern Namibia, and hence effectively remove this remaining part of the *cordon sanitaire*, with the accompanying security, ideological, and political implications, conceivably influenced the latest decision fairly directly.

- (f) *Personal idiosyncrasies.* The decision on Namibia was unavoidably related to the personal stakes of rivals in the Prime Minister's race. The question has been asked: Did the candidates perhaps try to outbid each other with brinkmanship in the hope that it might have a bearing on their respective chances in the Prime Minister's stakes? Or was it purely a matter of "Congress pathology"? For instance, did one candidate's demonstration of brinkmanship at the National Party Congress of the Orange Free State, when he implied that South Africa would not allow SWAPO to govern Namibia, perhaps reflect more than a matter of scoring points against his rivals? In any case, the need to make a decision of this importance on Namibia came at an unfortunate time for the politicians directly concerned in both the Namibian question and the consequences of Prime Minister Vorster's retirement.
- (g) *South Africa's assessment of the West's capabilities to enforce threats.* The underlying premise seems to have been that the Western powers do not have the capabilities to enforce economic sanctions effectively, and thus to lend credibility to their proposed threats. Furthermore, South Africa is seen to be far less vulnerable to these threats than is generally appreciated by the Western powers. In addition, South Africa has a history of unilateral decisions relating to Namibia. Some of the most recent include the consultations of the peoples of South West Africa (1976); the registration of voters; etc. These actions did not result in more than symbolic condemnation from the Western powers.

Tentative conclusion

On the basis of the previous analysis it seems justified to conclude that some of the reasons advanced by the South African Government for going it her way in Namibia - namely the size of the UN military contingent, the introduction of a UN civil police force, the lack of consultation with the AG, the election date, and also the involvement of the issue of Walvis Bay by the Western powers - served only as legitimation for a decision which was based on other premises and objectives. However, one cannot fail to show some sympathy for the South African stance, especially as far as the real intentions of SWAPO are concerned. It seems that this may be a classic case of a midwife suffering from cognitive dissonance, because she found it hard to accept and hold in her mind at the same time several conflicting and disturbing pieces of information. The South African Government desperately tried to reconcile this worrying state of affairs diplomatically, and when that failed or was perceived to be too risky, it suppressed some of the information and "threw some of the pieces away" to fit its own perception of the situation. Pretoria's own ideological motives and national interests thus became guidelines to selective perception and recall of information.

Some implications

Apart from the relatively obvious implications which might follow (but need not necessarily follow) from this decision - namely, an escalation in a

protracted guerilla war, the possibility of greater foreign involvement in the war, failure to secure international recognition for an independent Namibia and the likelihood of selective sanctions against South Africa - there are three other sets of implications which deserve consideration:-

(a) *Implications relating to the domestic political scene*

The type of *government system*, after the election, will in all probability be a multi-ethnic coalition constituted by the DTA alone, or by the DTA and AKTUR. All the other parties, namely SWAPO, the NNF and SWAPO-D, have stated publicly that they will not participate in the forthcoming elections. In concrete terms the elections will amount to an exercise in political metaphysics.

The pattern of *opposition forces* may be predominantly of the external type, espousing a zero-sum orientation to politics. The predominant lines of cleavage will be ideological, revolving around alternative governmental and economic systems and around the *legitimacy* of the system itself. This crisis of legitimacy may result in the powers that be calling upon the South African Government to sustain it by military force. The very presence of these forces may then provide rationalization for the external opposition forces, firstly, to exercise the diplomatic option of securing the status of a government in exile, and, secondly, to escalate its military actions against the powers that be in Namibia. In a way the South African Government's decision may thus be perceived by the opposition forces as a rationalization for the continuation of violence on their part - which will be extremely unfortunate.

(b) *Limitation of bargaining options*

There seems little doubt that this decision will limit South Africa's own bargaining options, and also the options of the five Western powers. The reason for this stems from what has been called, in other circumstances, the element of "negotiation by equivocation".² This element involves the question as to whether the negotiators on all sides will really have authority or a mandate to negotiate seriously, or indeed whether they will have any mandate at all, beyond the general one of protecting their own interests.

In the case of the newly elected constituent assembly in Namibia, it may find itself without legitimacy to negotiate on behalf of the people of that Territory with the UN or with the five Western powers (while Pretoria may well claim that it has this legitimacy, based on the proposed elections). In this respect, Namibia may well end up in the club of international pariahs.

(c) *A repetition of the Rhodesian analogy*

The decision to go it alone on Namibia may ultimately result in a repetition of the present Rhodesian impasse. This eventual outcome seems unavoidable, because, given the internationalisation of the Namibian issue and the whole legal legacy relating to the status of the Territory, it is difficult to envisage how South Africa can structure the political future of Namibia unilaterally, i.e. without the participation of SWAPO and the United Nations.

The ambiguities and uncertainties in the process of self-determination for Namibia will in all probability not finally be settled by the South African decision of September 20, 1978.

FOOTNOTES

1. The *operational environment* may be defined as those factors which an outside observer judges to be relevant and significant in explaining an event or state of affairs. The *psychological environment* constitutes the actor's image of reality.

2. See, Philip E. Mosely, "Some Soviet Techniques of Negotiation", in *Negotiating with the Russians*, edited by R. Dennett and J.E. Johnson, New York: 1951, p. 274.

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