

THE SOVIET UNION AND SOUTHERN AFRICA

John Barratt

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John Barratt is Director General of the South African Institute of International Affairs.

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Soviet African Policies: Brief Historical Background

In order to obtain some historical perspective for an examination of recent and current Soviet activities in Southern Africa, it may be useful to look very briefly at the Soviet record on the continent as a whole.

To begin with, there are four introductory comments to be made:

Firstly, there is a widespread ignorance in this country about the Soviet Union and its policies, because of problems such as the lack of adequate information, the fact that very little serious research on the subject is being done at any of our Universities, and distortions created by our own political perceptions. Objective analysis, therefore, is difficult and rare; generalisations and over-simplifications are common. This article is a small attempt to contribute to clearer thinking, but I personally cannot claim to be an expert on the subject, and I do not wish to be categorical in any of my conclusions.

Secondly, there is a similar, less excusable, ignorance about Africa - for the same sorts of reasons. It is relevant to mention this here, because it is not possible to analyse accurately Soviet relations with African countries simply on the basis of Soviet policies and actions, without considering the responses and sometimes the initiatives of the African states themselves. There is obviously an interaction in any relationship between states, and one needs to look at both sides of the equation. Moreover, our continent does not provide the Soviet Union - or any other power - with a static situation in which it can move at will, and in fact Soviet policy has shown itself to be very sensitive to changing developments in Africa.

Thirdly, it is also important to bear in mind the relationship between foreign and domestic policies - on both the Soviet and African sides. It has been said that "foreign policy is the pursuit of domestic policy by other means". Soviet foreign policy may not be as much affected by domestic considerations as in a democratic society, for instance the United States, but nevertheless one can be sure that there are influences

and constraints imposed domestically, which one should be thoroughly aware of for a proper understanding of the foreign policy. But here again one is handicapped by insufficient information. The same applies to African states where, for instance, links with outside powers are often established for reasons of internal security of the regime or because of economic development needs, rather than for ideological reasons, or even for foreign policy considerations - whether these links be with the West or the East.

The fourth and final introductory comment relates to the danger of generalisations. Soviet policies have varied from one African country to another and they have changed under successive governments and in response to changing African circumstances. Consistency has thus not been a notable characteristic of Soviet policy in Africa over the years, even if one could argue that the ultimate goal of extending Soviet influence has always been there. Anyone looking for a consistent strategy based simply on Soviet ideological statements, will be disappointed. Likewise, the response of African states has fluctuated wildly - factors which complicate any attempt to look for clear patterns and developing trends. One must therefore resist the temptation to over-simplify in order to fit events into preconceived patterns, even if the eventual picture which emerges is a rather muddled one, without clear conclusions.

Russian interest in Africa did not, of course, start after the revolution in 1917. There were various probings in Africa by the Czars, and it is interesting to recall that Russia had a particular interest in Ethiopia - motivated in part in the mid-19th century by a desire to create a link between the orthodox churches of the respective countries, and by geopolitical and strategic reasons. In the context of the scramble for Africa and of the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 the Russians made efforts to threaten the position of their main European rivals, in particular the British, and for instance they gave military support to Ethiopia in concert with the French. During the Anglo-Boer War the Boers received considerable Russian sympathy and even some practical support.

On the whole, not much of a concrete nature was achieved in Africa in this

earlier period, but it can be noted that opportunism was a characteristic of Russian policy before the revolution, as it has been since.

Policy since the revolution can be divided into various successive phases which can only be listed briefly in this background summary :

In the immediate post-revolutionary phase attention was focused mainly on internal changes and on the need to counter possible intervention from outside. In this context the fomenting of unrest in African colonial territories was seen as one way of undermining Britain and France and of promoting socialist revolution in Europe. Lenin saw the colonial areas as imperialism's weakest link. During this phase the Soviet régime, through the Comintern, gradually became more active in trying to exploit the beginnings of nationalism and pan-Africanism on the continent, mainly by relying on the activities of the communist parties in the European imperial countries, particularly the British and French, and of other activists, including American Blacks. As an example, there were attempts to infiltrate Marcus Garvey's pan-Africanist movement, with limited success. Garvey himself remained a staunch capitalist.

The beginning of a new phase was marked by the sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 with a decided change in the approach to Africa (as in many other facets of communist thinking). Influenced partly no doubt by the lack of any previous great success, but chiefly by what were seen as the great opportunities offered by the world depression, a more aggressive revolutionary strategy was adopted. This was known as the "united front from below", involving a move away from reliance on "bourgeois" nationalists, towards the concept of a "fighting front" led by the "proletariat". European communist parties were, for instance, urged to step up their activities by organising local parties and trade unions in the colonies and by penetrating peasant organisations. George Padmore from Trinidad, as Secretary of a new International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUC-NW), closely connected with the Comintern, became active at this time. He became closely associated with rising African Nationalist leaders, particularly in British colonies. Jomo Kenyatta was one, and later Kwame Nkrumah.

Although this phase in the late 1920s and early 1930s was one of increasing activity of the Soviet Union in Africa, it is difficult to assess the degree of

success achieved. But at least a basis for influence was being laid within the growing nationalist movements. In any case, however, events in Europe (which was obviously still the area of highest priority for the Soviet Union) intervened to change Soviet policy dramatically. The growth of fascism in the 1930s and particularly Adolf Hitler's coming to power in Germany in 1933, caused a decline in Soviet involvement in Africa.

Therefore, the next phase, from the mid-1930s, was one of Soviet withdrawal. By 1935 the Comintern had given up its strategy of the "united front from below" and had instead begun to promote broad anti-fascist coalitions. Alarmed by the threat arising in Europe and fearing possible isolation, Moscow began to re-align its policies towards France and Britain, and the motive of undermining them in Africa was greatly reduced. The ITUC-NW was disbanded, and its journal "The Negro Worker", which had been used to disseminate Soviet propaganda, lost its subsidies. As a result, George Padmore denounced the Soviet Union for abandoning the cause of African liberation, and he in turn was expelled from the Communist Party in 1934. Padmore's response has been echoed in many statements since then by African Nationalists, Civil Rights activists in the United States, and those espousing Black Consciousness in more recent times: "It is high time for the Negroes to stop depending on other people to fight their battles". Many Africans who had been aligned with the Comintern followed Padmore in breaking with it. As the author, Edward Wilson, has commented: "They had suddenly come fact-to-face with the long-standing reality that Russia's own national security interests constituted the prime determinant of its policy towards Africa." This reality was, of course, even more strongly underlined by the next and even more dramatic change in Soviet policy in Europe, namely the Soviet Union's pact with Nazi Germany in 1939.

It was to be nearly 20 years before the Soviet Union became actively involved in Africa again. World War II and post-war reconstruction intervened, and Stalin was preoccupied with the prime objective of securing domination over as much of Eastern Europe as possible. But nevertheless it is surprising that the Soviet Government apparently underestimated the speed with which the change would take place in the colonial world generally and in Africa in particular. The initial renewed African involvement by the Soviet Union was in the second half of the 1950s, and it was the 1955 Bandung Conference of African and Asian

states which appeared to alert the Soviet Government, now under Nikita Khrushchev, to the need to become more active, in order to counter both the new Chinese Communist influence and to challenge the global super power status of the United States. But very soon Moscow ran into trouble with its more activist policy which sought to present the Soviet Union as the example for newly independent states to follow. The Belgian Congo was seen as a potentially rich prize, and the chaos which followed the Congo's independence in 1960 appeared to offer Moscow a considerable opportunity, with Patrice Lumumba, whom Khrushchev backed, as the first Prime Minister. But the U.N. operation, although it caused acute problems for the U.N. itself and for the West over the next few years, did not by any means work in favour of the Soviet Union which strongly opposed it.

The setback in the Congo, among other negative experiences, caused a re-appraisal in Moscow and a recognition that the optimism about the revolutionary tide in Africa and Asia was premature. The first half of the sixties, therefore, witnessed a different phase in Soviet policy in which the Soviet Government tried to distinguish between those ex-colonial countries where it felt there was a genuine revolutionary potential, and those countries where there was not. Among those in the former category, to which special attention was paid, were Algeria and Ghana, but these two countries were fairly soon to demonstrate the risks for the Soviet Union in Africa. In June 1965, President Ahmed Ben Bella of Algeria was overthrown by Colonel Boumedienne. Although Soviet interests were not greatly affected by the change in the person of the leader, Ben Bella's overthrow highlighted the potential danger of internal challenges to leadership, which could in other cases come from "reactionary" sources. This danger was then confirmed when President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was ousted in February 1966.

So a second re-appraisal of the Soviet policy approach was undertaken, and it seems that two key conclusions emerged : 1) The "revolutionary democratic" leaders in the Third World suffered from such monumental faults that they would probably never effect a transition to genuine socialism. 2) The Third World generally offered no promise of great revolutionary advance in the foreseeable future, because "reactionary" forces still retained the upper hand over "progressive" forces everywhere. As one Soviet writer put it with respect to Africa, "the effective achievements of the National Liberation Movement on the continent, the establishment, in a few years, of dozens of new national states,

tended to create the erroneous impression that the struggle was almost at an end, that the way to liberation was easy, and that the forces of imperialism were played out"; but now "as the African revolution gains in depth, the internal weaknesses and objective difficulties in the liberation movement on the continent become increasingly evident". At the heart of the trouble, according to Soviet commentators, lay the prevailing conservatism of African society. (These conclusions are summarised from the analysis made by the American scholar, David Albright.)

It was from the basis of these conclusions that a new Soviet approach emerged during the second half of the 60s, an approach which apparently has continued to influence Soviet policies until the present time. And one can add here, by the way, that what has happened in Zimbabwe will have served to confirm again these conclusions for the Soviet Union.

The basic Soviet approach since the end of the 1960s

It is necessary now to say a little more about this new, more realistic approach of the Soviet Union, as it applies to Southern Africa, as well as to other parts of the Third World, and I believe it is important to see Soviet policy towards our region in the context of the Soviet global policy, rather than in an isolated fashion.

The new approach which developed over the years from 1966, was formally sanctioned in 1971 by Premier Kosygin in his report to the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This approach to the Third World, not only Africa, has been characterised by commentators as the "strategy of counter-imperialism" which has several components. These include emphasis on state and political movements of some inherent importance, rather than on those which might qualify as "progressive" or potentially revolutionary by Soviet standards, and also a geo-political emphasis. This coincided with the allocation of much greater resources to the development of the Soviet Union's naval power in order to extend its global reach, and it meant that Soviet policy would now be to select intrinsically significant countries for special attention. It also meant, in effect, a down-grading of the Third World as a whole amongst Soviet priorities, including a reduction of Soviet interest in Africa generally - although, of course, one must remind oneself that relations with Africa had never surpassed other much

more important issues on the list of Soviet priorities, such as relations with the United States, Europe and East Asia (including China and Japan).

In Africa, Nigeria is a case in point where the Soviet Union supported the central government under Yakuba Gowon against successionist Biafra under Ojukwu, and Gowon eventually received military assistance from the USSR. Thus the Soviet Union emerged after the Nigerian civil war with enhanced stature and a measure of goodwill in this significant African country.

The reduction of Moscow's concern with Africa as a whole is indicated by aid figures. Comparing the decade of 1954 to 1964 (i.e. including the post-Bandung Conference period) with the decade from 1965 to 1974, we see a considerable drop in the figures for aid to Africa, while total Soviet aid to the Third World (concentrated on particular countries) was increasing considerably. In percentages, Africa's share of overall Soviet aid fell from 47% to 13% and sub-Saharan Africa's share from 13% to 4%, indicating that most of even the reduced African aid was concentrated in the North African tier.

Interventionist Policies from 1975 and the Focus on Southern Africa

While I believe it can be maintained that the basic Soviet approach has not changed, there is no doubt that the Soviet Union has committed itself more actively in Africa since the mid-1970s. In line with the approach previously described, this commitment has been mainly in regions considered to be of significant importance, namely the Horn of Africa - particularly Ethiopia - and Southern Africa - particularly Angola. And North-West Africa may be another region for the concentration of Soviet attention, as has been suggested by Professor Dirk Kunert.

However, apart from these regions being of intrinsic significance to the Soviet Union for geopolitical, strategic, natural resources or other reasons, there is another important factor which draws Soviet attention to them. They are all regions where actual and potential conflict exists. This is the crucial factor which provides the Soviet Union with the opportunity to intervene. Without a situation of conflict, the Soviet Union's ability to exert its influence is very limited, and I believe that the course of developments in these regions demonstrates that the Soviet Union's influence increases in direct

proportion to the escalation of conflict, and decreases as the level of conflict subsides. The supply of weapons and other military support is the chief means by which the Soviet Union achieves this greater influence in conflict situations.

To this crucial factor one can possibly add the related factor of under-development, which like the factor of conflict, contributes to instability, thus inviting intervention.

Rather than spend time describing the course of Soviet involvement in Southern Africa, one may assume some familiarity with events in this region during the past few years and turn rather to examine possible Soviet interests and objectives in the region, as well as the means used to achieve these objectives. Events of recent times will simply be referred to for the purposes of illustration.

Soviet Interests and Objectives in Southern Africa

Interests and objectives are, of course, not the same thing. A country can have interests it wishes to pursue, but lack the means. Therefore, it may realistically draw back from translating those interests into actual foreign policy objectives. Or it could, more unrealistically, set foreign policy objectives without having the capability to achieve them. In any case, it is important, in assessing the foreign policy of the Soviet Union or any other power, to relate the apparent objectives to the capabilities of that power and the means employed.

The first and overriding objective of the Soviet Union, of which its Southern African policies form part, is to assert itself as a global power. With the build-up of its strategic forces, including the very successful missile development and the rapid development of the navy, the aim has been a capability to project Soviet power in all quarters of the globe. However, this global military capability is largely pointless, barring a major nuclear conflagration, unless it produces wider political influence for the Soviet Union. To achieve this influence, and to be able to exploit its power to that end, the Soviet Union must thus be involved in all major international issues. As Andrei Gromyko remarked in April 1971 : "Today there is no question of any significance which can be decided without the Soviet Union or in opposition to it."

Southern Africa is one such question which both the Soviet Union and the West regard as having global significance, even if not the highest priority. It is a regional issue where the remnants of colonialism have long been the cause of international concern, and where the question of racial conflict has clearly become internationalised, with universal implications. Furthermore, by projecting itself into Africa militarily and politically, the Soviet Union has sought to have a voice in African affairs generally, and to have influence on the OAU, rather than remain a passive spectator.

Secondly, there is the related factor of the global competition for influence between the super-powers. In this context the Soviet Union seeks to increase its influence in Southern Africa in relation to that of the United States, and to undermine American and Western influence generally. Historically, the countries of this region have been closely tied to the West which still has considerable influence here. If governments in the region increase their support politically for the Soviet Union, this will mean, in the Soviet view, an equivalent reduction in Western influence. The Soviets see it as a "zero sum" game, which is, of course, not necessarily the case.

A third objective is to prevent the extension of Chinese influence. This is a product of the bitter Sino-Soviet rivalry over the past two decades, with China trying to develop a role as a leader of the Third World, and the Soviet Union, for its part, seeking to co-opt Third World countries to its sphere of influence. It was, as mentioned earlier, the Bandung Conference of 1955, in which China was involved, which served as a spur to re-activate Soviet interest in what became known as the Third World.

While the anti-China objective applies throughout the African continent and the rest of the Third World, it has special relevance to Southern Africa, because in this region China was being relatively active and successful, until the Angolan War. There were various Chinese aid projects, notably the well publicised Tanzam Railroad (which has, of course, not proved very successful since its opening), but even more significant was the Chinese influence on the liberation movements. All the movements operating in Southern Africa learned from the Chinese guerrilla experience, and the Russians did not have much to offer them in this regard. In addition, some of the most successful movements

received considerable Chinese assistance by way of training and weapons, and they became closely aligned to China politically. The notable examples were Frelimo in Mozambique, UNITA in Angola and ZANU in Zimbabwe. Tanzania, which also had close Chinese links, provided Frelimo with its main bases and training camps, and an important origin of the close relationship between Tanzania, Frelimo and ZANU, which still exists, was their common links with China.

Although the picture changed dramatically after the Soviet success in supporting the MPLA in Angola, with China's fortunes declining, Soviet resentment of China's role has continued to be frequently expressed. Soviet commentators have, for instance, accused China of seeking "to present Maoism as the only new and revolutionary liberation doctrine suited to African conditions" and of setting the nationalist liberation movements "against the world socialist system and the international workers' movement".

The fourth objective, which is really a product of those already mentioned, is apparently to have an effective presence in the Southern African region. Without such a presence - in the form of diplomatic missions, aid projects, military assistance or naval visits - the political influence is not evident and cannot be very effectively promoted. To be effective, of course, this presence must also be sustained and not just sporadic, and it must be there with local support. Local support, particularly official governmental agreement, gives the presence legitimacy in the eyes of the country concerned and of the world. Otherwise, the Soviet Union, or any other outside power for that matter, runs the risk of being accused of illegitimate intervention.

The fifth apparent objective is the one that comes nearest to being ideological, namely the radicalisation of the region. Moscow no doubt hopes that in the future there will be African states aligned with the Soviet Union, which can be regarded as genuinely Marxist-Leninist. But Moscow does not regard any state as being in that position now, and it is doubtful whether the Soviets envisage this as a practical possibility in the foreseeable future. For instance, the MPLA and Frelimo governments which rule Angola and Mozambique, respectively, and which sometimes call themselves Marxist-Leninists, are still described in Moscow as "revolutionary democrats". The Deputy Director of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party

stated in a 1979 article, entitled "On the Countries of Socialist Orientation", that in these countries "there have been no irreversible processes" yet. Mr. V. Solodovnikov, Director of the African Institute in Moscow in the 1960s and early 1970s, and subsequently the Soviet Ambassador to Zambia (where he still is), stated in 1976 that "a specific feature of the development of the socialist-oriented countries in Africa is that even after their choice of the non-capitalist way they are still in the orbit of the world capitalist economic system".

In other words, the objective for the time being, based on realistic expectations (and the Soviet Union often shows a high degree of realism), falls short of the domination of the region through compliant, ideologically pure régimes, or of incorporating Southern African countries fully into the Soviet bloc. But radical black governments are nevertheless seen as an advantage to the Soviet Union. Soviet commentators, including Anatoly Gromyko (Director of the African Institute in Moscow and son of Foreign Minister Gromyko), have written of the benefits to the Soviet Union of the collapse of the Portuguese empire in Africa, and have indicated that Moscow expects similar political transitions to more radical governments in other countries of the region to produce the same benefits. Not least among these benefits would, of course, be the fact that the West cannot easily relate to radical governments.

Although the radical governments of Angola and Mozambique are thus not regarded as true Marxist-Leninists and as part of the Soviet bloc, the Soviet Union is nevertheless trying to bring them more closely into the Soviet orbit, through such devices as Friendship and Co-operation Treaties - but not yet with Mutual Assistance Agreements.

Sixthly, on this list of probable objectives, which one is attempting to distil from the overall picture of Soviet policies and actions, there is the very crucial issue of the mineral resources of Southern Africa. But whether there is an obvious Soviet objective in this regard or simply an important, but undefined, Soviet interest, is not clear.

From Soviet writings it is abundantly clear that Moscow is very well aware of the extent and value of these resources, and it would be very surprising if

the Soviets did not have an intense interest in the question of who has access to them. Moscow must be as aware as any other government that several of these strategically important minerals are in short supply in today's world and that in some cases the minerals are at present found only in Southern Africa and the Soviet Union. One can, therefore, safely assume that there is great Soviet interest in these Southern African resources, but it is more difficult to be sure what the Soviet policy objective is in this regard. Soviet commentators are not much help, as they tend simply to stress the West's alleged designs on these minerals, without indicating any Soviet concern to have access to them. But this does not, of course, exclude the strong possibility that the Soviet Union would like to have guaranteed access to the resources - even if it does not need them itself at present - so as to be able, if necessary in the future, to deny supply to the West. This would obviously greatly increase the Soviet Union's international bargaining position and its global power generally.

The question still remains, however : even if there is a strong Soviet desire to be in this ideal position, is its achievement currently a policy objective? Many Western and South African commentators do in fact see it as a major Soviet objective, but it seems to me that more evidence is needed to reach that clear conclusion. Such evidence, including the allocation of the necessary financial and military resources, would have to indicate clearly the intense involvement and degree of sustained commitment to the region, which would be required to achieve this major objective.

It is not sufficient to point to Soviet support for liberation movements and radical governments in the region, because this can be adequately explained by other probable Soviet objectives. Moreover, the degree of support has not been very great, compared with the Soviet Union's commitments to other regions (not including its own satellites in Eastern Europe). Apart from the special case of Afghanistan, the example of South-East Asia, India, Cuba and several countries in the Middle East, as well as Ethiopia and, before that, Somalia in Africa itself all demonstrate a much greater commitment than to any Southern African country, including Angola. It is true that there are Soviet weapons in several African countries and they are still coming in, including tanks and Mig 17 fighters in Mozambique, Zambia and Angola. But can these flows of weapons to any

Southern African country compare with the situation in, for instance, Iraq which is reported to be currently equipped with 340 Russian planes and 3 500 tanks and other armoured vehicles.

The actual practice of the Soviet Union thus shows that all these other cases enjoy much higher priority on the Soviet list of strategic interests, and a much greater commitment of military and economic resources on the part of the Soviet Union. The record also shows that Soviet policy in Southern Africa, like its policy in Africa generally, has not been as consistent and sustained as would be required, if it had decided that its main objective was a "take-over" of the region and its minerals.

My tentative conclusion, therefore, on this particular factor of mineral resources (to which I have devoted more attention, because of its topical interest) is that there is an intense Soviet interest in the question and extensive knowledge about the magnitude of the resources and the future potential of the region, as well as an acute awareness of the importance of access to these resources for the West. It would appear, too, that in the future - even without a world conflict - the Soviet Union might find access to these resources very useful, in the event that its own supplies become inadequate, not only for its own purposes, but for its satellites or allies. Further, in the case of a world conflict, it would be a very significant advantage to be able to deny these minerals to the West. But, short of such a conflict, the Soviet Union would be seriously constrained in using minerals as a weapon against the West, because of its dependence - and the growing dependence of some of its satellites - on the West for trade, investment and technological flows, and also because of probable African reaction and resistance. These and other constraints make it highly unlikely that Soviet policy-makers would give top priority to an unrealistic objective. All things considered, it is more likely that at most some access to, and some control of, Southern Africa's mineral resources constitute one of the longer term objectives, to be achieved as and when opportunity occurs, but without taking risks which would arouse strong Western and African reaction.

Seventh, and finally, there is the general military/strategic objective

which is linked to and supports other objectives, and which again is part of the overall global power aims of the Soviet Union. This objective would include ensuring access to ports, the possible establishment of bases, if these should be needed, and at least the posing of a threat to Western freedom of movement and security on the sea routes around Southern Africa. Moscow is well aware, for instance, of the amount of Western oil which is carried on routes around Africa - more than half of Western Europe's imports and 20% of the United States'. Indeed, Soviet commentators frequently mention these facts to illustrate Western vulnerabilities.

However, as with the question of minerals, this does not mean that the Soviet Union has any high priority, short-term objective to interrupt Western traffic on these sea lanes. Rather, its objective is probably to put itself in a better position to be able to influence events effectively, if the need arises, but not at the risk of provoking Western counter-moves and/or African reaction which would only serve instead to strengthen further the West's position in the region. This objective, therefore, is diluted by significant admixtures of caution.

The above seven related objectives should, of course, not be considered as ever having been listed in this clear-cut and rather simplified way by Soviet policy-makers. No government operates with such a specific list of objectives before it. But, in an effort from the outside to come to grips with Soviet policy, these points emerge from analyses made by Western scholars of Soviet policies and actions, and from one's own observations of the actual situation as it develops. In other words, none of these objectives should be regarded as definitive. As mentioned at the beginning, there is not enough information available, and there are too many uncertainties and too many unanswered questions.

It should also be re-emphasised that these probable Soviet objectives have to be seen in a global geopolitical and strategic framework, as well as in the regional context. Most of them could be applied, mutatis mutandis, to Soviet policies in other regions or towards other issues - except perhaps the interest in mineral resources which applies particularly to Southern Africa. Although some would argue that Southern Africa has been pinpointed by the Soviet Union as one of "the vital, if not decisive, factors in the eventual establishment

of a 'world socialist system'", the evidence does not appear to indicate that Southern Africa has that high a priority in Soviet policies. For example, no strong pressure is apparently applied to the Angolan Government or to Mozambique to prevent them from opening up economic links to the West, which they have clearly been trying to do. There is no great pressure on the Zimbabwe Government, which has so far maintained a cool relationship with the Soviet Union. We still have to see anything near "massive" support given to SWAPO to take over Namibia, i.e. support anywhere near the scale given to the Ethiopian régime, or even, on a lesser scale, to the MPLA in Angola. The limits which the Soviet Union thus appears to be setting to its commitments in Southern Africa would, it seems to me, support the thesis that the Soviet Union does not - or not yet at least - see Southern Africa as a region for major, high priority attention. This does not mean, however, that the Soviet Union does not have any objectives in the region, or that it will not seek to exploit any opportunity which occurs to achieve those objectives and thereby advance its interests, both regionally and globally.

The Soviet Union uses a variety of means to achieve its objectives, some of which have already been indicated. Many of them are similar to the means used by other powers, including the United States. The establishment of diplomatic missions, for instance, is a normal international practice, and one should not be surprised or unduly disturbed when Soviet Embassies are established in Southern African countries. What has been surprising has been the time it has taken - nearly a year - to persuade the Zimbabwe Government of Mr. Mugabe to allow an Embassy in Salisbury. An agreement has now been reached, which includes the unusual proviso that there will be no interference in internal affairs. The delay and this qualification clearly illustrate Mr. Mugabe's coolness towards the Soviet Union, stemming particularly from his concern about the past Soviet support for, and ongoing contacts with, Mr. Nkomo's ZAPU and its army ZIPRA. The agreement gives the Soviet Union the opportunity now to make up for the backlog in its relations with Zimbabwe, but the establishment of an Embassy alone does not guarantee an improvement in relations. It will be interesting to see whether the Soviet Union comes up now with any significant amount of foreign aid at the Donors Conference in a month's time.*

* The Soviet delegation did not, in fact, take up its seat at the Conference

The military support for liberation movements is another means used by the Soviet Union, notably in the Angolan War and since in the MPLA's struggle against UNITA. Support was also given in the Rhodesian War, and continues to be given to SWAPO and to the South African ANC. These movements have become almost entirely dependent on Soviet weapons, but it must be noted that this supply is still rather limited, compared with the much more massive supply to other movements and governments. In fact, the Soviet Union appears to be adopting a rather cautious approach to SWAPO and the ANC because of serious doubts about their effectiveness and reliability. This concern was demonstrated, in the report in January 1981, of what Major Koslov, the captured Russian spy, had to say. Past Russian experience with other governments and movements in Africa, where they have sometimes been badly bitten, has made them rather shy of taking great risks.

In addition to the direct supply of military assistance, there is the important role played in Africa by other communist countries, especially Cuba and more recently also East Germany. However, the theory that these countries are acting simply as proxies or surrogates of the Soviet Union seems too simple an explanation. There have been a number of studies of Cuban interests and objectives in Africa, and the consensus is that the Cuban Government does pursue some interests and objectives which are distinct from the Soviet Union. For instance, there is the personality of Fidel Castro, who regards himself as a champion of liberation and revolution in the Third World, and he has worked hard to create such an image of his leadership role by his political statements and military assistance in Latin America, Africa and elsewhere. Apart from the military assistance, Cubans also provide technical assistance in various African countries, including Angola and Mozambique. The Cubans are now reported to be selling their technical assistance in some countries, rather than providing it free or with Russian subsidies. East Germany, too, even if to a lesser degree, has its own motives for developing relations in Africa, including possibly competition with West Germany.

However, having said all that, there is no doubt that these smaller

countries are very dependent on the Soviet Union and that they do not possess great capabilities for operating independently in Southern Africa. They therefore have to rely on, and work closely with, the Soviet Union. So they prove very useful allies, and it is likely that their numbers will increase, as much in the technical field as the military. It would not be surprising if other communist countries were to be included in the roster of aid-givers - even perhaps a country like Vietnam. One factor is that the Russians themselves do not appear to get on too well with Africans, whereas the Cubans and others seem to relate better and be more acceptable.

Conclusion

The Soviet Union's record in Africa generally has been a very uneven one. Looking at the history of Russian efforts to penetrate Africa, one cannot conclude that there has been a steady advance, either ideologically, politically or militarily. But their own statements and writings indicate that they are more aware now of the problem and that their aims are more limited and more effectively integrated with their overall global policies. Thus, as already explained, they have since the mid-1970s concentrated on certain intrinsically significant regions, of which Southern Africa is one.

It would seem to be a mistake, however, to conclude that Southern Africa has top priority for the Soviet Union at the present time. The concrete evidence of intense and sustained commitment which would have to support such a conclusion is not there. Moreover, the Soviet Union is currently bogged down with serious problems in various other places, notably Afghanistan and Poland, but also in Ethiopia and Angola. The commitment was made to Angola in 1975 no doubt because Angola was seen as a possible showpiece for the Soviet Union in Africa. This has not happened; the civil war continues and reconstruction and economic development has not been possible. Six years later the Soviet Union is still having to commit resources and sustain losses - financial and military. When one adds the problem of Zimbabwe, where in effect the Soviet Union backed the wrong horse, and the reluctance of the Mozambique Government to become fully committed, one must conclude that the view from Moscow is by no means one of unadulterated success for the Soviet Union in this region. It is not a situation which can provide great encouragement to commit even greater

resources to the region.

At the same time it is not a situation without the potential for future success. Moscow has friends who, even if they are not fully committed, are ideologically sympathetic, and - most important - it can see a region which is still unstable and which therefore provides opportunities for continued intervention. This inclination of the Soviet Union to exploit instability and conflict for its own ends constitutes a threat to the region. A recent example has been the arrival of three Russian warships at Mozambique ports and the statement by the Soviet Ambassador in Maputo, clearly under instructions from Moscow, that the Russians would help their friends if they were attacked, and there would be an appropriate response if there were another South African raid into Mozambique. The ships may have been scheduled to call at Mozambique ports before the South African raid on the ANC houses, but in any case their arrival was used to demonstrate symbolically Russian opposition to South Africa and support for Mozambique. But the effectiveness of this symbolic action, combined with the Ambassador's statement, depends on what further action could be taken and how the threat is perceived from South Africa. One cannot be sure about this, but the most likely immediate action is further military support for the Mozambique army, and this is unlikely to prove a major military deterrent for South Africa.

What this incident demonstrates is the political cost which must be paid for military actions which may be inevitable in the type of conflict situation which exists in this region. The Mozambique Government, which from all reports does not want to become fully dependent on the Soviet Union, is unavoidably drawn closer to the Russians, at least in the public view.

Angola and Namibia provide even clearer examples of the fact that it is the situation of conflict itself which provides the major threat. While the Namibian dispute is unsettled, the Soviet Union will continue to support SWAPO, and will probably step up this support, and in Angola the continuation of the civil war with UNITA and the conflict on its Southern border means that the approximately 20 000 Cubans will remain and dependence on the Russians will have to be maintained.

The interests of both South Africa and Angola, as well as Namibia itself, dictate that there should be a settlement of the conflict in that part of the region as soon as possible. This provides the strongest ground for hope that there will soon be a renewal of negotiations, with the necessary political will and motivation on the part of all concerned to reach a compromise "deal". If that happens, there is little doubt that Russian influence will decline, as experience in similar situations elsewhere in Africa has shown.

The best way of countering the extension of Russian influence in Southern Africa is, therefore, to work for stability based on generally acceptable political settlements, including ultimately within South Africa itself, so that attention can be focused on co-operative development of the undoubted economic potential of this region.