The Foreign Relations of South Africa 1973-1978

Hovedoppgave i Historie
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Abbreviations

AAM Anti-Apartheid Movement (Great Britain)
AAPSO Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Movement
ANC (z) African National Council (Zimbabwe)
ANC African National Congress (South Africa)
BAWU Black Allied Workers Union
BCM Black Consciousness Movement (South Africa)
BOSS Bureau of State Security (South Africa)
BPC Black People’s Convention
CIA Central Intelligence Agency (USA)
FAPLA Forças Armadas Popular para Libertação de Angola (Angola)
FNLA Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola (Angola)
FRELIMO Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (Mozambique)
IDAF International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa
MK Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation)
MPLA Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (Angola)
NAI Nordic Africa Institute (Sweden)
OAU Organisation of African Unity
PAC Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa)
PAIGC Partido Africano para a Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde (Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde)
SACP South African Communist Party (South Africa)
SADF South African Defence Force (South Africa)
SAIC South African Indian Congress
SASO South African Students Organisation
SAUF South African United Front
SWA South West Africa, the colonial name for Namibia
SWANU South West African National Union (later Swapo)
SWAPO South West Africa People’s Organization (Namibia)
UMSA Unity Movement of South Africa
UN United Nations
UNITA União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (Angola)
WPC World Peace Council
ZANU Zimbabwe African National Union (Zimbabwe)
ZAPU Zimbabwe African People’s Union (Zimbabwe)
Africa

Southern Africa
Introduction

Any new nation has a desire for writing its own history. South Africa got a new start in 1994 and large parts of its history need to be written or re-written by historians. The 1970s was a formative period in South Africa’s modern history and therefore could benefit from some revision: During the 1970s the illegitimate apartheid regime faced increased international pressure and isolation while the black liberation movement increased its strength and capacity and as such became a serious challenge to the white government. The development of the liberation struggle which ended in the negotiated settlement in the early 1990s can be traced back to the 1970s. One of the key aspects of the developments in the mid-1970s was the two opponents’ foreign policy and foreign relations. This will be the focus of this thesis.

The mid 1970s was an important period not only for South Africa, but for the whole of southern Africa. The fall of Marcello Caetano’s regime in Portugal in April 1974 led to independence and change of power in Angola and Mozambique, which again tipped the regional balance of power in white South Africa’s disfavour. This was a serious challenge for the apartheid government. Apartheid South Africa was prior to this relatively secure and stable, both nationally and in its relations to the region and its international allies. South Africa had two choices; to accept the new situation and cooperate, or to resist and challenge its new neighbours. The response South Africa made to these choices would shape the region profoundly for the next two decades. It also sent South Africa into international isolation. Correspondingly, how South Africa positioned itself in the region fundamentally affected the opposition African National Congress situation and its ability to fight the regime.

This paper will look at South Africa’s foreign relations and foreign policy from ca. 1973 to 1978, and more briefly on ANC’s foreign relations and policy from ca. 1969 to 1978. The topic is important, because it can give insight and new perspectives on a crucial epoch in South Africa’s modern history. Besides, emphasising foreign policy and relations will highlight the connection between South Africa’s national conflict and the regional situation as well as the international Cold War conflict. Furthermore, South Africa is one of the best examples of an unpopular regime under severe international pressure. Analysing how the South African apartheid regime understood and reacted towards the increasingly hostile international climate and pressure can be useful in a larger context. This thesis uses mainly sources from the archives of the South African
Department of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria. South Africa’s modern history of the last few decades has been extensively covered by media and contemporary analysts. In the post-apartheid era, it is now possible and useful to review this period historically based on new archive material from new and unresearched historical archives.

This paper is an assignment to the Institute for History at University of Oslo, Norway Spring 2005 at “Hovedfag”-level. The topic of this thesis was suggested by my supervisor Odd Arne Westad (University of Oslo and London School of Economics) who is working on a broader history project called “Cold War in Southern Africa”. The choice of topic is related to this project, but is also an attempt on its own to contribute to modern South African history writing. Finding and researching archives from the South African apartheid government is still difficult, and some of the archives demand more time and effort than a visiting student can handle. The relatively easy access to un-researched files at the archives of Department of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria is a contributing factor to why this thesis emphasises South Africa’s foreign relations. However, the mix of files in English and Afrikaans also challenges a student with only limited understanding of Afrikaans in his research.¹

The topic and scope for this thesis
The aim of this thesis is to look at South Africa’s foreign policy, and more specifically its relations to the United States. Researching and analysing the archive material of the correspondence between the South African embassy in Washington in addition to reports, telegrams and other documents in the archives of Department of Foreign Affairs show that the relationship between the South Africa and the United States was complex and strained already from the early 1970s. Furthermore, the thesis will use archive material and interviews to look at the conflict in the South African government in relation to strategic choices South Africa should take when Mozambique and Angola were gaining independence in the mid 1970s. South Africa opted for two very different strategies, first an attempt to meet the altered balance of power in the region with diplomacy and friendship. In neighbouring Angola the situation turned into a civil war, and here Prime Minster John Vorster chose to use military strength to influence the outcome. South Africa’s handling of the situation in Angola make up a central part of this thesis and the argument about South Africa’s foreign relations. The strategy to intervene in Angola in October 1975 was promoted by the Department of Defence and opposed by the Department of Foreign Affairs

¹ Using my skills in Norwegian, English and German make it possible to understand sufficiently Afrikaans to evaluate their content and importance.
which was concerned that this could negatively affect South Africa’s foreign relations. The military invasion of Angola failed, and just as Foreign Affairs had predicted, led to serious international criticism. The following two years, two domestic developments – the Soweto riots and the murder of Steve Biko – further increased South Africa’s isolation. Vorster’s failed strategies of diplomacy and military aggression finally led to his downfall in 1978, when former Minister of Defence, Pieter W. Botha took over. P.W. Botha’s rise to power must also be understood in connection with the conflict over South Africa’s foreign policy strategies.

In this thesis, the central argument is therefore that the apartheid regime was driving itself into isolation. The main reason for the international opposition to South Africa was the racist apartheid policy. But the increased isolation and hostility must be understood as a consequence of South Africa’s failures in Angola, during Soweto and Biko. South Africa had no coherent and effective foreign policy to cover its domestic and regional mistakes. The other central argument in this thesis, is how the apartheid government’s main opponent, the African National Congress, managed to firstly mobilise the African continent against Vorster’s diplomatic initiatives, and secondly use South Africa’s aggression in Angola and in Soweto to win international legitimacy. Together with a slow but steady organisational consolidation and revitalisation, the ANC managed to use its international diplomacy to isolate the regime and gain international credibility. In other words, while the South African apartheid regime during the 1970s lost international support and was isolated, its main opponent, the ANC, increased its strength and international position. The fall of the one side and the rise of the other was a crucial development during the 1970s, and was necessary for the heightened level of conflict during the next decade, and the negotiated settlement in the early 1990s.

Existing literature on this topic
This thesis covers quite a number of issues and several important years in South Africa’s history. In addition, it is rather difficult to find primary sources to many of the events and conflicts discussed and analysed here. The discussions raised here are therefore dependent on wide use of secondary literature. Apartheid South Africa’s foreign policy and foreign relations has been covered extensively in various earlier and contemporary publications, although without researching the primary sources used in this thesis. One of the most essential books is Deon Geldenhuys The Diplomacy of Isolation, South African Foreign Policy Making, from 1984.²

Geldenhuys’ main focus is on who was making South African foreign policy. He concludes that the Department of Foreign Affairs was often a weak contributor in government and that foreign policy decisions were often formulated outside Foreign Affairs. According to Gavin Cawthra, Geldenhuys is “a prominent South African foreign policy analyst”, with connections to the government and therefore aware of what was going on inside the government and departments of the time.3 James Barber and John Barratt’s South Africa’s Foreign Policy, The search for status and security 1945-1988, from 1990 is another extensive publication on South Africa’s foreign policy.4 The authors in this book looks at the increasingly hostile and difficult international and regional situation South Africa was in during the 1970s, and how domestic and regional developments – and South Africa’s responses to them – pushed South Africa into isolation. Several books have been written about South Africa’s increasingly aggressive line towards the neighbouring states, but these generally focus more on the 1980s than the 1970s. Gavin Cawthra’s Brutal Force, The apartheid war machine and Joseph Hanlon’s Beggar Your Neighbours, Apartheid Power in Southern Africa are important books on this subject.5 For information and analysis of the yearly developments in all of Africa, Colin Legum’s yearly Africa Contemporary Records (ACR) provide excellent background information. They also contain specific articles on some of the issues raised in this thesis, some of which have been published independently, and the ACR contains a well of official documents and statements from the actual years.6

Chapter two of this thesis is built around a discussion about South Africa’s intervention in Angola in 1975. There are two recent and useful publications covering the conflict in Angola: Piero Gleijeses’ Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa 1959-1976 and Fernando Andresen Guimarães’ The Origins of the Angolan Civil War, Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict.7 Both publications provide new and important information on the conflict in Angola. Probably the most interesting and important contribution to South African history writing in the recent years is the work and report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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5 Cawthra, Brutal Force; Joseph Hanlon, Beggar your neighbours: Apartheid power in Southern Africa (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) and Currey 1986).
6 Colin Legum (various articles) and Africa Contemporary Records. See bibliography.
The Foreign Relations of South Africa 1973-1978

Introduction


9 Vladimir Shubin, ANC A View From Moscow (Cape Town: Mayibuye History and Literature Series No. 88, 1999).


8 One of the main aims of the TRC was to establish the facts of the secret and brutal activities of the apartheid regime. The process was unique and brought into the light many of the shady sides of the apartheid government. Some of the research in connection with the process around the TRC has been used by Terry Bell in his Unfinished Business, South Africa, Apartheid & Truth, which brings into light more information on for example the conflict within the government which will be discussed in chapter two.

The final chapter is a brief outline and discussion of ANC’s foreign relations and international diplomacy. The literature on ANC is yet less extensive than on the South African apartheid government. The probably most comprehensive and important study of ANC’s history is Vladimir Shubin’s ANC A View From Moscow from 1999. Shubin was himself one of the main Soviet contact persons for the ANC in their relations to the Soviet Union. He therefore has a well of information, a lot of it from first hand discussions with the ANC leadership, and he describes a close and warm relationship between the former Super Power and the South African liberation movement. Another useful publication is Scott Thomas’ The Diplomacy of Liberation: The Foreign Relations of the ANC since 1960. Roger Pfister has written a useful summary of literature on ANC in exile in “South Africa’s Recent Foreign Policy Towards Africa: Issues and Literature” (Zurich: Beiträge Nr. 29, August 2000).

My contribution to this field of research

The intention of this thesis is to use archive material from the archives of Foreign Affairs to broaden the knowledge about what shaped South Africa’s foreign relations. As will be described, Foreign Affairs was a rather weak part of the government. This is the key to understand the crucial choices made by Prime Minister John Vorster. The archive files also give further clues to the “mindset” of the diplomats in Foreign Affairs struggling to explain South Africa’s situation and problems. The strategies and tactics of the embassy staff for instance have earlier not been emphasised. None of the works on the apartheid regime use archive material from Department of Foreign Affairs.
This thesis is based on relatively new archive material. The research I have done will not revolutionise the understanding of South African history. The material presented here will confirm some of the allegations made by for example Geldenhuys and Barber that the Department of Foreign Affairs was a weak part of the South African government. However, my research show that not only was the Foreign Affairs weak, but if Prime Minister John Vorster had listened more to his Department of Foreign Affairs, he could possibly have escaped the major crisis following his decision to intervene in Angola with what he thought was American support. Furthermore, Foreign Affairs was not only weak in relation to the other government bodies, but kept major political issues – the intervention in Angola – secret from its own embassies abroad. These pieces of information can hopefully be useful in the discussion on how the apartheid government gradually slipped into increased isolation and responded with aggression towards its neighbours. My research does also show to what degree South Africa and the United States relationship was strained long before the intervention of Angola. The ANC and anti-apartheid movement have always emphasised the close relations between the two. The files from the archives does not fundamentally change the status of the South Africa-United States relations, but proves that the relationship was far more complex and controversial than their opponents claimed at the time. The research on the ANC has not brought any substantial new information, but adds details and information on a part of ANC’s history which is still little researched.

Archives and primary sources
Access to South African historical archives and information is still a controversial and difficult topic in South Africa of today. In a chapter named “The paper Auschwitz”, Terry Bell describes how South Africa lost much of its historical records during the transition to democracy:

As the prospect of a democratic transition in South Africa drew close, tons of files, microfilm, audio and computer tapes and disks were shredded, wiped and incinerated. In little more than six months in 1993, while the political parties of the apartheid state negotiated with the representatives of the liberation movements, some 44 metric tons of records from the headquarters of the National Intelligence Service alone were destroyed.12

South Africa is not the easiest country to do archive research. The archive of the Department of Foreign Affairs is now easily accessible in the basement of the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The main sources for this thesis have been the communication between the South African embassy in Washington and Foreign Affairs in Pretoria. There have been significantly

little files from the internal debates inside Foreign Affairs, and the archive staff have not been able to establish where this might be located. Other archives have been more difficult to access, in the National Archives I have only found a few useful files. The military archives are supposedly open for research, but the procedures are too comprehensive for a foreign visitor. Even the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was not able to access any relevant files regarding the South African Defence Force operations in Angola in 1975, which is an important case in this thesis.13 To add details to the material I have found, I interviewed two of the key embassy staff at the time, former ambassador Donald B. Sole and former charge d’affairs Jeremy B. Shearar, both at the embassy in Washington. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pik Botha, was contacted but did not have time for an interview. However, Pik Botha has been interviewed several times elsewhere on issues relevant for this thesis. Former President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda, visited Oslo in August 2004. He was willing to give an interview, and added a some interesting details regarding some of the issues raised in this thesis.

The ANC archives are in the process of being opened. According to estimates by ANC staff there are still around 5000 boxes still waiting to be processed and opened to research. But the archive material from the Lusaka and London offices of ANC at University of Western Cape-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives were temporarily closed when I did my research for this paper. Vladimir Shubin has used the ANC archives extensively, but there is still information which can be found and added to ANC’s history. Through a study scholarship at the Nordic Africa Institute I was given access to the research material used by Tor Sellström in the larger NAI research project “National Liberation in Southern Africa”. Sellström has accessed documents from Swedish Foreign Affairs and Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) regarding the ANC. In his collection there are several interesting interviews and meetings between Sweden and ANC. Through a minor project based job for NAI I collected information about Norwegian archives containing similar information, and unfortunately could not find Tore Linné Eriksen’s equivalent collection of ANC material from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad archives which he used for his Norway and National Liberation in Southern Africa. There was not enough time to redo Eriksen’s research in the Norwegian archives. On the ANC side it has been more difficult to make interviews, as the relevant people have either passed away or now hold important official positions and do not have time for interviews.

13 “The Commission was not able to access any files on Operation Savannah in the SADF archives”. (TRC Final Report, Vol. 2, Chp. 2, Par. 15).
In general, the files and documents I have researched provide few facts and decisions by the actors in South Africa’s or ANC’s foreign policy. The primary sources tell more about the way of thinking – or the “mindset” – of the personnel in Department of Foreign Affairs or the ANC. This thesis therefore is a narrative outline of the foreign relations of the two sides, where the primary sources provide insight into the ideology and thinking of the foreign policy makers on each side. Based on this, it is possible to identify some of the strategies and policies they chose. Some of the sources are used out of their chronological order, since the political opinions they portray were valid for a period of time more than a moment. A common feature of the sources I have found for this thesis is that they often lack signature, especially so for internal reports and resumes. Some of the conclusions and explanations in this thesis are somewhat general, since it is often difficult to identify the position and context of the source used.

A brief outline of this thesis

This paper focuses on the crucial years between 1974 and 1976 which form a turning point in the history of South Africa. I have identified certain events during these years and will show how these were crucial in forming South Africa’s history; the fall of Portuguese colonial power in April 1974, South Africa’s invasion of Angola in October 1975, the Soweto student riots in June 1976. The first chapter deals with South Africa prior to April 1974, outlining South Africa’s foreign relations – with emphasis on the United States – and the key participants in its foreign policy making. The aim of the chapter is to give an overview of the situation before the main changes during the decade took place.

The following chapter deals with South Africa’s reactions to the shift in the regional balance of power. First Prime Minister Vorster intensified international and regional diplomacy. During 1975 the situation in Angola developed towards a full scale civil war, something which preoccupied both Foreign Affairs and the rest of the government. A major disagreement regarding how to handle Angola developed, and Department of Defence’s line of action won. Subsequently South Africa invaded Angola, hiding behind two Angolan liberation movements. The invasion failed and South Africa was exposed, leading to an international outcry and severe damage to South Africa’s international relations.

The last chapter on the apartheid regime deals with how South Africa initially tried with cover up the scandal in Angola. But soon South Africa again enters arena of international attention due to the brutal repression of the student demonstrations in Soweto. The relations
with the United States deteriorated further, a development which reached a sort of prolonged climax during Jimmy Carters presidency.

ANC’s foreign relations are covered in the final chapter. The timeframe here is wider, starting in 1969 and the Morogoro conference which consolidated ANC in exile. ANC’s foreign relations are complex. They were vulnerable in exile, and had to balance their own policy with that of their hosts and other international contacts. Some space will be used to outline ANC’s relations with the Front Line States, i.e. South Africa’s neighbours, with the Soviet Union and the Scandinavian countries. All these relations were vital for ANC’s survival and growth. Some of the same events and developments discussed in first three chapters will also be used as reference points when looking at ANC’s development during the 1970s. In brief, the same events which affected Pretoria negatively were used by the ANC against the regime and helped ANC in the process of consolidation and growth.

Further research in this field
In post-apartheid South Africa, there are several historical issues and events which should be researched on the basis of new access to archives. In relation to Foreign Affairs, more research should be done on the discussions which took place inside the leadership of Foreign Affairs. I have not been able to find this material, and the archive staff were not aware of where it could be. Outside foreign policy, the way P.W. Botha came to power is highly interesting. Terry Bell has brought some information and analysis to this topic, but there is room for more knowledge. South Africa’s involvement in Angola is a central issue in this thesis which still needs more detail, especially research in the Military’s archives about their motives in Angola. The history writing about the ANC is slowly starting to catch up, and there will certainly be new publications in the next few years. Since ANC’s activities in exile were so important for the survival of the organisation, there are several issues here which could be researched. Shubin has covered the Soviet Union’s view of ANC, and the research publications of the Nordic Africa Institute have covered Scandinavia’s view of the ANC. It could be interesting to reverse this and analyse the relationship from ANC’s perspective, although it might be difficult to find any critical sources with very different views than have already been raised. Finally, if I should get a new chance to research South African history, I would look at the relationship between the ANC and the Pan Africanist Congress in exile. Both movements were exile based during the 1970s, and there are numerous references about the PAC in ANC’s archives. Despite this, there is little information and literature on the relationship between them and why they were unable to establish a close and
working relationship. If they had, could this have changed South Africa’s liberation struggle in any significant way?
1 South Africa’s foreign relations

Introduction

In the 1970s, Southern Africa was a region marked by conflict and changes. South Africa was itself part of and affected by the geo-political changes of power in the region. In the early seventies, South Africa was still in a relatively safe and secure position, seen from the point of view of the ruling white minority. South Africa was a white, western state on the tip of Africa, with stable but complex relations with the rest of the Western world. This would change from 1974 and onwards, with the coup d’état in Lisbon, Portugal 25 April 1974, and the subsequent liberation of Mozambique and Angola.

A general overview of South Africa in the early 1970s is necessary in order to discuss how the developments during the decade affected and shaped its foreign relations. This chapter will outline the most important features of South African society and domestic politics together with its relevant foreign policy and policy making. Foreign policy making was made by several and often conflicting key players; the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Department of Information, the Department of Defence, Prime Minister John Vorster and his close political ally Hendrik van den Bergh in Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Between them there was a serious power struggle for influence and power to shape South Africa’s foreign policy. Understanding the positions and political differences between these parties is fundamental for understanding the developments taking place through the decade. South Africa’s relations with its main international ally, the United States will be outlined and analysed, based on the files in the archives of Foreign Affairs researched for this paper. The research shows how the relations were marked by conflict and ambivalence already in the early 1970s. In addition this chapter will take a somewhat briefer look at some of its other Western allies. South Africa’s diplomatic initiatives towards the rest of the African continent will be briefly discussed. The aim of this chapter is to provide background for an analysis of the changes taking place during the next few years, between 1974 and 1978. The next two chapters will look at how South Africa reacted to the new challenges of the mid-1970s, and how its foreign relations affected its choices – and how its foreign relations was affected by the actions South Africa took.
South Africa in the early 1970s

The National Party (NP) came to power in 1948, and for the next 46 years it completely dominated the South African government and Parliament. The policy of \textit{apartheid}, which can be roughly translated with “segregation”, was implemented from 1948. Apartheid aimed at creating a society with full segregation between the races through all aspects of life: social life, politics, geography, culture, economy etc. This fundamentally racist policy soon formed all aspect of the society from job market and wages to where one lived and who one could marry. South Africa’s government and politics were reserved for the white minority only, a group constituting only 10-20 percent of the population. Apartheid policy was based on inherited racist policy of the British colonial system, however with the National Party in government racism became so comprehensive and systematically implemented that it represented a new system altogether.

The dominant opposition parties, the South African Communist Party (SACP), the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) were all banned (ANC and PAC in 1960, SACP in 1950) and their leaders imprisoned for acts of sabotage and resistance. At the beginning of the 1970s, any opposition to the National Party was weak or forced underground. The white regime was therefore in a strong position vis-à-vis the weak black opposition, and used their power and initiative to transform South Africa in their own image. In this regard, one of the most important domestic developments during the early 1970s was the acceleration of “forced removals”. Large numbers of blacks and coloureds were forcefully removed from their homes to the new “Bantustans” (also called “Homelands”) or Townships. This was part of a grand scheme to create several independent Homelands for the non-white population, a process which should legitimise white rule in South Africa itself.

The exclusively white National Party completely dominated Parliament and Government, and the NP was again dominated by the Afrikaners. The white population consisted of two dominant groups, those speaking either Afrikaans or English. The Afrikaners dominated political life, Government and bureaucracy, and the National Party managed to uplift the former impoverished Afrikaner community. The English speaking whites, while economically and socially privileged, were less dominant in the Government and State sector. When analysing South African foreign policy and Government politics in the 1970s, one must keep in mind that the key participants were representing a narrow sector of the population, namely male elite Afrikaners, sharing an ideology of Afrikaner exclusivity, racism, and religious passion.\footnote{1}

\footnote{1} This is a generalisation, but nonetheless a useful generalisation when analysing South African politics in the 1970s. When the term “South African” is used in the following text, it usually refers only to the apartheid regime and its white constituency. The majority South African, was black and excluded from politics and power. The “regime” is
The South African government

Balthazar Johannes “John” Vorster became South Africa’s Prime Minister in September 1966. He had been Minister of Justice and as such he was known as a “resolute law-and-order man.” Vorster succeeded Hendrik Verwoerd when Verwoerd was assassinated in Parliament in 1966. Vorster displayed “a remarkable degree of political flexibility” compared to his earlier post in the cabinet. Vorster played a crucial role in South Africa’s foreign affairs in his time as Prime Minister. He increasingly took part in and initiated foreign policy initiatives, notably the “outward-looking policy” also known as “Dialogue” and “Détente” which will be discussed later. During the early years of his premiership, Vorster launched several foreign affairs initiatives, notably in relation to the newly independent neighbouring states Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (also known as the BLS-states). Vorster’s active foreign policy, he was even described as a “super Foreign Minister”, must be taken into account when assessing the Department of Foreign Affairs and their work. Hilgard Muller continued as Minister of Foreign Affairs in Vorster’s Government as he had been in Verwoerd government. Foreign Affairs was not a priority under Verwoerd and Muller did not have much political weight in either of the two governments. The experienced diplomat Donald. B. Sole, claims Muller “was a very weak minister – personally a very charming minister, but he didn’t stand up for the Department at all.” Muller was also described as “a classical English don”, which was not necessarily a good thing in the Afrikaner dominated government.

In 1966 South Africa had 22 diplomatic missions abroad, of these only one was located in Africa (Malawi). The embassies in Washington, London, Paris and Bonn were the most important foreign stations, indicating which countries were South Africa had its most important international contacts. There were no embassies in Eastern Europe. The embassies were South
Africa’s primary mean of contact with the rest of the world. They were the first to receive comments and criticism from the international world directed at South Africa. The richest and most relevant archive material available today at the archives of Department of Foreign Affairs are reports, memoranda, questions and comments coming from the various embassies – especially the embassy in Washington – directed to Department for Foreign Affairs in Pretoria. However, I have not been able to find any extensive material from discussions within the Department itself. While opinions and assessments of embassy staff are evident in their correspondence with Pretoria, it is more difficult to assess the mindset of the staff in Pretoria.

According to this secondary literature, Brand Fourie was an important figure in Department of Foreign Affairs as Secretary of the Department. Vorster even sometimes bypassed Minister Muller and worked directly with Fourie. The flow of information and (lack of) open discussion in the Department was also influenced by Fourie. According to Sole: “[Fourie] played his cards very close to his chest, maintained his own private set of files and kept the rest of the Department minimally informed as to what was on the go.” This secrecy is probably one of the reasons it is difficult to access any information of the “inner thoughts” of the Department. This thesis therefore, unfortunately enough, has to rely on a wide use of secondary literature when analysing how the staff in Pretoria were thinking.

South Africa’s foreign policy making was made complicated by having two other government bodies conducting foreign policy. Department of Information, Department of Defence, and the Bureau of State Security (BOSS). Officially the three bodies co-operated and filled each other in, but in reality the tactics and initiatives of the other two at times undermined Foreign Affairs’ diplomacy. The Department of Information, under Minister of Information Connie Mulder (from 1968) and his energetic Department Secretary Eschel Rhodie (from 1972) initiated an intense and comprehensive campaign in the early 1970s. Mulder and Rhodie used millions of Rand to strengthen South Africa’s image abroad. The campaign was support by John Vorster and received its funding through secret funds under the Department of Defence. Their extensive and secret budget was used for a wide programme of secret operations all over the world, aimed at improving South Africa’s image and winning friends who could speak South Africa’s cause abroad. These projects were ranging from newspaper ads portraying the beauty and

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9 Geldenhuys, *Diplomacy*, p. 123. Apart form this claim in Geldenhuys, it is not possible to draw any conclusions directly from the sources I have found regarding personal influence around the foreign policy making in Pretoria.

10 Donald B. Sole, *This above all. Reminiscence of a South African Diplomat*, (Unpublished, no date, National Library of South Africa), p. 260. Fourie’s separate files together with the lack of open discussion might also explain why there is difficult to find any significant discussion documents in the DFA archives.

11 Barber, *South Africa’s foreign policy*, p. 114.
splendour of South Africa, to more controversial operations like buying stocks in Western newspapers to gain influence over the news coverage of South Africa. Providing funds for an expansion of “Hundeavisen” the publication for the political party “Anders Langes parti” as well as the funds for the party’s first election campaign in 1973 is a relevant Norwegian example.  

The secret projects and the general atmosphere of secrecy caused notable tension between Foreign Affairs and Information. Information’s staff stationed at the embassies could for example conduct their own diplomacy without informing the ambassador, and in the process disrupting or jeopardising Foreign Affairs diplomacy and credibility. Donald B. Sole is 30 years later still annoyed by Information’s activities and the fact that they “sought to conduct their own foreign policy.” According to Sole, Foreign Minister Muller’s “great failure was his inability to prevent Connie Mulder from appropriating himself, with the Department of Information as his instrument, a major responsibility for the conduct of foreign affairs. […] Most senior officials in Foreign Affairs, myself included, found it incredible that a Foreign Minister could accept this kind of humiliation and not offer his resignation.” Mulder and Rhoddie on the other hand “strongly criticised Foreign Affairs for being too cautious, for operating in too few countries and having too narrow a range of contacts within those countries and failing to give full support to government policies.” The conflict between the two departments lead to a bitter conflict in the Embassy in Washington between the Ambassador, Johan Samuel Frederick (JSF) Botha, and a senior Information Officer, J.J. Becker, which ended in the transfer of both and the appointment of Roloef “Pik” Botha as ambassador. Donald B. Sole, when hearing of the matters in Washington, called in his information officer at the embassy in Bonn and demanded to know what he was doing – with a later response from Minister of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria that Sole was not supposed to know. However bitter, the conflict between the two departments was kept unofficial, and Information officially applauded Foreign Affairs’ diplomatic work.

In addition to Department of Information, also the Department of Defence and Bureau of State Security (BOSS) were active in areas bordering traditional foreign policy making.

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14 Sole, This above all, p. 262.

15 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 114.

16 Interview with Donald B. Sole, 25 June 2003.

17 “Talk by secretary for information, Dr. Eschel M. Rhoddie, on Top Level, Springbok Radio, Sunday, 17 November 1974”, MNL 90 Vorleggings aan die Minister 3547, South African National Archives.
Department of Defence was headed by the Pieter W. Botha, and he was also one of Vorster’s toughest opponents in the cabinet. The Defence Force was partly involved in international policy through its military attachés abroad. Furthermore, Defence used the Defence White Papers in 1973 and 1975 to argue for the “total strategy”. This briefly meant that stronger defence force would strengthen South Africa’s foreign policy. Furthermore, there should be a more coordinated transformation of the South African society in order to face the growing international threats against South Africa. P.W. Botha often operated independently from the other government bodies, sometimes to great frustration from Foreign Affairs. D.B. Sole remembers a situation during the conflict in Angola, where the military person at the embassy in Bonn misinformed him as ambassador about where the South African forces were at the time inside Angola. During the following meeting with American diplomats, he felt humiliated as the Americans pointed out that the South African troops were much further north than his military staff had told him.

Bureau of State Security was the other significant participant in foreign affairs making in the government. Hendrik van den Bergh, the head of BOSS, was a close political ally of Vorster. Bergh initiated secret diplomacy which could overlap Foreign Affairs’ responsibilities. BOSS developed a wide network of agents both inside South Africa, in the rest of Africa and in Europe. This network was used for conducting a wide range of undercover intelligence work, most likely also including assassinations. The agents and their contacts were also used to establish diplomatic contact, and BOSS was heavily involved with the foreign policy initiatives “Dialogue” and “Détente” which will be described later.

While the Department of Foreign Affairs was in conflict with Department of Information, BOSS was in conflict with Department of Defence. The dynamics in these inter-governmental conflicts between the various Departments and offices (BOSS) are crucial for understanding how South Africa’s foreign policy was being made in the 1970s. They were all competing and rivalling for Vorster’s attention when it came to matters of foreign policy. This conflict came to its climax during the conflict regarding Angola, which will be described in the next chapter. The underlying point in this introduction is to show how South Africa had various competing participants in foreign policy making, and that as a result, South Africa had no coherent foreign policy.

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18 Geldenhuys, Diplomacy, p. 146.
19 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 115
Furthermore, in this environment the Department of Foreign Affairs was not the most prominent contributor to South Africa’s foreign policy making.

South Africa’s place in the world

White South Africa enjoyed a good time in the early 1970s. South Africa experienced an impressive economic growth between the mid 1960s and 1970s, although the oil crisis from 1973 and onwards affected South Africa a great deal. On the surface the political situation was stable and secure. The country was a dream and a promise for thousands of immigrants arriving in South Africa in this period. Between 1946 and 1978 more than 350,000 people emigrated from Britain to South Africa. Regionally, South Africa was relatively secure and protected since; “South Africa and South West Africa […] are separated from the hostile black states by means of friendly neighbouring states.” South West Africa (Namibia) was under direct South African rule, Angola and Mozambique was ruled by Portugal and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) was ruled by a white minority government similar to that of South Africa. The other three neighbours, Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, were politically weak and heavily influenced by South Africa. On the international arena, South Africa was allied to Great Britain, South Africa’s former colonial power and the United States. It also had close ties to France and West Germany and was improving its ties to Israel and Japan among others.

There were however developments which caused concern. Among the first signs was the wave of independence rolling over the African continent. In its wake followed demands of freedom and majority rule also for the remaining white ruled states in Southern Africa. South Africa’s domestic policies, i.e. apartheid, were also under increasing criticism from outside Africa, mainly from other former colonies and the Socialist Bloc. The United Nations had become one of the main arenas for criticism of South Africa in the early 1960s, when the United Nations Special Committee on Apartheid was set up in 1962. The increasing international pressure led to a feeling of growing isolation for the white population. The brunt of the criticism was however brushed aside as interference with domestic affairs or as lack of understanding for South Africa’s “unique situation”.

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22 Barber, South Africa's foreign policy, p. 154.
25 In this thesis Namibia and Zimbabwe will be mentioned by their present names, not by the colonial names.
Apart from criticism, the South African government was like the rest of the Western world concerned about the potential military danger of the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc. Various documents and reports in the Foreign Affairs archives discuss and analyse the threat of the Soviet Union, estimates the military strength of the Socialist Bloc vis-à-vis NATO etc. One such extensive report from 1972 or 1973 named “Increasing Communist Infiltration in Southern Africa and the Threat Posed by This Development” outlines and discuss the danger of Soviet activities in southern Africa. According to the report, the “danger of communist infiltration in Southern Africa is not only present in the infiltration as such, but also in the stimulus which it lends to revolutionary states, organizations and other powers which are intent on destroying the status quo in this part of the continent”. The report established three main objectives as the purpose for communist infiltration, namely: “to secure a foothold in Southern Africa”, “to infiltrate and undermine this traditional Western sphere of influence” and “to transform tension into conflict in a part of the continent where white and black are already involved in a delicate and potentially explosive process, namely the development of a balanced form of co-existence”. Furthermore, the document established a connection between the communists, the terrorists (i.e. ANC and other liberation forces) and what they saw as communist friendly countries like Tanzania and Zambia. The perceived communist threat against South Africa could be understood in the following way. Firstly, the communists have an active strategy to challenge the Western influence in southern Africa, including the government in South Africa itself. Secondly, all opposition to the South African government is part of this strategy, since the communists have infiltrated the opposition and uses potential conflicts for their own gains. The government came to believe that all opposition to apartheid, both domestic opposition, ANC in exile and the neighbouring countries which hosted ANC and other exiles was one common communist threat against the stable, secure white South Africa, and treated all opposition correspondingly.

**Diplomacy and African opposition**

During the late 1960’s and early 1970’s Dialogue was a major feature of South African foreign policy. Vorster understood that South Africa, situated at the extreme end of the African continent, needed more and better relations with the African states. If South Africa won acceptance in “black Africa”, it would also be more acceptable to the West. Through the active work of notably BOSS and Department of Information, and partly with help from Foreign Affairs, South Africa made contact with several independent African states. During the early

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The Foreign Relations of South Africa 1973-1978

1970’s, Vorster also held important talks with President Félix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, President Léopold Senghor of Senegal and President William Tolbert in Liberia. When the United States ambassador to South Africa visited the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hilgard Muller in Parliament the 6 June 1973, it was important for South Africa to show how they through dialogue were now aiming at establishing diplomatic relations with the rest of the continent. The report from the meeting concludes:

South Africa was, however, anxious to have a representative in Lesotho. There were also regular contacts with certain other African countries, but these were kept confidential.27

It was important for Foreign Affairs to relate to the Americans how they were successful in their attempts in a diplomatic dialogue. In a letter to President Nixon in 1971, Vorster emphasised the recent successes in Dialogue.

It should also be mentioned that we have been engaged in dialogue for a considerable time and to our mutual advantage with all our neighbours and with some other African states further afield. For instance, in the case of our immediate neighbours – Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland – we regularly discuss in amity matters of importance affecting a wide range of social, political and economic realities.28

South Africa established relatively strong and lasting relations with Malawi under President Hastings Banda. South Africa’s only embassy in Africa was set up in Malawi. One of the key aspects of dialogue was the controversial and difficult talks initiated between South Africa and Zambia. Zambia was a key country in Southern Africa; it was an independent, liberal, African state with political weight in the Organisation of African States. It also housed several of the liberation movements in the region, notably ANC, South West African Peoples Organisation (SWAPO, fighting for the liberation of Namibia) and the Zimbabwean liberation movements. Hendrik van den Bergh in BOSS initiated contact with President Kenneth Kaunda in 1968.29 According to Kaunda, van den Bergh sought to establish the same kind of relations with Zambia as they had done with Banda in Malawi, i.e. a South Africa-loyal African state, something he refused.30 Kaunda kept the secret talks going with South Africa for the next few years, but he always held his African colleagues, especially president Julius Nyerere, informed about all

27 “Record of Conversation between the United States Ambassador Mr John Hurd, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr The Hon. H. Muller in the Minister’s office in parliament at 3 p.m. on Wednesday 6. June.”, Cape Town, 6 June 1973, “USA relations with South Africa” Vol.26 19.4.73 – 29.6.73, BTS 133\3.
28 “Draft of reply by Prime Minister to President Nixon”, March/April 1971, “USA relations with South Africa”, (no signature, no date), Vol. 18. 1.12.70 – 28.5.71, BTS\133\3.
29 Contact was first made in 1968 according to Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy p. 145; Kaunda claims contact was established in 1969, but was not very clear on dates. Interview with Kenneth Kaunda, Oslo, 30 August 2004.
meetings and correspondence with South Africa. Kaunda acknowledged that South Africa and Vorster was the key to change in the region, and that there was a need to talk with the enemy. The relationship between South Africa and Zambia was ambivalent and controversial, since Zambia officially supported the goals of the liberation movements. Kaunda claims the ANC was informed and agreed upon his tactics, but increasing difficulties for ANC in Zambia was an indication that Kaunda’s talks with South Africa influenced the situation for liberation movements negatively. South Africa’s diplomacy with Zambia became even more important during 1974 and 1975 when negotiations over Zimbabwe’s future was promoted by Kaunda and Vorster.

The Dialogue initiative was successful in creating a small crack in the independent African states approach towards South Africa. With certain African states open for talks with South Africa, there was no longer a unified front against South Africa and apartheid. The policy was used in relations with the West as a sign of South Africa’s credibility on the continent. Dialogue can also be seen as an important point of reference for the proceeding developments in the region, as it can be seen as an alternative foreign policy to what South Africa eventually did in the years to come. The initiative did however loose its drive after a few years, thanks to the efforts by the ANC and its African allies, Tanzania most importantly, to isolate the Vorster and hold a united Africa front against South Africa (see chapter four).

South Africa and the Western world
The colonial past and its historical legacy made South Africa a part of the Western world. South Africa had strong political ties with Great Britain, and after the Second World War, with the United States. Relations with France and Germany were also growing in this period, while USA and United Kingdom were clearly the most important. South Africa’s impressive economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s linked the country to international business in the same countries, as well as with Japan. Western investments were important, and the presence of multinational companies meant increased trade and access to technology. The strongest economic ties were with Britain, while USA, West Germany and Japan were expanding their business activities in South Africa. UK was the strongest investor (with £50 million in new investments per year), closely followed by West Germany and USA.

The close connections between apartheid South Africa and the West was a central argument in propaganda used by ANC and the anti-apartheid movement. According to these, the

31 Interview with Kenneth K. Kaunda, interview, 30 August 2004; Shubin, ANC: A View From Moscow.
32 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 155.
main powers of the West protected South Africa from any serious challenge to change her racial policies. In the words of ANC:

African Independent States, Socialist countries and progressive mankind have succeeded in their efforts to isolate South Africa, whilst reactionary forces headed by USA, UK, Japan, France and West Germany have been and are still nursing South Africa.33

The United Nations became an important battleground between South Africa and the newly independent countries in Africa and Asia during the 1960’s. Apartheid was an issue which could unite the former colonies, where they could claim moral high ground and challenge the super powers. The racism of apartheid was also seen by all parties – except the apartheid regime – as violating the Human Rights Charter and United Nation principles.

The pressure against South Africa in the United Nations increased in the early 1970s. As an example, 19 of 51 sessions in the Special Political Committee were devoted to South Africa and apartheid and the General Assembly started to pass a large number of resolutions against apartheid.34 In 1973, UN declared apartheid “a crime against humanity” and held a conference in Oslo, the “UN and Experts on victims of apartheid”. Also in 1973 an attempt was made to exclude South Africa from talking to the General Assembly in the United Nations. This was done with success in 1974. In addition to apartheid, the issue of Namibia’s sovereignty and independence was at the heart of the conflict with the United Nations. South Africa had been in control over the former German colony since the World War I and slowly tried to integrate Namibia – or South West Africa as it was called – into South Africa as its fifth province. During the 1960’s and 1970’s a continuous legal and political battle was fought partly in the United Nations Security Council and partly in the International Court in Hague over the future of Namibia.

USA and Britain saved South Africa from any serious pressure from the United Nations by using their veto power in the Security Council to prevent any binding and harmful resolutions. A report written by Foreign Affairs in 1974 summarised the situation: “The U.S. is a moderating force at the U.N. and in other international forums and has often opposed irresponsible moves against us.”35 But while they prevented any strong measures, they had to show the world that their own line of soft pressure would work better.

34 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 169.
35 “Relations with the United States”, “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol 29, 21.8.74-17.2.75, BTS 133\3.
Despite their protection in the United Nations, South Africa found the relationship with United States and Great Britain much more complicated than their opponents would claim. Pik Botha, former South African ambassador to Washington and former Minister of Foreign Affairs summarised the situation in the following way in 1997:

“We couldn’t align ourselves to any power, not even the United States, because the United States was irrevocably [...] and firmly and unconditionally against apartheid. [...] The United States gave the South African Government a hard time all along.”

Despite the strong historical and financial relations between South Africa and the West, South Africa’s relations with the leading powers of the West were becoming increasingly complicated. This development and the reasons why will be explored more in dept in the following two chapters. The rest of this chapter will examine the characteristics of the relations between South Africa and United States in the early 1970s together with a brief look at South Africa’s relations with the rest of the West. This will provide a background for the changes taking place during the crucial years in the mid-1970s.

**South Africa and the United States**

United States became South Africa’s most important foreign ally during the Cold War due to USA’s importance and hegemony in the bipolar realities of the era. When the new South African ambassador to Washington, JSF Botha presented himself to the President of the United States in 1971, he made the following remarks about the close relationship between the two countries:

“South Africa cherishes its historic association with the United States, an association which has its basis in the common heritage we share. These ties have been further forged in many fields. Our countrymen fought shoulder to shoulder in defence of international security. Our scientists and technicians have collaborated fruitfully in a number of major projects for our mutual benefit and that of mankind as a whole. In the economic field our two countries have developed mutually beneficial commercial and financial relations. [...] It shall be the primary objective of my mission to maintain and further strengthen the mutually beneficial and longstanding ties of friendship between South Africa and the United States.”

This statement is naturally marked by the circumstances in which they were made, i.e. official talks between the ambassador and the host president. But it does nevertheless show how

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South Africa’s official relationship with the United States was portrayed. In the internal and secret correspondence between the embassy in Washington and Foreign Affairs in Pretoria, the emphasis was put on very different sides of the ambivalent relationship between the two countries:

The United States policy is still one of blatant interference in our domestic affairs. Their attitude is remarkably patronising and their understanding of our policy and the realities of South Africa is still abysmal.\footnote{\textquotedblleft The Development of South-African-United-States relations under the Nixon administration\textquotedblright, marked “Secret”, unclear signature, Pretoria 1971, “USA Relations with South Africa”, Vol 20, 5/10/1971 – 25/2/1972, BTS 133/3.}

The United States policy towards South Africa in the early 1970s was based on a strategy document made under national security advisor Henry Kissinger in 1969, called National Security Studies Memorandum 39 (NSSM39). The study outlined various options on how United States should deal with South Africa and the region, and concluded with “Option 2”, recommended continued but cautious engagement with the apartheid regime. Other options would be normal and friendly relations at the one end or isolation and serious confrontation on the other. In the early 1970s, the relations between South Africa and USA was therefore marked by open, serious engagement on several levels and areas, but strained by constant US ambivalence and criticism towards South African politics.

Business and trade were vital aspects of South Africa-United States relations, and thus a key concern for the embassy in Washington. American business were, especially in the early 1970s, not too concerned with South African domestic policy, caring mostly for business opportunities and profitable return of investments. One of the reports from the embassy to Foreign Affairs in 1972 indicates the disparity between political and financial relations:

1970: No softening in the approach of either the State Department or the White House to our internal policies with regard to separate development. South Africa viewed by the US Department of Commerce as being an excellent trading partner.\footnote{“Memorandum: South African-United States relations – 1964-1976” “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 40, 17.2.77 – 31.3.77, BTS 133/3.}

As a consequence, South Africa found it essential to keep good terms with American business, for the survival of this white, Western state in Africa, as well as for the economic benefits. Former ambassador to Bonn (early 1979s) and Washington (from 1977), Donald B. Sole stated in 2003: “American business was very important. One of the things I learnt in Germany […] was that number one foreign policy priority should be the promotion of foreign
investment in this country.” 40 Sole claimed he helped “to double the German investment” in South Africa during his time in West Germany. According to Jeremy B. Shearar, who worked at the embassy before and during Sole’s time as ambassador, “the Government looked at trying to organise or get [American] business to itself organise into a lobby”. Despite their attempts, they were not very successful in this regard: “It didn’t really succeed, because various business were rivals” and because “the major business firms that were still working in South Africa, and there were a couple which were socially conscious, and therefore apparently withdrawing but leaving licences, and therefore they were less control and less interested in forming a lobby”.41 Sole hoped to repeat his success in Germany by doubling American investment in South Africa, but found out this became impossible as it was “progressively more and more difficult because of the universities which withdrew their investment in firms that were in South Africa”.42 While American business did not want to involve itself in South African politics, they were affected by domestic politics and Americans supporting the struggle against apartheid:

While considerable pressure is being generated on this issue [American companies investing in South Africa] by our antagonists, I have not considered it advisable to become involved in public argument about it. In fact have resisted attempts to draw me into it. […] It might be advisable to have some frank discussions with at least some of the American business people in South Africa.43

Disrupting “business-as-usual” with South Africa was one of the goals of the anti-apartheid movement. American business was not negatively affected by apartheid (on the contrary), but they were affected by the reactions and opinions of their own markets and shareholders. The embassy hence preferred to lay low and not challenge the public argument. They saw it as a better strategy to relate to American politicians, bureaucrats, diplomats and business people in privacy and without disruption from their opponents.

As indicated, the South Africa’s relations with the United States were not without tension and strain. The embassy in Washington was in the frontline, receiving the brunt of the US pressure against South Africa. Two of the key staff at the embassy in 1970s several years afterwards both give a very negative characterisation of the US-South African relations at the time. Jeremy Shearar, who was charge d’affaires at the embassy in Washington argues that: “we

40 Interview with Donald B. Sole, 25 June 2003. Sole added, in what might be influenced by post-1994 politics: “Because without foreign investment on an extensive scale, you never will be able to uplift standards of living, and the whole issue of poverty and the increasing gap between the rich and poor, not only in this country but in all of Africa.”
41 Interview with Jeremy B. Shearar, 2 June 2003.
42 Interview with Donald B. Sole, 25 June 2003.
43 Ambassador JSF Botha to The secretary of foreign affairs, “U.S. Economic Involvement in South Africa”, Washington, 1972, “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol 21, 26.1.72 – 17.3.72, BTS 1\33\3.
were in fact probably more close than any of the other countries the US had military co-
opera tions with at the time, but again the pressures were becoming strong and even under Ford
and Nixon we found that they were becoming more and more difficult […] South Africa found
itself becoming beleaguered, isolated.” Pik Botha, who was South Africa’s representative to the
UN, then took over after JSF Botha as ambassador in Washington before he became Minister of
Foreign Affairs in 1997 remarks: “I can assure you that the State Department of the United States
was pretty much always aggressively on the attack. […] United States gave the South African
Government a hard time all along.”

It is important to note their emphasis on how the difficulties stemmed from official US
politicians and bureaucrats. The activities from the American anti-apartheid movement were
more of an irritation than a serious challenge. The ANC was hardly active in the United States
(see next chapter) and was not seen as a real threat to the embassy. According to Sole, they also
had contacts with the CIA in relation to ANC, “Just to keep an eye on them”.

The files from the Foreign Affairs’ archives contain a large number of correspondence with
several and frequent reports and assessments of the relations between the two countries. It is
evident that the embassy understood the relations with USA to be difficult and strained. To give
an idea of how South Africa viewed the situation at the time, it is useful to explore one of the
documents from the archive. There are several relevant files in the archive of Foreign Affairs,
proving how the South African embassy in Washington made frequently made summaries of the
developments of US-South Africa relations. These memoranda were written for the USA desk at
Foreign Affairs in Pretoria, and usually described important developments and recent events
which were formative for the foreign relations between the two countries.

Using one of these documents as an example, from January-April 1973, the report includes;
a summary of the policy of the US administration towards South Africa, recent statements made
by American politicians regarding South Africa and a summary analysing the implications of
these statements for US policy on South Africa. The embassy found it necessary to stress United
States’ opposition to apartheid, which they did frequently in similar reports. To add detail to this
point, the embassy quoted Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Mr David Newsom,
who “criticised South Africa somewhat severely in June 1972 due to pressure from some Anti-

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44 Interview with Jeremy B. Shearar, 2 June 2003. The comment was made during Shearar’s outline of nuclear
relations between South Africa and USA.
45 Karen Brutens, “Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.
47 “US – SA relations: Developments January – April 1973,” “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 27, 2.7.73 –
29.11.73, BTS 13333.
South African bodies”. Based on various other anti-South African statements by American politicians, the embassy summarised: “On examination of the evidence, it would seem that these recent statements do not imply a major change in US policy. The US is still opposed to apartheid and favours a multi-racial solution to South Africa’s problems.” The embassy summarises the US attitude towards South Africa in the following way: “The United States, whilst securing its real interests in South Africa, adopted a “posture” against South Africa’s policies to satisfy world opinion. In reality, however, the US Government is not as anti-South African as she would have third parties believe”.

If one see these various statements and arguments together, one can understand some of what frustrated the embassy and Foreign Affairs. First of all, they saw the main problem in the relationship between South Africa and the United States being criticism and more serious political attacks by American politicians and diplomats. However, noting that the US government was not as “anti- South African as she would have third parties believe” they found the problem lying elsewhere. The politicians were influenced by anti-South African forces, which gained strength during the early 1970s with campaigns and demands of a tougher line towards South Africa. The American politicians were apparently not able to understand the real situation in South Africa, and were misled by the protesters.

**United States’ opposition to Apartheid**

The problems between South Africa and USA were all connected to one central issue: apartheid. Pik Botha made clear summary when explaining why the US Government was opposed to South Africa:

“We couldn’t align ourselves to any power, not even the United States, because the United States was irrevocably - whether it was a Democratic government or a Republican government, they were irrevocably and firmly and unconditionally against apartheid.”

52 Karen Brutens, ”Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.

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All the American criticism and attacks against South Africa were based on a common opposition to South Africa’s racial policies, and to lesser degree based on opposition to South Africa’s attempt to annex Namibia against the will of the United Nations.

The most vocal opposition to South Africa was naturally found in the anti-apartheid movement and the broader student and black civil rights movement. The embassy in Washington and the various South African consulates in other American cities were frequently targeted by anti-apartheid groups and groups sympathising with their cause. The embassy in Washington duly reported about demonstrations and pickets and added newspaper-articles, leaflets etc. regarding the demonstrators. Demonstrators managed to embarrass the embassy enough to hamper their diplomatic work in the United States. The ambassador reported to Pretoria one such incident in 1971 regarding the potential disruption by demonstrators:

With May 31 this year being the tenth anniversary of the Republic, I had had every intention of holding a large National Day reception to celebrate the occasion. […] Should a demonstration be held while a National Day reception is taking place, it could, we fear, have very bad effect. The disorderly behaviour of demonstrators could be most embarrassing to guests and the whole matter would undoubtedly [sic] be played up by the press.53

Irritating as this was for the embassy, the demonstrators and protestors were never seen to be a major problem but more of a constant annoyance. Foreign Affairs found the opposition coming from the White House, State Department and other central institutions and politicians to be more harmful. In a document from 1972 summarising the “point of contention” between the two countries, the embassy quotes President Richard Nixon’s Foreign Policy Report of 1972, and summarise the situation in the following way:

There is very little evidence that the United States takes South Africa’s policy of Separate Development seriously. American criticism of South Africa and the bitterness against the Republic which is prevalent in some leading government and State Department circles may be ascribed to the United States attitude toward South Africa’s race policies.54

The other main point of contention was “the United States attitude to South West Africa”, where USA argued that “South Africa no longer has any rights in Namibia under the mandate [of United Nations] and there is no other basis for its continued presence in the Territory”.55 The issue of South Africa’s mandate over Namibia was an area of conflict between the two countries

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54 “Points of contention”, (no signature, no date), “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 21, 26.1.72 – 17.3.72, BTS 133/3.
55 “Points of contention”, (no signature, no date), “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 21, 26.1.72 – 17.3.72, BTS 133/3.
from the 1960, running until the late 1980s. While the question of the status of Namibia’s was a question of its own, several other conflict issues were bound to American opposition to apartheid. The mentioned report lists the following areas of contention: the United States arms embargo, uranium, United States’ economic policies, wattle extract, prison labour and visa policies, among others.

Taking the visa issue as an example, South African visa restrictions towards American visitors judged to be critical of apartheid is an issue which features frequently in the files in the archives. US Congressman Charles Diggs appears frequently in the files due to his opposition to apartheid, and because South Africa refused to give him a visa to visit the country: “Visas were once again the focal point in relations in 1972. Delays in applications referred to South Africa on many occasions caused unfavourable comment. Diggs’ second application for a visa was refused.”56 The problem for South Africa was that people like Congressman Diggs wanted to go to South Africa to collect information they would later use against the regime. When being denied a visa, Diggs would use this to show how the regime did not tolerate criticism. Foreign Affairs evaluated the situation in the following way: “although South Africa’s visa policy has become more relaxed in recent years, individual cases, such as that of Congressman Diggs, still cause friction from time to time.”57 The visa issue can be understood as an issue which South Africa could use as a bargaining card against USA. South Africa denied visas to people they knew would criticise South Africa’s policies. But they could also relax visa restrictions as a show of good will and faith towards the Americans.

One of the more controversial aspects of South Africa-United States relations was military cooperation. In 1963, some African states asked the Security Council to call on United Nations member states to ban arms sales to South Africa. The call for an arms embargo was ignored by many countries in the West, but United States officially upheld the embargo.58 Noted as “other areas of contention”, the Foreign Affairs claims: “United States arms embargo and refusal to allow naval units to visit South Africa. Although South Africa is not dependent on the United States for arms supplies it feels that United States attitudes on defence matters are extremely negative.”59 In a different document, United States choice to follow the voluntary arms embargo is discussed and difficult to accept for South Africa:

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57 “Points of contention”, (no signature, no date), “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 21, 26.1.72 – 17.3.72, BTS 133/3.
58 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 81.
59 “Points of contention”, (no signature, no date), “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 21, 26.1.72 – 17.3.72, BTS 133/3.
While this [the arms embargo of 1963] is, of course, a matter for the United States to evaluate and decide on herself, South Africa must place on record its view that the arms embargo is a punitive measure, the continued maintenance of which is not justified either by South Africa’s record of responsibility, nor its policy towards the United States, nor by the world security situation.60

Foreign Affairs was also concerned how USA was widening “the are of the arms embargo to include, at times, ordinary civilian equipment”. The arms embargo and unwillingness to provide military equipment was raised with the Americans in diplomatic talks a few years before. In 1970 Brand Fourie held discussions with Mr Newsom, where Fourie raised the question of “maritime defence equipment”:

Mr. Fourie said that South Africans found it very difficult to understand why the U.S. remained unwilling to supply maritime reconnaissance aircraft to South Africa. Surely it is in the interest not only of the United States but of all the countries with shipping in these parts that South Africa should be able to do air-sea rescue work. We have on occasions been called to help Americans. Mr. Newsom said that the U.S. had strong feelings on the subject – feelings which had to take into account the reactions not only in Africa but also at home. At the highest levels in the U.S. they had reached the conclusion that the implications of supplying any military equipment to South Africa would evoke the strongest negative reaction.61

One of the reasons South Africa was annoyed with USA for lack of military support was their argument that South Africa was in control of the vital sea routes around the tip of Africa.62 Furthermore, they were angry that South Africa’s historical legacy of fighting in the Second World War and in the Korean War was not recognised and appreciated, but met with an embargo and lack of cooperation. The lack of military cooperation was one of the constraints in the relationship between the two countries. Another important quote gives a hint that there might have been military cooperation despite the arms embargo. “This seems to make it clear that any military contact between our two countries, will have to continue to be conducted off-stage.”63 It is quite likely that South Africa and the United States did have some sort of military

61 “Notes on discussions between Secretary for Foreign Affairs and Mr. Newsom on 9 November 1970”, Pretoria, December 1970, “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol 18, 1.12.70 – 28.5.71, BTS 1\33\3.
62 The issue of the sea routes around the Cape of Good Hope will be discussed later.
cooperation, although this might have been limited and secret from Foreign Affairs, as no other references to real military involvement can be found in Foreign Affairs’ archives.\textsuperscript{64}

Some of the issues which created problems between South Africa and the United States involve rather petty arguments involving South Africa’s racial policies and the often absurd consequences of this. One such case which kept Foreign Affairs busy was the appointment of “A Black Negro diplomat” at the US embassy in Pretoria.\textsuperscript{65} The appointment of an Afro-American diplomat, Mr James Baker, was seen as a negative political statement by the United States, and the issue was followed closely. A later report states: “Negro Diplomat: The smooth appointment of James Baker to the US Embassy in Pretoria is a plus factor in our relations. However, Jim Baker himself is frustrated and unhappy”.\textsuperscript{66} The last sentence indicates how the issues was not as “smooth” as Foreign Affairs argued, and the whole question of Mr Baker is an indication of the level of the diplomatic controversy and what kept Foreign Affairs busy. Other similar controversies involved “Pretoria’s refusal to lift colour bars for visiting black American seamen” and “its anger at mixed race drinks parties at the US Embassy” according to Barber.\textsuperscript{67} Even if this does not look like serious constraints in the aftermath, these issues were important at time, especially in the diplomatic sphere were Foreign Affairs operated.

All these examples show that in reality the relations between South Africa and the United States were much more complicated than South Africa would claim officially, or was stated in ANC propaganda. There were several problematic issues which preoccupied the South Africans in USA. All the issues – except the question of Namibia’s sovereignty – were connected to USA’s opposition to apartheid. The United States followed its policy of critical engagement with South Africa, which meant that they were never really hostile and never very welcoming. Often US politicians would be openly critical in interviews and speeches, while US diplomats would be friendly but cautious in diplomatic talks. This duality was again very frustrating for the South African diplomats in Washington, as they felt that all the American goodwill they managed to build up as part of their diplomacy never lasted.

The South African diplomats, frustrated as they were, did not fail to analyse \textit{why} the Americans acted in this way. They understood United States’ approach to South Africa as being

\textsuperscript{64} Lack of military support later moved South Africa to increase its self reliance on military equipment, and during the late 1970s and 1980s the South African military industry grew rapidly.

\textsuperscript{65} “US – SA relations: Developments January – April 1973.”, (no date, no signature), “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 27, 2.7.73 – 29.11.73, BTS 1\textsuperscript{133}3.

\textsuperscript{66} “Notes on US-RSA Relations: 1972/73”, (no date, no signature) “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 27, 2.7.73 – 29.11.73, BTS 1\textsuperscript{133}3.

\textsuperscript{67} Barber, \textit{South Africa’s foreign policy}, p. 160.
founded more on American domestic and international strategies than South Africa’s own politics:

U.S. policy, like that of all countries, is based on what it perceives to be in its own best interest. […] In the case of South Africa the U.S. has an obvious interest in maintaining beneficial relations with a viable orderly country; it is of economic and strategic importance to the U.S.A. and it would be acting contrary to its own interest if it were to connive in the destruction of an orderly, viable and economically strong society. But at the same time, relations with South Africa is for the U.S. somewhat of a political embarrassment.68

According to the South Africans, the US used South Africa as a scapegoat and applied different moral standards for South Africa than any other country:

It is a pity that the State Department should feel it necessary to stress the ‘restraints’ which it imposes in its relations with South Africa […]. This is particularly so in view of President Nixon’s mature and dynamic philosophy of international relations with the rest of the world. This attitude is well illustrated by the formula which the United States has adopted for its relations with the USSR (a country which is not widely noted for its adherence to the principle of ‘self-determination’ of for the ‘political role’ which it allows its citizens) that ‘Difference in ideology and social systems of the USA and the USSR are not obstacles to the bilateral developments of normal relations, based on the principles of sovereignty, equality, non-interference in internal affairs and mutual advantage’.69

Even if the South African diplomats thought they understood USA’s policies and priorities towards South Africa, they found this to be “patronising and directed towards interference in our domestic affairs”, or “blatant interference”.70 “Hypocrisy” was another word used of US policy towards South Africa compared to for example the Soviet Union. As mentioned, the South Africans were frustrated that opposition to apartheid came not from the usual anti-apartheid opposition, but from US politicians and diplomats. Even more frustrating, both political camps, both the Democrats and the Republicans held the same political line towards South Africa. The embassy understood the reason to this came from the American politicians need to win black votes, something which became urgently important after the Civil Rights movement and the rise of black politics in the United States. There was also an international component to the issue:

68 Ambassador JSF Botha to Secretary of Foreign Affairs, “State Department Influence: Bantu Leaders”, Embassy in Washington, 1 September 1972, “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol 23, 1.9.72 – 31.10.72, BTS 1\33\3.
69 “The Foreign Policy Report of Secretary of State”, (no date, no signature), “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 27, 2.7.73 – 29.11.73, BTS 1\33\3. The quote within the quote from “Basic Principles of Relations between the USA and the USSR signed at Moscow on 29/5/1972.”
Undoubtedly the State Department and the office of the President are under considerable pressure from various anti-South African groups both in the United States and abroad.”\textsuperscript{71} Being clear and aware of the strained relations between the two countries, and having analysed the reasons, Foreign Affairs needed their own strategies to improve the relationship.

South Africa responds to USA’s criticism

South Africa’s strategy to mend relations with the United States was based on what they saw as a “failure on the part of the United States to grasp the essence of South African politics.”\textsuperscript{72} The general feeling in the Department of Foreign Affairs was of being misled. The Americans neither understood the special situation South Africa was in, nor the progress it made in the developments to improve the situation for all South Africans, black and white. Taking one occasion as an example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hilgard Muller, told the United States ambassador to Pretoria, Mr John Hurd that he “could not understand why, after all these years, there was no appreciation of South Africa’s multi-national development or its policy of self-determination for its policies, and of the fact that South African Government was doing all it could to achieve development.”\textsuperscript{73} Muller also found it necessary to ask Hurd why “if South Africa was making progress, it would still never get credit, why it should be the whipping boy”.\textsuperscript{74}

A common approach by the South African diplomats was to explain South Africa’s special situation and unique problems. This could remove the “misunderstandings” where the Americans did not understand South Africa’s intentions, as well as providing a background for South Africa’s political choices. There are not many documents in the Foreign Affairs’ archives outlining their strategies towards the United States. One such rare document, “The role of terminology in the Republic’s Foreign Relations” gives important clues to how South Africa thought they could counter the negative criticism abroad.\textsuperscript{75} The document claims that “a clue to the crux of the ideological attack against us may be found in the different interpretations of the term “South Africa” – indeed the contention may be made that the confusion which exists on the meaning of

\textsuperscript{71} “The Development of South African-United States relations under the Nixon Administration: January – February 1972.”, (no signature, no date), “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 21, 26.1.72 – 17.3.72, BTS 1\33\3.

\textsuperscript{72} “President Nixon’s Foreign Policy Report 1973”, (no date, no signature) “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 27, 2.7.73 – 29.11.73, BTS 1\33\3.

\textsuperscript{73} “Record of conversation between the United States ambassador, Mr John Hurd, and the minister of foreign affairs, Dr the Hon. H. Muller in the minister’s office in Parliament at 3. p.m. on Wednesday 6 June.”, “USA relations with South Africa” Vol.26 19.4.73 – 29.6.73, BTS 1\33\3.

\textsuperscript{74} “Record of conversation between the United States ambassador, Mr John Hurd, and the minister of foreign affairs, Dr the Hon. H. Muller in the minister’s office in Parliament at 3. p.m. on Wednesday 6 June.”, “USA relations with South Africa” Vol.26 19.4.73 – 29.6.73, BTS 1\33\3.

\textsuperscript{75} “The role of terminology in the Republic’s Foreign Relations”, (no signature), Pretoria October 1973, “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 27, 2.7.73 – 29.11.73, BTS 1\33\3.
this term, lies very close to the heart of our problems.” The document set out to examine the main interpretations of the term “South Africa”, and identified five different meanings of the term. South Africa was internationally thought of as either: the “unitary multi-racial state”, the “western state”, the “white nation”, the “Afrikaner nation” or the “Black State”. The last interpretation was according to the document “the interpretation of extremist black exile organizations currently engaged in terrorist activities against Southern Africa.”

The problem, according to this document, was that when the South African government spoke of South Africa, it usually meant the “White nation”, while the rest of the world thought of “South Africa” as “the unitary multi-racial state”. As a consequence, the strategy for South Africa’s foreign policy should be “that of securing international recognition of our right to a separate nationhood […] In so doing we could base our argument on the internationally accepted principle of the right of all peoples […] to self-determination.” The white government in other words had to make it clear that it was representing the white nation, and not all of the people living in South Africa. The other “nations” in South Africa would, according to the ideology of apartheid, be developed side by side with this “white nation” and gain independence over separate, self ruled “Homelands”. If they made this clear to the rest of the world, the essence in the criticism against South Africa would fall away; i.e. the racism and lack of political freedom for the black population.

South Africa and the Cold War
A second and equally important strategy used by Foreign Affairs in the United States was to argue for South Africa’s strategic importance and the threat of Communism. If the Western allies understood South Africa’s geopolitical importance, it would increase its position in the Western world: “The South African government drew on Cold War theories to argue that its opposition to local liberation movements with Soviet sympathies or links was part of the same battle that the US and Western Europe were waging against Eastern Europe and the USSR.”

The threat of the Communists became a more and more central point in South Africa’s political ideology during the 1970s. One can argue that the real threat of an communist onslaught did not take shape before the late part of the 1970s, but this did not prevent South Africa from seeing this as a threat already from the 1960s. The TRC Final Report concludes:

[an] important factor shaping the South African government’s actions in the 1960s was the anti-Communist zeal of the cold war, in which the West was seen to be engaged in an effort to stem an encroaching and creeping

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South Africa’s foreign relations

Communism. Despite the South African government’s diplomatic alienation from Britain and the Commonwealth in the early 1960s, the notion of a common struggle against the forces of Communism gained increasing popularity among key security policy-makers. The adoption of the Freedom Charter in 1955, the relationship between the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) after 1960, and the ANC’s later links to China and then the Soviet bloc, entrenched the National Party (NP) government’s perception of a link between Communism and the struggle against white domination.77

South Africa was also convinced, and tried to convince the Americans, that they were in control of one of – or even the most – important sea lanes in the world, around the Cape of Good Hope. P.W. Botha in early 1976 argued that the “Republic of South Africa is situated on the most important sea route on the face of the globe.”78 The tense situation in the Middle East made the Suez Canal vulnerable. South Africa was in control of the passage around the tip of Africa, and used this as a bargaining card towards the United States. South Africa even improved the naval base in Simonstown, south of Cape Town, to be able to cater for a large presence of British and American ships in case of a war. Neither Britain nor USA showed any appreciation over this offer. To some degree, South Africa’s arguments only worked one way, and did not always impress the Americans. In a conversation between ambassador Hurd and Foreign Minister H. Muller; “The Minister referred to South Africa’s interest in sea traffic and in the need to keep the sea-lanes open but the Ambassador did not react to this”.79

However, this argument might have worked better with military strategists than with diplomats in the State Department. The Consul General at the South African consulate in San Francisco sent a copy of an address by Rear Admiral W. H. Groverman, which had emphasised South Africa’s strategic importance with the comment that “Admiral Groverman is very well disposed towards South Africa and the thought has long ago occurred to me that it would be a good idea to invite him as a guest to South Africa”.80 In other words, while the State Department might not have been too impressed with South Africa’s geo-strategic importance, the American

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78 Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha, House of assembly debates, 26.1.1976, col. 44. See also chapter 3 for more on this session in Parliament.
79 “Record of conversation between the United States ambassador, Mr John Hurd, and the minister of foreign affairs, Dr the Hon. H. Muller in the minister’s office in Parliament at 3. p.m. on Wednesday 6 June.”, “USA relations with South Africa” Vol.26 19.4.73 – 29.6.73, BTS 1133/3. Underlining in original text. The same pattern is also evident in the report mentioned above.
80 Consul General (signature unreadable), South African consulate in San Fransisco to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, ”Address by Rear Admiral W.H. Groverman: Strategic Importance of South Africa.”, 5 November 1971, “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol. 20, BTS 1133/3. According to the Consul General, the admiral were “very good friends of ours”, which also could mean that the admiral had been successfully influenced by the South Africans.
military might have been more interested. This is not evident in the Foreign Affairs archives however.

During the 1970s, South Africa developed a highly secret and controversial nuclear programme. The nuclear programme had one official side, which was the development of nuclear energy and power stations. Foreign Affairs was involved with nuclear matters, and both D. Sole and J. Shearar have been involved in these matters, Sole at times served on the Atomic energy board. But South Africa also developed a secret nuclear programme with the aim of building a few nuclear warheads. According to Sole, the Atomic energy board was aware of this project, although they were not supposed to know.\textsuperscript{81} While the secret development of nuclear arms was a military strategy developed by Defence, it was at any rate an important foreign policy matter. The issue of proliferation was very important during the Cold War. South Africa could – and would? – not entirely hide the fact that they were developing or capable of developing nuclear arms. This was another of the important issues between South Africa and USA, forcing the United States to take South Africa seriously. According to Shearar, the idea of developing nuclear arms independently of USA or UK was not necessarily to use the weapons – as South Africa had no enemy against nuclear bombs would be effective. But in the case South Africa was under serious threat, USA and others would have to take the threat seriously and come to South Africa’s aid – as South Africa had the potential to use nuclear weapons. One should not overlook it also made South Africa feel more powerful and important.

South Africa’s European friends

Colonial history gave South Africa with strong links to Great Britain. Maybe half of the white population in South Africa had roots in Britain and used English as their first language. Britain was also the most important source of foreign investment in South Africa, and most of the latest wave of immigrants too still came from Britain. Consequently, many British had family connections in South Africa and held a positive view of the country. The feelings for Great Britain were not so warm among the government and the Afrikaners, still remembering the humiliating defeat during the Anglo-Boer war.

The British political landscape was markedly different to the American and the political parties’ had markedly different attitudes towards South Africa: A change of government would be clearly felt in Pretoria and the embassy in London. In 1974 or 1975, Foreign Affairs noted that: “The advent of the Conservatives to power in 1970 implied an immediate easing in the taut

\textsuperscript{81} Interview with Donald B. Sole, 25 June 2003.
relations then existing between Britain and South Africa.”82 And “As long as the Conservative Party remains in power we can expect that the friendly relations existing between us will be maintained.”83 This is a rather different tone from the assessments towards the United States. On the other hand, the authors of this document feared what the Labour Party might do, in the light of their criticism of South Africa when they were in power: “As the Labour Party has so openly displayed and expressed its antipathy for South Africa we can expect no quarter from them in or out of power.”84 They also noted that even the Labour Party was conscious of economic links between the two countries, and would not necessarily stop all economic cooperation with South Africa if they regained power.

Another important factor in London was the presence of a large South African exile population, many of which had escaped because of their opposition to apartheid. London also housed the most important ANC-office in the West. The Labour Party cooperated with the ANC, the exiles and the British Anti-Apartheid Movement, so the already strong anti-apartheid front thereby had strong links into mainstream politics. In London the apartheid regime therefore had to share ground with their enemy to degree they did not do anywhere else. Foreign Affairs was the only South African body working in Britain, also a strong BOSS agent network was active in Britain monitoring and engaging the anti-apartheid organisations. Their activities affected not only South African exiles, but also interfered with the host nation in ways such as infiltrating the post services and framing of leading politicians among other examples.85 It was rather BOSS than Foreign Affairs which dealt with ANC in Britain.

South Africa’s relations with Britain were just like relations with USA ambivalent, due to the level of political opposition against apartheid. However, the situation was different, as South Africa on the one hand could relate to political forces and currents in Great Britain with much stronger links to South Africa than they could find in America. On the other hand, the South African political exiles, the British Anti-Apartheid movement, and even the powerful Labour Party made Great Britain a more hostile environment than USA.

A few other nations must be considered among South Africa’s international allies, although they did not measure up to USA and Great Britain in importance. Portugal was one such ally, important because of its political support for South Africa in for example NATO, and its

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Colonies, or “territories” in Southern Africa; Angola and Mozambique. Portugal was however limited when it came to international status and influence. France and West Germany were other important allies of South Africa, although on a smaller scale than the United States and United Kingdom. France was an important provider of arms to South Africa, while West Germany had important nuclear co-operation with South Africa. The latter was later exposed by the anti-apartheid movement in Germany, much to ambassador Sole’s embarrassment.86

The relations with Israel were also important, especially the military cooperation, while the political relations were more ambivalent. Both countries were controversial in the eyes of their geographical neighbours and under fire from international solidarity organisations, local guerrillas and in the UN. But the relations between the two “pariahs” were somewhat restrained by Israel’s need for good relations with independent Africa states, to counter the hostility of their Arab neighbours. Vice-versa did South Africa need good relations with the Arab world, as they were facing a hostile African continent. Prime Minister Vorster’s history of pro-Nazi sympathies during the Second World War was another restraint in the relationship, although Vorster did in the end visit Israel in 1976. Israel and South Africa had the other hand more in common than pulling them apart. The development of the nuclear war heads was most probably a joint South Africa-Israeli project, and they were also cooperating on conventional weapons. Japan also stands out as one of South Africa’s important international allies. Japan was an increasingly important trading partner for South Africa. With no active anti-apartheid movement, Japan did not feel pressured to criticise apartheid. Nonetheless, Japan had too hide their economic links with South Africa, as they would not jeopardise their economic ties with other countries by openly supporting South Africa.

Conclusion

In this chapter the main features of South Africa and its foreign relations before the coup in Lisbon in April 1974 have been outlined. South Africa was at the time a relatively secure and stable country, run by an oppressive white racist minority regime. Internal opposition was silenced and inactive. Regionally South Africa was protected by friendly regimes in Mozambique, Angola and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Internationally, South Africa was firmly placed and committed to the Western camp of the Cold War. But this would change with the collapse of the regime in Portugal and the prospect of independence for Angola and Mozambique. This tipped the regional balance of power in white South Africa’s disfavour.

86 Sole, This above all.
South Africa’s strongest ally was the United States, and there were strong political and economical ties between the two countries. However, as the archive files presented in this chapter show, the relationship was fairly ambivalent. The United States’ politicians and bureaucrats repeatedly criticised South Africa in public for the racist apartheid system. The tone was slightly more diplomatic and friendly in unofficial talks or in talks with American business. This meant that the South Africans grew gradually more tired of USA’s “lack of understanding” for South Africa’s political problems. The South African diplomats also attempted to counter the negative criticism from USA in various ways. One of the main tactics was to explain the reasons behind apartheid and the necessity of racial segregation. Despite various attempts, it did not seem to help. South Africa also tried to convince the United States of the geopolitical importance of South Africa, since it was in control of the sea route around the Cape of Good Hope. This did neither impress the Americans. However, outside the diplomatic and political sphere, business relations between the two countries were still good and growing in this period. The archive material from Department of Foreign Affairs shows a similar trend in the relationship between South Africa and its other Western allies, such as the United Kingdom, which were also ambivalent and marked by both conflict and hospitality.

During Vorster’s premiership foreign relations were higher on the South African government’s agenda than before or after. He was actively involved with foreign affairs especially “Dialogue” with various African states to win acceptance and credibility on the continent. This would improve South Africa’s regional and continental stance, but should also improve South Africa in the eyes of its other international allies. This was the other South African strategy to contain international criticism of South Africa and apartheid. The initiative had some early success in establishing relations with a few independent African countries, but was soon stopped by a efforts from the ANC and its radical African allies such as Tanzania. In the end, Dialogue was therefore not enough to impress South Africa’s Western allies notably.

An important feature of Dialogue, was how the initiative was driven by BOSS and Department of Information. Interestingly, Foreign Affairs was less involved, an indication of how Foreign Affairs was more or less sidelined in the South African government. Foreign Affairs’ tactics were quiet diplomacy, trying to explain South Africa’s problems and keeping a low profile. Department of Information were keeping a high profile and in many ways doing Foreign Affairs’ job, to their great frustration. Foreign Affairs’ low profile in foreign policy making would have serious consequences for the developments after April 1974, as will be shown in the next two chapters.
2 Diplomacy and Aggression, 1974-75

Introduction

1974 was a turning point in the history of Southern Africa. The balance of power in the region shifted from being dominated by regimes based on white minorities to regimes supported by the black majority. The shift in power affected South Africa’s position in the region, and would in the next few years have a dramatic impact on South Africa itself. Marking the turning point was the coup d’état in Lisbon, Portugal, on 25 April 1974. This set in motion a development leading to independence for Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau.1 South Africa lost one of its most reliable allies, the Portuguese Caetano-regime. The geographically large and politically friendly neighbours to the north, Angola and Mozambique, would now likely move into the hands of radical, Marxist governments.

This chapter will analyse how the change of power in Lisbon and the independence for its African territories affected South Africa and the balance of power in Southern Africa. The chapter will then look at how South Africa responded to these developments; first with renewed efforts of improving foreign relations with other African countries and trying to solve the conflict in neighbouring Zimbabwe, an initiative known as “Détente”. Détente was also used actively by the South African diplomats vis-à-vis its international allies. After only a year and a half, Détente came to an abrupt end when South African invaded Angola in October 1975.2 Détente and the invasion will be analysed as two different approaches by South Africa to the change of power in the region. Behind these two strategies – diplomacy and aggression – was a serious and extensive political conflict between various bodies within the South African government. When assessing these two solutions, it is important to analyse the conflict of interest and strategy which took place in the South African cabinet in this period. The outcome of this struggle for political power and influence was vital for shaping the direction South Africa would take during the next two decades. The immediate challenges for Foreign Affairs in the wake of the intervention in Angola will be discussed in this chapter. The further implications this had on South Africa’s foreign affairs will be assessed in the following chapter on the period from early 1976 to late 1978, where South Africa tried to overcome the negative effects of the invasion.

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1 Guinea-Bissau will not be much discussed in the following.
2 South Africa’s military operations in Angola will here be referred to as both “intervention” and “invasion”.

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The research done for this thesis show how Department of Foreign Affairs was concerned with the developments in Angola, and held official contact with the Portuguese in matters concerning the development in the interim period before Angola would gain independence. But Foreign Affairs was not able to influence Prime Minister Vorster to abstain from any military involvement in Angola, despite Foreign Affairs’ experience in international diplomacy and predictions of how the world would react on this. When the invasion in Angola had failed and South Africa came under serious international criticism, the heads of the Department in Pretoria continued to keep its embassies uninformed about what had really happened, complicating their work. This research both confirm and add information to the claim that Foreign Affairs was sidelined in Vorster’s government. Furthermore, the failure of Foreign Affairs to prevent a military intervention or to explain it to the world contributed to South Africa’s move towards increased international isolation.

The fall of ‘Portuguese’ Africa, April 1974

The coup d’état in Lisbon on 25 April 1974 came as much of a surprise to the South African Government as it did to the rest of the world. Apparently, the state broadcaster South African Broadcasting Company had “proudly described Portugal and South Africa as the only two remaining stable states in the world” only days before the coup.3 Portugal was one of the few countries which had supported South Africa internationally. South Africa had covertly supplied arms, helicopters and a limited number of pilots to the Portuguese war against the three liberation forces in Angola. The Portuguese were grateful for logistical support, but did not want any direct South African involvement in their armed operations.4

In 1974 Portugal fought three separate colonial wars in their three African territories; Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau. In Angola alone they faced three different national liberation movements: MPLA, FNLA and UNITA.5 By 1970 Portugal used 40 per cent of its annual budget for the military. It had 150,000 troops in the three colonies and was suffering a death toll of 13,000 in 1972 alone.6 Portugal had in reality met a stalemate in the war against the liberation movements; Portugal could not destroy the struggle for liberation, the liberation forces

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4 Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p. 75.
5 MPLA; Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, FNLA; Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola and Unita; União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola. MPLA’s army was named FAPLA; Forças Armadas Popular para Libertação de Angola.
6 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 175.
could not beat the Portuguese armed forces. It became clear to many Portuguese that they could never win the wars, and this revelation influenced the coup makers in April 1974. Still it took several months of political struggle within the new political leadership before they decided to grant independence to the colonies. This was done on 27 July 1974 by General António de Spínola, head of the new Junta of National Salvation.\(^7\) In the former colonies, especially in Angola the situation was tense during the period after the coup and before the date for full independence was decided. The situation was tense between the large number of Portuguese settlers and the African population, as well as between the three liberation movements waiting to take over.

### South Africa’s response to changes in Southern Africa

The change of power in Portugal and the expected consequences for Southern Africa were met with concern in South Africa. When it became clear that Mozambique and Angola would gain full independence under majority rule, the regional balance of power was almost turned upside down. The region would no longer be dominated by white minority regimes, but by black, radical nationalists. Only South Africa, including South West Africa, and Rhodesia were still controlled by white regimes. Minister of Foreign Affairs Hilgard Muller noted in September 1974:

> The fast-moving tempo of modern-day international life brings with it ever-increasing change. Hardly a week passes without significant developments in some or other quarter of the globe. We see and example of this in the changes that took place in Portugal in April of this year. Already these changes have made their impact felt and there can be little doubt that they will profoundly influence the future history of Southern Africa.\(^8\)

South Africa was also aware of the existing alliances between the African liberation movements in the region. With former liberation movement taking over Mozambique and Angola, this would most likely provide ANC, PAC and SWAPO with greatly increased access to South Africa and Namibia, possibly even military bases close to the South African border. The South African government concerned about this scenario and saw itself forced to adapt new strategies fast. Two important developments soon followed. The first was increased regional and continental diplomacy: The dialogue-initiative was renewed and advanced in what became known as the “Détente”-policy. Détente in brief amounted to renewed contacts with Zambia in

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\(^7\) Guimarães, The Origins of the Angola Civil War p. 92

\(^8\) Minister of Foreign Affairs Hilgard Muller, “Draft of Minister’s Speech for Twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly” [of United Nations], 12 September 1974, “Statements made by the Minster of Foreign Affairs”, Vol. 8, 26.2.73 – 17.8.76, BTS 4\(\text{t}\)1\(\text{t}\)13\(\text{t}\).
order to solve the problems in Rhodesia, as well as new diplomatic bonds to African countries north of Southern Africa. The second development was “to launch a five-year military modernisation and expansion programme, necessitating a drastic increase in defence expenditure. A significant organisational shake-up of the South African army’s combat forces was initiated with the establishment of separate conventional and ‘Special Forces’ formations.”

This increased militarization of South Africa was an important and fundamental development of South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s, and also increased the Military’s political power. Because of the limited space, only the first of these outlined developments will be discussed here; Vorster’s new diplomatic initiative.

It is important to note that there was no consensus within the South African cabinet on how to meet the new challenges. For the next few years, rivalry and intense power struggle took place within the government, which again shaped the strategic choices which was made. Prime Minister Vorster’s first official reactions to the coming independence for neighbouring countries were however open and positive.

Whatever patterns may emerge from these changes in our part of the world, I would like in this forum to reiterate our policies of good-neighbourliness, peaceful co-existence and non-intervention in the affairs of the other countries – already demonstrated to our Portuguese-speaking neighbours for more than a century – will continue.

This (draft) speech to the UN General Assembly was an attempt by the Minister to prove that South Africa had only good intentions towards the region. The speech does however – most likely unintentionally – reveal how South Africa was out of line with the rest of the world. The “policies of good-neighbourliness” is the same phrase used by former Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd when he tried to make a definition of “apartheid”, something the anti-apartheid movement used when explaining the differences between what the apartheid governments propaganda and the realities. Apartheid was declared by this same audience, the UN General Assembly, as a “crime against humanity” in 1973, and the irony of using the same phrase when describing South Africa’s foreign relations was probably not lost on the audience. Furthermore, the reference to “our Portuguese-speaking neighbours” omits that the majority of the population in these countries did not speak Portuguese. It is doubtful that the Minister saw any irony or

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10 Minister of Foreign Affairs Hilgard Muller, “Draft of Minister’s Speech for Twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly” [of United Nations], 12 September 1974, “Statements made by the Minster of Foreign Affairs”, Vol. 8, 26.2.73 – 17.8.76, BTS 4\1\13\3.
anything controversial in this. The Minister went even further and committed South Africa to a friendly relationship with its neighbours, regardless of their political orientation:

I would like to take this opportunity to affirm that, in particular, we for our part are ready to co-operate and collaborate in the economic field and otherwise, with any Government that may be formed in Angola and Mozambique, whatever its eventual composition may be.11

While Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister Vorster promised friendly relations with the new governments in Mozambique and Angola, the reaction in the Department of Defence was different. According to several scholars, P.W. Botha and Department of Defence sought to support white Portuguese settlers who wanted to unseat President Samora Machel in a coup. Defence had forces and equipment ready when van den Bergh in BOSS and Vorster sabotaged the operation.12 This example shows both the contradictory foreign policy strategies which existed within the government, and how one of the parties had to sabotage an operation to stop the Military from staging a coup in a neighbouring country – an operation which would have been directly contrary to the official stated South African foreign policy at the time. However, Vorster shared Department of Defence’s concern about how independence for Mozambique and Angola posed a threat of increased ANC activity against white South Africa:

South Africa’s policy is not to interfere in the internal affairs of these countries [Mozambique and Angola]. [...] The only thing that interests us is that Mozambique and Angola are not used as springboards against us. They have given us assurance about this in fact, and if they continue this attitude, all will go well.13

The worry of having ANC, PAC or SWAPO bases close to South Africa’s borders was not far-fetched, but something the liberation movements actively tried to establish. The disagreement in the government was related to how South Africa should counter this renewed threat from the black opposition. South Africa could either use diplomacy to ensure the liberation movements would not get a foothold in the neighbouring states, or threaten with military action against ANC targets there.

11 Minister of Foreign Affairs Hilgard Muller, “Draft of Minister’s Speech for Twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly” [of United Nations], 12 September 1974, “Statements made by the Minster of Foreign Affairs”, Vol. 8, 26.2.73 – 17.8.76, BTS 41\13\3.
Before Vorster turned his attention to the growing conflict in Angola, he used most of 1974 and 1975 on renewed diplomatic efforts to increase South Africa’s status in the rest of Africa through Détente. In September 1974 Vorster met with the president of Ivory Coast, Felix Houphouët-Boigny (the meeting only became known to the public in May 1975), and in February 1975 he met with Liberia’s President William Tolbert. South Africa’s ambassador to Washington and the UN, Pik Botha, was crucial in communicating between the two presidents until Tolbert died in April.\(^\text{14}\) The Department of Information was active in setting up other diplomatic relations during the Détente, in particular the meeting with President Houphouët-Boigny, where Eschel Rhodie had brokered the meeting.\(^\text{15}\) BOSS was the other key participant in forming and extending South Africa’s new diplomatic links to African states.

Apart from diplomatic contact with states in West Africa, “Détente” also covered an intense diplomatic activity regarding the situation in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Vorster, together with Zambia’s President Kenneth Kaunda, tried to broker a peace agreement between the white minority regime of Ian Smith and the African liberation movements ZANU and ZAPU.\(^\text{16}\) The Smith regime was even more isolated than South Africa, and could only count on South Africa as its ally. South Africa had for a time also been present in Zimbabwe with police units and air force to help Smith, giving especially the Military and the police strong links to the Rhodesian forces. South Africa was therefore the only country with leverage to push Smith to the negotiating table. Kaunda, which through the process held close contact with Tanzania, had the same leverage on ZANU and ZAPU.\(^\text{17}\) Neither Smith nor the liberation movements were comfortable with the negotiations, preferring the battlefield. But if they succeeded, Kaunda and Vorster could improve their regional and international status.

The contact between Vorster and Kaunda regarding Zimbabwe started in October 1974, and went on as secret diplomacy between the two countries for the next year. The Department of Foreign Affairs were actively involved in Détente, and Brand Fourie, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, “played a vital role in the [...] détente negotiations”.\(^\text{18}\) BOSS’ van den Bergh was also involved as Vorster’s envoy to Kaunda. An interesting example and detail showing how far Vorster was willing to go is how they were willing to sacrifice some of the covert work of Defence to please


\(^{15}\) Bell, Unfinished Business, p. 62.


\(^{17}\) ZANU and ZAPU had different power bases inside Zimbabwe, and also different international allies. Only some people within the liberation movements chose to negotiate, while others continued the liberation war.

\(^{18}\) Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 182.
Kaunda. According to Bell, van den Bergh and Vorster found out that the South African Defence Force (SADF) was recruiting and building a small army of Zambian dissidents which they planned to use against Kaunda. Van den Bergh and Vorster, without the knowledge of P.W. Botha, sent the dissidents straight into a planned Zambian ambush. P.W. Botha was furious, while Kaunda was naturally pleased.19 This again show the disparity between BOSS and Vorster on one side and P.W. Botha on the other.

Détente’s climax was a conference in August 1975 in Victoria Falls. Ian Smith met a delegation from African National Council (ANC (Z)), a joint council of representatives from both ZANU and ZAPU, for negotiations in a railway carriage on the bridge over the Zambezi River.20 Vorster and Kaunda were both present to exercise pressure on the two parties, but the talks failed, marking the beginning of the end of Détente. Détente was an important but controversial diplomatic initiative. Vorster’s pressure on Smith was not popular in all circles in South Africa. Also, many white South Africans felt solidarity with their white neighbours in Rhodesia. They were bemused with the way Vorster undermined their power and future in favour of black nationalists. Smith was of course fully aware of this, dragging out the negotiations “for time to allow an extremist white backlash to develop against Vorster at home.”21 Détente was not very popular with the liberation movements or OAU either. In January 1975, the OAU Liberation Committee adopted the “Dar es Salaam Declaration” calling for “intensified pressure to ostracize the South Africa Government and to intensify the armed struggle”.22 OAU also decided to increase funds for the struggle for liberation in Rhodesia and Namibia, while not the ANC.

Détente, as well as Dialogue before it, served two important goals: the strategy created a split in the OAU, as the African nations no longer made a solid front opposing South Africa. Détente in this regard continued what Dialogue had started. Besides, South Africa used Détente to convince the Americans and other Western allies that South Africa was serious in its commitment to peace and security in Southern Africa. The Americans to some degree acknowledged the South African efforts, and Newsom, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, the beginning of 1974 confirmed to South African ambassador JSF Botha in, the importance of Détente and credibility:

19 Bell, Unfinished Business, p. 61. Kaunda, in response, “showed his gratitude to Vorster by ensuring that several potentially troublesome South African exiles working in Zambia were moved on”.

20 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 185-6.


[Newsom] added, however, that the establishment of a *modus vivendi* with the Black African countries would, of course, presuppose a significant change in the general acceptability of South Africa’s policies and this fact would of itself be of greater importance in bringing about a more positive attitude towards South Africa in the United States.23

Even the ANC indirectly acknowledged the potential threat of Détente, which could ruin a united African opposition against South Africa. In his speech to the to the Ministers present at the 24th session of the Organisation for African Unity in early 1975, Alfred Nzo, Secretary-General of ANC, made the following remark:

[… that the information media of the Western imperialist countries, especially those of the South African regime, have attributed the absence of the delegation from the Central African Republic from the current Session of the OAU Council of Ministers to the fact that a high level delegation from this sister Republic is at the very moment paying a “goodwill visit” to South Africa.24

Détente and Dialogue were crucial diplomatic initiatives with potential to actually improve South Africa’s legitimacy in Africa. However, they failed due partly to South Africa’s own actions and partly due to ANC and its allies active campaign to counter Vorster’s efforts (this will be discussed later). Worth noting is that these initiatives were not formed by the Foreign Affairs alone, but by a mixture of “conventional diplomacy by Foreign Affairs, unconventional initiatives by the Department of Information and BOSS”.25 This shows how the Department of Foreign Affairs did not control South Africa’s foreign policy alone – which again made it stand out as politically weak in relation to the other government bodies. It also shows how foreign policy was a highly contested arena with various and highly active participants trying to shape and influence South Africa’s relations and foreign policy strategies.

An important point is how Détente is a foreign affairs strategy in its own right, a strategy where the South Africa government would maintain its power and control by making friends rather than enemies on the African continent. In the eyes of Vorster’s political opponents at home, this strategy could be seen as weak and dangerous. He was betraying white Rhodesia and allowing the enemy to come even closer to South Africa’s borders than before. These two opposite views would clash fundamentally in South Africa’s handling of the situation in Angola.

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Towards independence for Angola, 1975

Despite the pending independence for Angola on 11 November 1975, Angola’s future did not promise well as the conflict between the liberation movements deepened. South Africa had to pay more attention Angola in addition Zimbabwe. In 1975 Angola was headed by a temporary Portuguese authority, while preparing the country for its independence. During the liberation struggle before 1974, there had been three different liberation movements each with their own army fighting the Portuguese; the MPLA, the FNLA and the UNITA. The three liberation movements had at this point a relatively weak military capacity, they were politically opposed to each other and geographically divided: UNITA was based in the south and east, FNLA in the north and with bases in Zaire, while MPLA had most of its support in centre of Angola and from the African and radical population in the major towns, especially Luanda.26

During the time between the coup in April 1974 and the planned hand over of power to the Angolans in November 1975, the relations between the three movements grew more and more tense. The rivalry between them grew to the point where a civil war was about to break out. They all increased their military strength dramatically during 1974 and 1975, receiving support from different sides of the Cold War. In 1970 the Soviet Union initiated supporting MPLA with military hardware, logistical support and political training.27 After a period of little support due to political infighting in the MPLA the Soviet Union reaffirmed its support for the MPLA (Neto’s faction) in October 1974, and in December planned renewed military support.28 The FNLA and UNITA received support from USA and China. China sent 112 Chinese military advisors and 450 tons of equipment to the FNLA in May 1974, although pulled out later without really influencing the situation. CIA had supported Roberto Holden, the leader of FNLA, with money as early as 1961, something the Portuguese authorities were aware of. 29 In July 1974 the CIA increased their support and a covert programme was elaborated in January 1975 with the support of Kissinger who was Secretary of State at the time.30 FNLA’s main support came from Zaire, one of USA’s main allies in Africa, where it also kept its military bases. In January 1975 Kissinger and the “Forty Committee” approved financial support of US dollars 300,000 to FNLA, which

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26 MPLA was for some time marked by serious splits and fractional fights. The strongest and most important was the fraction led by Agostinho Neto, which in the end won control over MPLA. The opposing Daniel Chipenda-faction would later join Unita and South Africa during the invasion in the end of 1975.
28 Westad, “Moscow and the Angolan Crisis” p. 5.
29 Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, p. 279.
greatly improved FNLA’s political and military strength in relation to MPLA. UNITA was the smallest of the liberation movements. It was based in the south of Angola and near the Zambian border. It had links to Zambia and for a while to SWAPO. UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi contacted the South Africans in July 1974 asking for support and cooperation. Through several meetings with Military Intelligence and BOSS over the next year, UNITA and South Africa developed a close relationship.

In January 1975 the three movements, still in intense rivalry, sat down with the Portuguese government and signed the Alvor agreement where they agreed on a transitional government constituted of all three parties. This was supposed to last until Portugal handed over power on the 11 November same year. The transitional government did not last long. In the course of 1975 the tension between MPLA and FNLA escalated to a full civil war. In July 1975 MPLA, strengthened by Soviet arms, gained the upper hand and gained control over a large part of Angola through a large military offensive. UNITA had tried to stay out of the military conflict, but was nonetheless drawn into the war. In August 1975 UNITA joined FNLA against MPLA after Savimbi had met with Kenneth Kaunda in Luanda. From September UNITA began to receive military support from USA. During the same month the situation in Angola escalated into a full civil war. The country was divided in three, with FNLA’s based in the northern Angola and with backing from USA and Zaire, UNITA in the south with backing from USA, South Africa and Zambia and MPLA in Luanda and central Angola with backing from the Soviet Union and Cuba.

### The South African consulate in Luanda

Department of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria followed the unsteady progress towards a civil war in Angola closely with the aid of the consulate in Luanda. Foreign Affairs’ main contribution to South Africa’s handling of the situation in Angola was its analysis of the situation inside Angola, and keeping contact with the Portuguese transitional authority. Before the coup in 1974 South Africa had supported the Portuguese military in Angola, and had also been allowed to conduct search-and-destroy operations against SWAPO in southern Angola. When Portugal ended their

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31 Guimarães, *The Origins of the Angola Civil War* p. 101. The Forty Committee was “an interagency mechanism that brought together the disparate parts of the US Administration’s policy-making structure to decide on covert operations” according to the same author.


war against the liberation movements, South Africa had to abandon these missions inside Angola and the South African liaison officers had to leave Angola.35

From November 1974 SWAPO exploited this advantage and started to set up bases in southern Angola and increase its activities in the Ovambo areas across the border in northern Namibia. South Africa's concern of how Mozambique and Angola could become springboards for attacks was becoming a reality. There was also a likely risk that ANC would use Angola for the same purpose. South Africa was worried that Angola after independence would be ruled by a government which would permit these organisations to stay permanently and escalate their attacks on Namibia and South Africa. There were two other concerns regarding the situation in Angola. The first was the construction of a Hydro power scheme on the Cunene border river at Ruacana and Calueque.36 The power stations were built by South African constructors but in agreement with the Portuguese. The stations were supposed to supply northern Namibia with electric power. Lastly, South Africa was also concerned and involved with the increasing stream of refugees fleeing the civil war in Angola, many of them white Portuguese fearing the liberation movements which would soon govern the country.

South Africa's principal aim in Angola was therefore to prevent the southern part of the country to become a springboard for SWAPO and ANC. Thereafter they wanted to secure the continuing construction of the power stations in the border area. This meant that they wanted a stable and secure government in Luanda which would ensure that this would not happen. As Angola descended into a civil war, South Africa had increasing interests in supporting and aiding the movement which could secure the situation in southern Angola. In Mozambique there had only been one liberation movement and therefore no choice. In Angola there were three different movements, and therefore a real possibility of affecting the outcome of the power struggle.

Archive material in the Department of Foreign Affairs show that the Department had been concerned with the situation in Angola long before Portugal promised independence to Angola in 1974. In a report written by the South African Consul General E. M. Malone on 19 August 1970, the Consul-General informs Foreign Affairs about the situation in the Cuando-Cubango District in South-Eastern Angola. This was one of the districts then marked by the liberation war, and the Portuguese army was facing MPLA-forces which the Consul-General estimated to be “not less than 150 and not more than 300 men – a remarkably small number to present such

35 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 273
36 Note that these names are spelt differently in various sources.
serious and dangerous problems!”

The report tells in detail about the trip done by the Consul-General and a Mr. van der Waals, and about the situation in Angola in general. He made a point of how the Portuguese are not offensive enough which “represents their principal military weakness”. Noteworthy is also his recommendation, after “several hints dropped in our direction” that Foreign Affairs should look into the possibility of sending “any obsolete .303 rifles (plus ammunition) that we may be able to spare from our surplus stocks in the Republic”. For a better understanding of the general South African attitude towards the Angolans, the following example is telling. Regarding the idea of sending surplus weapons to the “semi-trained Bantu” which constitutes the “so-called “Milicia”, Malone stated:

It does not matter very much if the rifles in question should be inaccurate owing to worn or corroded barrels, for no Bantu in these parts bothers much with such refinements as aiming over sights, preferring to blast merrily away in the general direction of what he hopes, eventually, to hit. This I think, applies to the average terrorist also, which is just as well.

The idea of arming Angolan militias was repeated in a letter from Malone to Foreign Affairs in 1972, when the Consul-General once more suggested that South Africa should send surplus rifles to the Portuguese organised militias: “Could consideration not, when the time comes, be accorded to consigning surplus .303 ex-Commando rifles to the Portuguese authorities here (and in Mozambique) for the use of their Militia forces?” Considering the later conflict regarding how South Africa should handle the situation in Angola, it is interesting to note that someone in Foreign Affairs actually recommended military assistance as early as 1970 and repeated this in 1972. There are no evidence in the archives whether this proposal was put into action. However Malone in his letter quoted a separate letter sent by the Vice-Consul at the consulate, a Mr. van der Waals, who is corresponding with the SADF regarding the same matters. This was probably a appropriate channel for the suggestion, although this cannot be established here.

Following the coup in Portugal 25 April 1974 and the deepening of the conflict in Angola, the consulate in Luanda seem to have been increasingly concerned about safety for its personnel and other South African citizens in the country. As an example, the consulate contacted Pretoria regarding the possibility supplying their staff with firearms for their own protection. Foreign

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37 Consul-General E. Malone, report “Official visit to South-Eastern Angola”, Luanda, 19 August 1970, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 3, 12.6.70-10.8.72, BTS 1\223. The trip was done by Malone himself accompanied by Mr. van der Waals.


Affairs also raised questions regarding contingency evacuation and in January 1975 the Foreign Affairs in Pretoria forwarded their plans for evacuation of Lourenco Marques (Maputo) to the consulate in Luanda and vice versa. They also ordered the Heads of the two missions to keep Foreign Affairs in Pretoria updated on radio before any further steps or detailed steps were taken.  

Consul-General Malone was in June 1974 also approached by a group calling themselves UDI-movement, or “Secret Euro-African Revolutionary Army”. The movement, represented by a Mr. Neves, maintained that they could “raise a guerrilla force of 5 000 men, which will be increased to 10 000 in three months” and that they enjoy support of 90 percent of the European population and 75 percent of the personnel of the armed forces. Their aim was to take control over Angola, and they asked the consulate for heavy support in form of money, arms, equipment, advisers as well as “small aircraft and warships”. Even if Malone earlier suggested sending rifles, he now found it “difficult to take this plan of action seriously”.  

The example is in any case important, as there must have been a similar call for help that made the Military initiate a secret operation to help a similar coup in Maputo.

Foreign Affairs’ analysis of the Angolan situation

The staff at the consulate in Luanda felt how the situation in Angola became more tense through 1975. In a report from the consulate in Luanda in March the situation was described as calm, but the relations between MPLA and FNLA had “explosive potentialities”. An “Aide Memoire” from mid-April explained the developments on the border between Angola and Namibia which “if they continue to take place, could result in armed clashes between UNITA forces and South African security forces”.

The conflict which developed on the border was related both to general, “hostile” UNITA activities in the border area, which the report claimed included cross-border activities, harassment of Ovambo people who resided in the border region, and disruption and harassment of people working on the construction site on the Cunene River. The memo also mentioned that on 5

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40 Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, to Chief of Staff in Angola and Mozambique, “Contingency planning in respect of Angola and Mozambique”, Pretoria, 17 January 1975, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 4, 1.9.72-27.2.75, BTS 1\22\3.
43 “Aide memoire”, April 1975, (no signature), “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 5, 5.3.75-25.7.75, BTS 1\22\3.
April, UNITA troops in uniform fired on a SADF patrol on the Namibian side of the border. The memo also claims that members of SWAPO “sometimes apparently act together with UNITA groups and are equipped with UNITA uniforms and arms.” These problems were discussed with the Portuguese which still had the official authority in Angola, which confirmed they would discuss the problems regarding UNITA with Savimbi. A report from a visit to Angola in April 16 to 18 mentions possible contacts between South Africa and UNITA:

I got the impression that both Military Intelligence and the Bureau of State Security have established contact with the leadership of Unita. There may be danger of overlapping, and it may be worth sorting out at high level.

The issue of security at the construction sites soon became an important question for Foreign Affairs and the missions in Luanda and Lisbon. The Department of Foreign Affairs repeatedly contacted the Portuguese during 1975 in order to draw attention to the security for the construction work at Ruacana and Calueque. The matter was raised in April, and repeated again several times from August, when, according to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, UNITA troops “accosted and searched South African workers at Calueque pumping station”. As a result of the harassment the construction workers were “refusing to return to work unless improved security is arranged”.

On 12 August, the Foreign Affairs informed the Lisbon embassy that “one platoon troops and four armoured cars went into joint project area at Calueque over weekend to afford protection to workers and installations. Portuguese ambassador has been informed of problem and current situation and asked if Portugal can arrange necessary protection”. Three days later, apparently concerned whether the intervention had resulted in any negative international reactions, Pretoria asked the embassies in London, Washington, Bonn and Paris to “report fully and urgently on any press, radio and television coverage there might have been concerning situation south west Africa/Angola border”. In replies from the embassies it was

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44 “Aide memoire”, April 1975, (no signature). “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 5, 5.3.75-25.7.75, BTS 1\22\3.
45 “Discussion with General Cardoso, High Commissioner in Angola on Situation on S.W.A/Angola border”, Luanda, 16 April 1975, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 5, 5.3.75-25.7.75, BTS 1\22\3.
46 “Visit to Angola: 16-18 April 1975”, (no signature, no date), “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 5, 5.3.75-25.7.75, BTS 1\22\3.
48 Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria to South African Embassy Lisbon, “Immediate Telegram: Secret”, Pretoria, 12 August 75, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 6, 26.7.75 – 13.11.75, BTS 1\22\3. Note: In telegrams important names, numbers, and acronyms were often repeated with a parentheses in the middle for emphasis: “ONE(ONE”.
confirmed that media coverage had been “limited to factual reporting” with “no comment or criticism” (Bonn) and “extensive reporting” but “brief and factual” (London).\(^\text{50}\)

The Portuguese Government, still officially in charge in Angola, called on the South African ambassador in Lisbon on 19 August 1975, and gave South Africa a mild protest after the military operation in Calueque:

whilst portuguese [sic] government regretted South African governments action by sending troops and armoured cars into the joint project area at Calueque without consulting Portuguese on intended action, they understood however the need for protecting the workers and the equipment. They were hoping to send in troops to afford the necessary protection but now find that they are unable to do so. He clearly implied that the present situation must be accepted but requested that everything possible be done to avoid any direct confrontations.\(^\text{51}\)

The Portuguese Directorate-General of Political Affairs also delivered a more formal letter of protest to the ambassador on 3 September regarding the same issue. However, in the accompanying letter from the South African ambassador to Lisbon, the ambassador refers to the oral discussion with the Portuguese where they “explain that communications in southern Angola were almost non existent and that owing to the fuel shortage they could not depend on their own transport. It would therefore be greatly appreciated if they could rely on the South African authorities for support in the field of food, fuel and transport to sustain their units at Calueque”.\(^\text{52}\) The matter was not followed up, and no Portuguese troops were ever sent to the Cunene River projects, with or without South African logistical support.

From the South African Government point of view, the Portuguese protest was probably not taken seriously. Portugal simultaneously acknowledged South Africa’s need for security, as well as confirming they are not going to provide this security themselves. There is another interesting detail in Foreign Affairs’ files. Portugal points out that they are aware of an attack on Pereira de Eça “by a force which did not previously exist in that area”, suspecting they might be


\(^{52}\) South African Embassy Lisbon to The Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, “South African Army Protection at Calueque and Alleged Invasion of Southern Angola”, Lisbon, 3 September 1975, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 6, 26.7.75 – 13.11.75, BTS 1\22\3.
South Africans or mercenaries which might have moved in from Namibia. The attack might have been one of SADF’s raids in August. Brand Fourie, the secretary for Foreign Affairs requests the ambassador to advise the Portuguese that the South African Government was “surprised at the suggestion that mercenaries and others might have penetrated southern Angola from South West Africa. The Government rejects this possibility and would appreciate it if the “reliable reports” could be made available to it”. This denial of South African attacks inside Angola could have been a tactical denial of facts Foreign Affairs already knew. But it might very well have been an honest rejection by Foreign Affairs of facts they were not told. According to Geldenhuys, Foreign Affairs only learnt about the attack of Pereira de Eça from the Portuguese, and not Ministry of Defence, and actually might not have known.

If Geldenhuys is right and Foreign Affairs’ rejected South African attacks out of lack of knowledge, it is a crucial example of the lack of communication within the government and to what degree Foreign Affairs was sidelined by Defence. Moreover, it must have been difficult (not to say embarrassing) for Foreign Affairs to conduct diplomacy without the full knowledge of their own country’s activities. The latter point was emphasised by former ambassador Donald Sole in regard to a similar story in Germany some months later during the larger and more serious invasion in October and November.

An interesting report found in the Foreign Affairs’ archives describes a meeting sometime in September or October 1975 between Commander Martines da Silva, representing the Portuguese High Commissioner in Angola and someone in the Department of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria (no name given). The report states that the Portuguese High Commissioner “wished our troops to stay as long as possible. It was not possible for Portuguese troops to be sent to Calueque, as they were in the process of being withdrawn from Angola and would be out of the country by 11 November”. In addition, “Commander da Silva said that the Portuguese authorities had welcomed our intervention in Calueque and Ruacana, although for the sake of their relations with the Angolan Government they had had to go through the form of protesting”. Da Silva also gave away the date, 15 October, for when the Portuguese would withdraw from Sa da Bandeira in

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54 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 295.
56 Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 79.
57 “Relations with Angola, Secret”, (no date, no signature), “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 6, 26.7.75 – 13.11.75, BTS 1\22\3.
the south of Angola. According to the report, da Silva had also had seen a General Armstrong, which means da Silva might have given the South African military the same date. The “Operation Savannah”, the South African invasion of Angola, started on 14 October 1975. This report again clearly undermined Portugal’s formal protests against South Africa’s operations in southern Angola during August and September 1975. The report also indicated the date for when Portugal intends to withdraw, and hence when southern Angola will be free of international presence. Da Silva gave yet more interesting information:

Commander da Silva said that [Angolan interim Prime Minister] Mr Lopo do Nascimento had asked him to say that M.P.L.A. wished to have normal relations with South Africa, which it accepted as a neighbour, and accepted the Portuguese Government’s agreements with South Africa concerning joint projects on the Kunene [sic].

Da Silva pointed out that “M.P.L.A was radical, but not communist” and gave a clear and less frightening picture of a MPLA than the South African Government might have visualised. It is difficult to establish to what degree da Silva influenced Foreign Affairs’ view of Angola. But if the report was distributed and read by Brand Fourie or Muller, it might have given them reasons to both support the limited military presence on the water projects on Cunene, and at the same time give them reason to discourage any further military actions against MPLA. This was more or less the line Foreign Affairs would follow in the government dispute over what South Africa should do in Angola. It is worth noting that as late as in June 1975, Foreign Affairs still did not want to chose between the three liberation movements. Shearar at the embassy in Washington, explained to a representative of the US State Department in Washington as late as in June 1975:

We indicated that it is not our practise to meddle in matters [in Angola] that were within the jurisdiction of another state. In any case the expression of a preference [towards Unita, FNLA or MPLA] by ourselves at this stage could be counterproductive.

At this point the Military and BOSS had for several months conducted meetings with Savimbi and UNITA. While Foreign Affairs seemed to have been mostly concerned about the construction projects on Cunene, the military might have wanted to use the volatile situation in Angola to make a serious move against SWAPO. From August and onwards, the South African

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58 Lopo do Nascimento was a MPLA leader which at the time was prime minister for the interim Government in Luanda – MPLA was at the time the only remaining party in the interim Government, as FNLA and UNITA had left Luanda at this point.


61 Guimarães, The Origins of the Angola Civil War p. 130 and Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 191.
troops were involved in several attacks and clashes in southern Angola, the largest being “operation Sausage II” on 22 August. In August SADF also set up refugee camps in Chitado and Calai inside Angola to handle the flow of thousands of Angolans and Portuguese fleeing the increasing civil war. Vorster in September requested Secretary General of the UN’s attention to the “plight of large number of refugees on Angolan side of S.W.A. border”, which were “being supplied with food and other necessities by the SADF. They already total several thousand and numbers are increasing”. The situation was now volatile and violent in several parts of Angola and especially in southern Angola. The South African government felt obliged to do something, but the various actors within the government approached the issue very differently. According to Geldenhuys – referring to “Angolan guerrillas” in general – Defence Minister P.W. Botha promised Vorster that attackers would be “decisively driven off”.

The Americans also reacted to news reports of the South African military incursion in August and September. Shearar, in a letter to The Secretary for Foreign Affairs 17 September, quoted a letter from American ambassador in Nigeria Donald B. Easum. The ambassador “expressed the view that “both our countries may need to explain more clearly what their respective Angolan policies actually are”. He has enquired whether there is any information that we would wish to send him.” In the Foreign Affairs files there are no reply to this request by the Americans, which meant that they either refused to answer, or were not fully aware of what was going on.

The examples mentioned here show how Department of Foreign Affairs was involved in matters regarding Angola, mostly regarding how the unstable situation in the border region affected the South African hydro-projects and official contacts with the Portuguese interim authorities in Angola. But in addition to the diplomacy carried out by Foreign Affairs, BOSS and the Military were behind a separate development. They started military operations in Angola of which Foreign Affairs was not always informed, and with more comprehensive goals than Foreign

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62 Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, p. 295.
63 Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p. 76, Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 191.
64 Secretary for Foreign Affairs Pretoria, to South African Embassy in Washington and Lisbon, "Priority Telegram", “No 256(256”, Pretoria, 10 September 1975, Vol. 6, 26.7.75 – 13.11.75, BTS 1\22\3.
65 Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p. 79.
66 Donald B. Easum was former Assistant Secretary of State for Africa in the State Department.
68 When no response to direct requests from the embassies can be found in the archives, it can mean that a reply was given by telephone, but both Shearar and Sole has pointed out that Pretoria often did not answer such requests from the embassies.
Affairs operated with. These two diverging political lines would ultimately clash in the South African cabinet.

South Africa’s response to the conflict in Angola

While Vorster promised peace and tolerance towards the new government in Mozambique, P.W. Botha planned a military coup against the same government. These two different approaches to Mozambique’s independence were indicative for the thinking and disunity within the South African cabinet in 1974 and 1975. South Africa was facing more or less the same dilemma towards Angola: a peaceful versus a military response. However, there was one crucial difference: the growing conflict between the liberation movements in Angola gave the military an option of intervening on the side of its preferred movement to influence the outcome. After a more profound conflict in the South African cabinet, Vorster chose the latter. The outcome made a serious impact on South Africa’s foreign relations regionally and internationally. In the following section a brief outline of the various participants and their choices of strategy towards Angola will be outlined.

South Africa had several interests in Angola: the construction of Hydro power scheme, refugees, the presence and activities of SWAPO as well as the advantage of having a stable and close ally in an Angolan government. It is however important to understand how some of these concerns were limited in scope and geography, like the construction work. The question of which liberation movement would dominate the government in Luanda was a complicated issue, concerning more than the Department of Defence. The dispute in the government regarding strategies towards Angola saw Department of Defence, represented by P.W. Botha in conflict with BOSS’ van den Bergh and Department of Foreign Affairs. In Foreign Affairs Secretary Brand Fourie and Ambassador to Washington, Pik Botha were the key figures, while the Minister himself Hilgard Muller was playing a less important role. Department of Information played a minor role, supporting the side of BOSS and Foreign Affairs. Prime Minister Vorster was in the middle, and would eventually choose what he saw as the best line of action.

None of the accounts of South Africa’s first involvement in Angola (there would be many more interventions in the years to come) have full insight in the decisions made within the government at the time. This again has left a rather confusing picture of what really happened. It is therefore necessary to present the different actors in the conflict regarding Angola and what alternatives they favoured.

Department of Foreign Affairs’ “hands-off” approach
The Department of Foreign Affairs came out as the weaker part in the power struggle between the departments on what to do with Angola. In the increasingly hostile environment within the government, “the Department of Foreign Affairs from the outset found itself largely excluded from decision making on South Africa’s Angolan adventure”.70 Foreign Affairs was vary of what too much involvement in Angola could do to South Africa’s already tattered image abroad, and therefore wanted to maintain the same “hands off” approach which it had done towards Mozambique, according to Geldenhuys: “The foreign ministry’s religious adherence to the principle of non-interference in other countries’ internal affairs was the very antithesis of the Defence Force’s belief that South Africa should take a hand in shaping Angola’s destiny”.71 Foreign Affairs had a more narrow scope in its relations with Angola, focusing on the problems regarding the water projects and relations with the Portuguese concerning criticism against South Africa. They seemed not to be interested in which side was going to win the civil war, as this was not South Africa’s business.

The fact that Foreign Affairs only heard of the first major military offensive in Angola in August from the Portuguese government – not from its own government – is a telling sign to what degree Foreign Affairs was sidelined. On the other hand, the top rank of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Brand Fourie and Pik Botha, must have been partly informed about what was going on, although they did not win the discussions. According to Barber and Barratt, Vorster “refused at first to respond positively to a personal appeal to intervene against the MPLA from Presidents Houphouet-Boigny and Senghor, partly because of opposition by Brand Fourie”.72 Another interesting aspect in this conflict is how the people from Foreign Affairs who were involved did not relate the discussion and decisions towards the rest of the Department or the missions abroad.

BOSS, Department of Defence and active involvement
BOSS had for many years been active in establishing and maintaining diplomatic contacts throughout Africa during Dialogue and Détente. More important in this case, BOSS had close co-operation with CIA of the United States, and these two agencies were according to former CIA operator in Angola, John Stockwell, “CIA had traditionally sympatized with South Africa

70 Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p. 79.
71 Geldenhuys, The Diplomacy of Isolation, p. 79.
72 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 192; Rhoodie, The Real Information Scandal, p. 142.
and enjoyed its close liaison with BOSS”. BOSS was, contrary to Foreign Affairs, not against South African involvement in Angola. Van den Bergh’s preferred strategy was secret undercover support of FNLA and UNITA, which was also the strategy used by the CIA. According to Barber, van den Bergh “wanted BOSS, rather than Military Intelligence or the Defence Force, to be the main instrument of South African involvement an influence”. This in reality meant to continue his already close working relationship with CIA. Another possible motive could be that van den Bergh was worried about the possible affect open military actions could have on the foreign relations he had been active in building during Dialogue. BOSS in other words shared Foreign Affairs’ concern about how South Africa’s actions could affect diplomatic contacts and foreign policy.

Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha was contrary to BOSS and Foreign Affairs arguing for military intervention in Angola. P.W. Botha had been working his way up in the National Party for many years, and had as Minister of Defence gained the support and trust of the military and the generals. Both the Military and the Military Intelligence were powerful institutions. The Military had already experience of operations outside South Africa. In 1969 Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha, and his chief of Military Intelligence, Colonel Fritz Loots, approached Vorster to get approval of supporting Biafra in the separatist war in Nigeria. While understanding that Biafra might well loose the war, they hoped that by supporting Biafra, South Africa could get better credentials among Biafra’s African allies. These included Zambia, Tanzania, Gabon and Ivory Coast. The first two were especially important, as they were harbouring ANC-bases or offices. Vorster, apparently without van den Bergh’s knowledge, agreed to send a group of military trainers, along with arms and equipment. In addition, as mentioned earlier, the military had been trying to act against both Mozambique and Zambia.

South Africa had a heavy military presence in northern Namibia, fighting against infiltrating SWAPO units. SADF had co-operated with the Portuguese and conducted “hot-pursuit” operations in southern Angola against SWAPO and finally were engaged in the protection of the South African construction site at Ruacana. SADF and Department of Defence

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74 Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 193.
76 Bell, Unfinished Business, p. 60.
77 Bell, Unfinished Business, p. 60. According to Bell, van den Bergh was furious. The détente policy was an attempt by van den Bergh to take over the initiative taken by Defence, where he would play the contact role developed by Loots in Military Intelligence.
were due to this increasingly concerned with and involved in the situation in Angola. For P.W. Botha, a military solution must have been “natural” as they were already militarily involved. Consequently, P.W. Botha argued for a more active role in Angola than any of the other government agencies.

SADF operated across the border in southern Angola in both July and August in pursuit of SWAPO, but apparently also had “engaged in minor skirmishes with both UNITA and FNLA”.78 Also a telegram in the files from Foreign Affairs from 8 August informs that “It has now been reported that UNITA troops have accosted and searched South African workers at Calueque paping [sic!] station”.79 By August, South African troops occupied installations of the Ruacana dam on Angolan territory.80 The Military had in reality and independently started military operations inside Angola, which would precede and make precedence for the actual invasion which took place later in October. In addition to the military operations in the border region which affected South Africa more directly, the Military saw no reason not to actively aid their ally in Angola in beating the Marxist MPLA. This was far beyond what Foreign Affairs would agree on doing.

The beginning of an armed operation

It is necessary to take a short step back to look at how South Africa in July 1975 chose to support UNITA and FNLA with weapons and (later) training. In the increasingly labile situation in Angola, both UNITA and FNLA searched for foreign friends and backing. According to former BOSS-agent Gordon Winters, both FNLA’s Holden Roberto and UNITA-leader Jonas Savimbi were CIA agents, since 1959 and the 1960s respectively, and received money from the CIA.81 Jonas Savimbi approached South Africa for support in 1974, and met with Military Intelligence and BOSS several times during 1974 and 1975 in Angola, Botswana and London.82 Savimbi promised during these meetings good relations with South Africa and to decline support for SWAPO if South Africa in return for arms and money. During this period Holden Roberto in FNLA approached South Africa with the same intentions and promises.83

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82 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 276.
Vorster asked BOSS and SADF for a full report on the situation in Angola in May 1975. The report was presented to Vorster on the 26 June 1975, and they concluded that MPLA would win the war in Angola if they did not support FNLA and UNITA. Vorster then asked General Constand Viljoen from the army and BOSS’ van den Bergh to set up a list of weapons for UNITA and FNLA. The list of a total of 20 million Rand’s worth of weapons was approved by Vorster on 14 July, with the provision that the arms could not be traced to South Africa. There was no dissent to this order, according to Gleijeses.

The first shipments of arms reached FNLA and UNITA in August, and by September they had also sent military personnel to train the UNITA and FNLA forces, which in turn would “help to expel Swapo from southern Angola”. According to the South African officers which were sent to train FNLA and UNITA, their military forces were in poor shape. Professor F.J. du Toit Spies wrote the official South African Defence Ministry report, “Operasie Savannah” and according to him, FNLA and UNITA “where totally dependent on South Africa for weapons, ammunition and general equipment.” In August and September, SADF also made several raids against Swapo inside Angola with the help of FNLA and UNITA. To a large extent, the FNLA-UNITA front was reconstructed by South Africa and CIA from almost nothing. They were then used to find and fight SWAPO, and later put in front the South African invasion in October as a form of disguising South Africa’s involvement.

In September 1975, when South Africa was secretly arming and training UNITA and FNLA, the United States simultaneously set up a parallel operation doing exactly the same. On 22 January 1975, the CIA and the 40 Committee in the United States decided to increase their support for Holden Roberto and FNLA to increase his power vis-à-vis MPLA and UNITA. CIA had already funded FNLA without the support of the 40 Committee, but in January the 40 Committee agreed upon supporting the FNLA with 300,000 dollars. In August the same year, CIA’s Angola programme “grew into a full-fledged covert action program” at the same time as South Africa was starting to support the same movement. Then, “during September and October, the CIA, with remarkable support from diverse U.S. government and military offices around the world, mounted the controversial, economy-size war with single-minded ruthlessness.

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84 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 276.
87 Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 295. I have been unable to find a copy of Spies *Operasie Savannah*.
89 Stockwell, *In search of Enemies*, p. 54 and 67 (Stockwell inaccurately states to different amounts being granted Roberto: 260,000 (p. 54) and 300,000 (p. 67))
90 Stockwell, *In search of Enemies*, p. 86.
 [...] CIA officers, eventually eighty-three altogether, were dispatched to the field, where they beefed up the Kinshasa, Luanda, Lusaka and Pretoria stations, and managed the air, ground maritime, and propaganda branches of the little war.”  

91 In August, the American president authorised another 10 million dollars for more arms, ammunitions and advisors. The total budget of the CIA operation then reached 24.7 million.

The level of co-operation between South Africa and United States during their involvement in Angola was an issue which would define the foreign relations between the two for several years. The full truth has yet to be uncovered, but there are enough clues in order to understand how the issue would become a significant strain in the relations between the two. According to Gleijeses “the parallelism between Pretoria and Washington is striking. Both launched their covert operations at roughly the same time – in mid-July – and both had a military presence in Angola by early September. How the cooperation between them unfolded remains murky”. 92

Both USA and South Africa were involved in Angola, supporting the same Angolan movements at the same time and in a similar fashion. One of the American key figures in the operation, CIA’s John Stockwell claims that: “I saw no evidence that the United States formally encouraged them [the South Africans] to join the conflict”. 93 While there might not have been formal agreement between the two governments, there was close and informal cooperation between BOSS and CIA: “Thus, without any memos being written at CIA headquarters saying “Let’s coordinate with the South Africans” coordination was effected at all CIA levels and the South Africans escalated their involvement in step with our own.” 94

During October, South Africa and the CIA both increased their support for FNLA and UNITA. CIA flew in weapons to Kinshasa, Zaire, and the South Africans brought the weapons to the front inside Angola: “Escalation was a game the CIA and South Africa played very well together.” 95 But when CIA tried to get official clearance for further co-operation with the South Africans, by shipping fuel to Namibia for UNITA and FNLA, they were stopped by the Government: “[CIA’s] Potts remained silent on the subject of formal involvement with South Africa for the next six months” but "CIA case officers continued to coordinate with the South Africans in Angola, Pretoria, and Kinshasa, with tacit approval from Jim Potts, but the CIA stopped trying to expand that cooperation at the policy level.” 96

91 Stockwell, In search of Enemies, p. 161.
92 Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, p. 297.
93 Stockwell, In search of Enemies, p. 186.
94 Stockwell, In search of Enemies, p. 188.
95 Stockwell, In search of Enemies, p. 188.
96 Stockwell, In search of Enemies, p. 190.
The South African ambassador to Washington, Pik Botha, who was also involved in the discussions going on in Pretoria regarding Angola, claims he was not informed about what BOSS and Defence were doing inside Angola: “What exactly happened between military establishments, I cannot tell you because I do not have the knowledge. I was not informed on that at all.”  

However, Pik Botha claims he warned Vorster that United States would never, in his opinion, openly support South African involvement in Angola, and would pull out if this became known publicly: “I told you earlier of Mr. Vorster’s, the Prime Minister of the day’s surprise when I warned him that I expected a cutting-off of the funds of the United States. And that has remained a puzzle to me – namely, who conveyed that message to the South African Government, and at what level? It certainly was not Henry Kissinger, and it certainly was not the President of the United States of America.”

This indicates that someone in the American administration promised support for South Africa in Angola, although it is not possible to establish who and at what level.

Prime Minister Vorster chooses military intervention

With P.W. Botha favouring military intervention and both van den Bergh and Foreign Affairs opposing large scale military intervention in Angola, Vorster hesitated and delayed any operation. According to Grundy, “Pretoria did not appear to know what it wanted to do largely because no clear-cut policy direction was established”. In addition to having Department of Defence pushing for a military option, some African countries, Zaire and Zambia being the most important, also urged South Africa to help UNITA and FNLA. P.W. Botha delivered the report outlining South Africa’s options in Angola in June. During the next three months, the regular army, SADF, increased their activity inside Angola because of the construction works and SWAPO. At the same time, the secret programme to arm and train FNLA and UNITA expanded. When the date for Angola’s formal independence drew closer, MPLA was in control in the capital and gained territory in the north and south. If FNLA and UNITA should have a chance before MPLA declared independence and government in Luanda on 11 November, they had to act quickly.

Vorster now had to choose between the cautious political line favoured by Department of Foreign Affairs and the large scale military intervention favoured by Defence. Foreign Affairs was worried about the international reactions if South Africa interfered in the Angolan war and

97 Karen Brutens, “Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.
98 Karen Brutens, “Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.
99 Grundy, Militarization of South African Politics, p. 89.
the effects it could have on Vorster’s regional diplomacy. Defence emphasised the need to act on the pressing situation in the south of Angola, and wanted South Africa to react while it could still influence the outcome of the power struggle in Angola. What probably made Vorster decide to send troops to Angola in support of FNLA and UNITA was his belief that the Americans supported the operation as well as some of his African allies, including Zambia.

With these developments and factors in mind, P.W. Botha had managed to convince Vorster to send troops to Angola in October. Subsequently Defence started its “Operation Savannah”, sending regular South African troops into Angola, heading a joint FNLA-UNITA-South African offensive against MPLA. The SADF had been in a direct confrontation with FAPLA forces (MPLA’s army) when South African officers were commanding UNITA forces in early October. According to Spies, SADF then understood UNITA could not fight and win MPLA alone, even with South African commanders and trainers. They needed larger and more active South African military participation.100 The attacking force, a military column under South African command codenamed Zulu, consisted of South African officers, “Bushmen” (a unit of San people), former Portuguese army officers, mercenaries and about a 1000 UNITA soldiers together with hundreds of FNLA troops under leader FNLA-leader Daniel Chipenda. They were joined by 1500-2000 regular SADF troops on 23 October.101

The advancing troops quickly defeated MPLA in southern Angola, and progressed rapidly northwards heading for Luanda. At the same time, FNLA-troops, assisted and enforced with South African trainers/officers, attacked from the Zairean border in the north. When the independence day on 11 November approached, South African and their allied troops were in control over a large part of southern Angola, and FNLA troops were only a few miles outside Luanda. Apparently, Vorster was not aware of the scope and scale of South Africa’s military operation, and “according to one of his ministers at the time, he was taken aback when P.W. Botha, “like an excited schoolboy”, informed him that South African troops were on the outskirts of Luanda.”102

On 10 November 1975, South African bomber aircrafts attacked MPLA in Quifangondo just outside Luanda in an attempt to help the FNLA advance on Luanda. Afterwards FNLA started their attack on Luanda, with South African advisers and CIA present, but they were almost immediately defeated by FAPLA and Cuban artillery, which effectively broke down FNLA

100 Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, p. 298
101 Guimarães, The Origins of the Angola Civil War p. 110. The number of South Africans in the armed operations is contested, and I have chosen Guimarães, which is the most recent study on the subject.
102 Bell, Unfinished Business, p. 70.
as a fighting force for good. A couple of hours later, at midnight before 11 November, MPLA declared independence for the People’s Republic of Angola in Luanda. FNLA and UNITA announced the formation of a Democratic People’s Republic of Angola in Huambo, a promise which never really materialised. In the south, the advancing South African troops were effectively stopped by MPLA and Cubans on 23 November. This became the turning point for South Africa’s military advancement in Angola. Now MPLA and the Cubans reinforced and shortly became stronger than South Africa and UNITA. Vorster was not willing to send more or heavy troops to Angola, and the South African assault was stopped. This marked the end of the first large scale South African operation in Angola. More important, it was a turning point in South Africa’s foreign relations when information about South Africa’s invasion became known around the world.

**Responses and reactions to the invasion**

Officially, South African troops did not take part in the invasion of Angola. South African press was not allowed to print any information regarding South African troops in Angola, and the government and Foreign Affairs repeatedly denied any South African presence in Angola – except for the troops protecting the construction sites at the border. It took weeks before the international media understood that the forces advancing northwards were in reality a South African invasion. The South African troops had been instructed to say they were mercenaries, and accordingly, several international newspapers reported that “white mercenaries” were fighting alongside UNITA and FNLA. During November international media learnt the realities about the military operations and soon MPLA was able to parade South African prisoners of war to the international press. Anyone in South Africa with access to international media quickly learnt of the news. Internationally the military intervention soon became, through MPLA’s version of the events, known as a South African invasion, with strong international condemnation as a result. However, South Africa continued to deny this for months after.

For South Africa the most damaging development followed the disclosure of the secret CIA Angola mission in New York Times on 13 December 1975. When CIA’s operation in Angola which seemed to involve cooperation with South Africa became known, the United States Congress passed the Tunney Amendment on 19 December which prohibited any further US

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104 Gleijses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 316.
105 There is no space here to tell the full story of “Operation Savannah”, which is well explained and described in Gleijses and Guimarães.
involvement or support of anti-MPLA forces in Angola.\(^{106}\) This happened at the same time as Cuban troops and Soviet arms poured in to aid MPLA, and ultimately reversed the balance of favour once again in favour of the MPLA. The South African military was furious of what they saw as betrayal by the United States, which forced them to accept give up and withdraw. P.W. Botha later declared the Americans had “left South Africa in the lurch.”\(^{107}\)

A recent interview with Pik Botha give an indication of how the Vorster and South African government had failed to understand how their complex and strained relationship with the United States would affect the operation in Angola. Pik Botha’s claims are worth quoting at length:

I phoned my Government, as ambassador from Washington, and said, “Look, whatever your purpose of going into Angola, you will have to return; because if you rely on American assistance, then I want to warn you that assistance will either be terminated or will be withdrawn, and then you stand alone.” And the Foreign Minister then – and I succeeded him subsequently - was Dr. Hilgard Muller, a very kind and sensible, well-balanced man. He then asked me to phone the Prime Minister of the day, Mr. John Vorster. I phoned the Prime Minister, and told him the same. And he said to me, "But look, we have the opposite information from the highest level," and that is that the United States would continue to support our effort to keep the Cubans as far north as possible. And I said to him, "Sir, I do not know what your sources are, but I’m living close to Capitol Hill; I know the senators, I know quite a number of congressmen; I know the sentiments there, and they vote the budget, and they are going to withdraw Dr. Kissinger’s funds, and I warn you that you must bring this into your calculation of what we want to do in Angola, because if the Americans withdraw their support, the matter would go to the Security Council of the United Nations immediately, and we would stand alone, totally isolated, with a severe potential for sanctions or drastic measures which could then be taken against us in terms of the Charter, for breaking peace or being a threat to peace.” So, the Prime Minister was surprised, to put it mildly, and said to me, "But look, there is obviously a clash here, a contradiction. I have information, and you say you know the situation. Now my information clashes with your knowledge of what you claim to be the situation. Take another day or two," he said to me, "and give me another report."\(^{108}\)

If Pik Botha here gives a correct picture of the situation, Vorster evidently not prepared for United States’ reaction, and even less for the wave of bad publicity South Africa got in the aftermath. The Tunney Amendment on 19 December 1975 which banned the CIA from helping South Africa in Angola was certainly a drawback for South Africa, and would strain the relations


\(^{107}\) Talbot, *CIA and Boss*, p. 245.

\(^{108}\) Karen Brutens, “Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.
between the two countries for many years. Apart from Pik Botha’s version of the situation, the many contemporary reports from the embassy in Washington, analysed in the previous chapter, should have warned Vorster of how United States would react when South Africa’s involvement became known. The failure to secure American support therefore is partly due to how Foreign Affairs was sidelined during the discussions on South Africa’s strategies in Angola. However, Foreign Affairs continued to play a back-seat role in the question of Angola, and never openly criticised the decision of military involvement in Angola.

Foreign Affairs’ response to international criticism

Because the South African government decided to keep South Africa’s participation in the war in Angola secret, the invasion started to affect Foreign Affairs long before they could or would acknowledge South Africa’s role. The research conducted for this thesis shows one interesting aspect, how the Foreign Affairs in Pretoria kept the invasion secret even for its own missions. It has been established that the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Brand Fourie, and ambassador to Washington, Pik Botha were participating in the discussions around Angola. But apart from these two, it seems that a most of the embassies and consulates were kept uninformed, with the exception of Pik Botha’s own embassy in Washington. This is remarkable, as the missions were first in line when it came to the international impact of the invasion. When the world gradually learnt about the invasion, these missions were approached for explanations on South Africa’s role and participation.

The South African missions abroad could follow the developments in Angola in international media, and soon felt the need to answer and comment the media reports of the invasion. When Sole, at the time ambassador in Bonn, was asked about his understanding of the invasion of Angola, he answered:

A: I can only give you my second hand impression. The only information I got in Germany on the whole issue, I got from my American colleague, he and his deputy. We often discussed this situation.

Q: So you were not informed from Pretoria?

A: I was not informed. When I took over from Pik Botha [as ambassador in Washington in 1977] I said to my new secretary […] I wanted to read up on the Angola files, but he [Pik Botha] had taken them all back to South Africa.109

When the embassies soon felt neglected by Foreign Affairs in Pretoria, some of them asked for official information from Pretoria. On 29 October 1975 the South African embassy in Brussels sent a telegram to Brand Fourie for information on the situation in Angola:

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Secret. There have lately been many radio television and newspaper reports on South African military and mercenary involvement in Angolan conflict. Could you please supply any information as basis for a press release in reply to numerous enquiries received.110

The reply from Department of Foreign Affairs is equally significant, as they did not want the embassy to respond to the press at all: “Do not think press release indicated. You can however in reply to enquiries say these reports without foundation.”111 After denying the content of media reports, Foreign Affairs explained that South Africa “took certain measures for the sole purpose of protecting installations and workers” at “Calaeque-Ruacaha” [sic!] as well as assisting refugees. This explanation was dated October 30 – two weeks after Operation Savannah started. The Secretary for Foreign Affairs must at this point have known that the Military was doing more than protecting the construction sites at Calueque and Ruacana.112 Regardless, Foreign Affairs in Pretoria stuck to this explanation in correspondence with its missions for all of November. The embassies in Lisbon, Ottawa, Rome and Bonn all received telegrams with variations of the same explanations, Bonn as late as 8 December, almost two months after the invasion and one month after FNLA’s defeat outside Luanda.113 In the telegram to Bonn on 8 December, Foreign Affairs even denied that any mercenaries could have entered Angola from South West Africa: “The South African Government have rejected the possibility that mercenaries and others might have penetrated South Angola from South West Africa.”114

In denying the possibility that mercenaries might have operated from South West Africa, Foreign Affairs even limited the number of credible explanations which might explain why white, foreign troops were present in southern Angola.

While the other embassies were denied information about Angola, the embassy in Washington was informed. Pik Botha admits he and the Washington embassy were informed about what happened in Angola: “as I understood the reports from South Africa at the time, as ambassador – of course, we were being fed with information, of course, by our head of us in

111 Department of Foreign Affairs to the South African embassy, Brussels, “No 113”, Pretoria, 30 October 1975, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 6, 26.7.75-13.11.75 BTS 1\22\3.
112 I have as noted in the introduction not been able to find much internal discussions and correspondence within the Department of Foreign Affairs, so I do not know how the Department was informed by Vorster or P.W. Botha. But during the weeks after the invasion, Government and even the opposition party was informed – and told to keep quiet.
113 Various telegrams from Department of Foreign Affairs, Pretoria, to its Embassies, November 1975, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 6, 26.7.75-13.11.75 BTS 1\22\3.
Pretoria”.115 Also Shearar confirms that the embassy in Washington was informed about Angola. The reason why Pik Botha had information regarding Angola was probably because he was directly involved in the discussions and, in the words of Shearar; “[Pik Botha] was being groomed for the foreign ministry, as foreign minister. He maintained direct relations with the prime minister, the foreign minister and the cabinet.”116

It is in a telegram to the embassy in Washington two months after the border crossing the first acknowledgement of the invasion is evident. The information given in the telegram shows that Foreign Affairs had knowledge of information from inside Angola itself, i.e. from the fighting South African troops. In addition, Foreign Affairs apparently tried to convince the Americans to increase their involvement in Angola rather than pulling out:

For your background information – Minister spoke to U.S. Ambassador this afternoon along following lines – our information is that bulk of fighting on MPLA(MPLA side is being done by Cubans who have suffered heavy casualties and lost considerable equipment. Our information and impression is that Soviet Union and its allies do not have whiphand at present and it is now psychological moment for USA(USA and Western powers to apply maximum pressure.117

Foreign Affairs continued to deny any major South African involvement in Angola all through December 1975. When questioned, they referred to official speeches by Prime Minister Vorster and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hilgard Muller. No reliable or accurate information seemed to have reached embassies other than Washington. At least one of the embassies apparently got tired of lack of substantial information. As late as 14 January 1976, the ambassador in Athens wrote to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs:

As is no doubt the case in most of our Missions abroad, we are continually being asked […] what the truth is about South Africa’s military involvement in Angola. Ordinarily our reaction has been to quote the substance of […] official statements […]. We are aware that very little hard news has been permitted to appear in our own press about what is happening, and do not wish to question the reasons for this, which are no doubt well founded. But our problems overseas is in knowing how to react to questions based on reports in overseas newspapers, not subject to restrictions at all. Up to a point one can try to discount them as communist propaganda, […] but there are circumstances where this becomes impossible.118

115 Karen Brutens, “Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.
116 Interview with Jeremy B. Shearar, 2 June 2003.
118 South African ambassador in Athens to Secretary for foreign Affairs, “South African Military Involvement in Angola” Athens, 14 January 1976, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 8, 2.1.76-13.3.76, BTS 1/22/3. No reply to this letter can be found in the DFA archives.
No answer to this request has been found in the archives. There are certain important points which can be drawn from this outline of Foreign Affairs’ response to the international reactions to South Africa’s invasion of Angola. It has been noted earlier that Foreign Affairs had been mostly sidelined in the decision process leading towards South Africa’s military involvement in Angola. The archives show that most of Foreign Affairs and its missions not only were sidelined, but kept completely in the dark about what happened. It is understandable that the issue of military involvement was kept secret before the invasion, but the fact that Foreign Affairs in Pretoria continued to keep its missions uninformed long after the military invasion had started and during increasing international protest is remarkable. This could signify that Foreign Affairs was “weak”, but furthermore that the department completely lacked initiative to inform or instruct its embassies. The only strategy apparent after the invasion was denial, a strategy Foreign Affairs used for several months, also after it became clear that they were loosing the war in Angola.

**Defeat and withdrawal from Angola**

First in early December did international media with certainty report on the South African participation in the fighting in Angola. On 12 December, staff from the South African embassy in Washington (probably Pik Botha) met with Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, Mulcahy, and discussed the developments in Southern Africa. When Mulcahy hinted about South Africa’s presence in Angola, the embassy “made no comment repeat no comment on this remark beyond referring to official public statements regarding [sic] South African presence in Angola.” Mulcahy continued with admitting “american aid [to Angola] was being supplied at off-the-record requests of at least five heads of state, namely presidents Bongo [Gabon], Bokassa [Central African Republic], Mobutu [Zaire], Senghor [Senegal] and Amin [Uganda]”. Mulcahy had earlier the same week in a lunch with senator Dick Clark described the situation in Southern Africa in recent months as “promising” and South Africa’s moves towards settlement of South West Africa as “peaceful” and showing “good intentions”, although the State Department was not ready to express this openly. The embassy ended their telegram to Pretoria by marking “We consider Mulcahy’s explanation to Clark of SWA and South African problems very interesting and even remarkable”.

In a separate telegram from the embassy in Brussels, the embassy gave a resume of statements from British and “Dutch(?)” NATO representatives which had participated in a top

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level conference also attended by Kissinger. They noted that “Any South African intervention in Angola considered to be of peripheral importance only, as real issue is to test the strength between Soviet Union and West” an assessment apparently “held by Kissinger and to certain extent by Britain”.

In light of USA’s positive attitude towards South Africa in these two telegrams, the developments a week later must have been disappointing. On 19 December, the Tunney Amendment was passed in the US Congress, which marked another important turning point for the Angolan invasion. South Africa was now standing alone in its Angolan venture. It was no longer possible to draw on the support from the African states which initially supported South Africa, and now even its closest ally turned against them. With the limited number of South African troops and the arrival of Cubans, South Africa was not able to push northwards. Cuban forces and Soviet equipment poured into Angola, while South Africa was denied similar support from the United States.

The Department of Foreign Affairs became involved in the issue of captured South African soldiers. On the morning of 16 December MPLA paraded South African Prisoners of War in front of international media in Luanda to prove South Africa was lying about its presence in Angola. Their picture then appeared also in South African press, although with few details on why they were captured. What South Africa did not know, was that MPLA asked ANC to help them with interrogation of the prisoners. This must have been extremely humiliating for the self confident South Africans.

On 19 December the South African ambassador to Geneva wrote to the President of the Executive Council for International Committee of the Red Cross to acknowledge that four South African servicemen where in the hands of MPLA in Angola. The four were said to be “Technical Service Corps personnel (…) used only for logistical purpose.” Three days later, the ambassador agrees to ICRC’s suggestion that the contact with MPLA should be informal. This means South Africa had a channel of communication with MPLA through Foreign Affairs with the Red Cross as intermediates from late December 1975.

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121 Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, p. 323.
122 South African ambassador in Geneva F.D. Tothill, to the International Committee of the Red Cross in Geneva, (No title), Geneva, 19 December 1975, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 7, 24.10.75-31.12.75, BTS 1\22\3. According to the letter, “The four servicemen concerned were sent out to fetch and unserviceable vehicle”, though without mentioning where they had been at the time of capture – presumably inside Angola – why they were there, or why the vehicle had become unserviceable, i.e. because it was attacked.
After South Africa pulled out of Angola, they kept official but secret contact with MPLA in order to secure the return of the captured South African prisoners of war. This was partially done by the Department of Foreign Affairs, which contacted the Red Cross in Geneva to ensure the status of the prisoners. Foreign Affairs later during 1976 participated in several meetings between MPLA and South Africa.\(^{124}\)

By the end of December South Africa’s Angolan operation had therefore met a dead end. On 31 December 1975 Prime Minister Vorster called together some of the key members of Government, the military and others to discuss what to do. According to Pik Botha which was present, they all, including the military establishment, agreed that South Africa should withdraw from Angola.\(^{125}\) But, again according to Pik Botha, there were “requests both from the United States as well as certain African countries, important African countries, asking us to hang on, hang there until the Addis Ababa meeting,” i.e. the specially convened OAU-meeting on the future of Angola, which was going to be held in Addis Ababa 10 January 1976.\(^{126}\) It was expected to pass a resolution on the future of Angola. Another reason for delaying the withdrawal was an appeal by Savimbi, supported by Kenneth Kaunda, for the South African troops to stay. Savimbi met Vorster secretly in Pretoria on 20 December to ask for continued support.\(^{127}\) While still remaining in Angola, the Government had now effectively decided to withdraw its troops.\(^{128}\) The only reason they still remained in Angola was a hope that the OAU-meeting would pass a resolution which would call on the withdrawal of all foreign troops, including Cuban and Soviet troops and advisors. It would therefore be better for South Africa to remain in Angola until the OAU-meeting, and argue for withdrawal of all international troops, rather than leaving immediately and lose a bargaining card.

With the decision in the cabinet on 31 December to pull out, the government in reality accepted defeat and the need to withdraw. The invasion of Angola and the impact this had on the world would mark South Africa’s foreign relations for years to come, especially the relations with USA. Department of Foreign Affairs had participated in the discussions on South Africa’s strategies towards Angola, but had lost the decisions to the Military and BOSS. It did however

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\(^{124}\) Various documents, “Angola relations with South Africa”, BTS 1\22\3.

\(^{125}\) Karen Brutens, “Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.

\(^{126}\) Karen Brutens, “Interview with Pik Botha 20 May 1997”.

\(^{127}\) Barber, South Africa’s foreign policy, p. 196.

\(^{128}\) Hallett states that the Government was divided on whether to withdraw or not at the end of 1975. I choose to emphasise the first hand remarks by Pik Botha, though will emphasising his own role and being one of the key players, does not deny the potential disagreements between the Foreign Affairs and Military, here states they agreed. The coherence between Foreign Affairs and the military during the opening of Parliament some weeks later might indicate that they were in fact in line at this point, even if they probably were marked by the initial rift over Angola. Hallett, “The South African Intervention in Angola, 1975-76”, African Affairs 77 (308).
remain silent about its defeat and followed quietly the line of action laid forward by Department of Defence and BOSS. However, looking beyond the direct battle casualties, it would be Foreign Affairs which most of all would feel the consequences the invasion had on the foreign relations. The decision to involve South Africa in what was in reality a small invasion would be a turning point in South Africa’s international status. Department of Foreign Affairs and its missions did what it could to mend South Africa’s tarnished image abroad. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

Conclusion

South Africa’s relatively secure and stable situation came to an end with the fall of the Caetano-regime in Portugal in 1974. Angola and Mozambique were previously ruled by South Africa-friendly Portuguese settlers. Now they could be replaced by black, Marxist liberation movements. In Mozambique there were no other potential government than the radical FRELIMO, in Angola the situation was far more uncertain. The crucial question for South Africa was now how they should approach this new situation, by either cooperation or confrontation.

Initially Vorster applied extended the logic of “Dialogue” for Mozambique. South Africa confirmed their willingness to work with the new government in Maputo regardless of their political colour. Furthermore, they improved their contacts with Zambia and pursued peace negotiations over the future of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe through Détente policy.

However, Vorster’s open and peaceful strategy was controversial. Political forces on the white South African rightwing and within the military establishment were not in favour of Vorster’s “soft approaches”, fearing he would sell out the whites in Rhodesia. The Military and Military Intelligence started to support two of the three liberation movements in Angola, where the situation was much more unclear than in Mozambique and there were possibilities of affecting the outcome of the increasing struggle for power. During 1975 South Africa got increasingly involved in Angola, in cooperation or understanding with USA. South Africa’s approach towards Angola was controversial within the government, with Department of Defence set against Boss, Foreign Affairs and Information. Vorster was in the end, in October 1975, pursued to use the military to aid UNITA and FNLA before the Marxist MPLA came to power. South Africa had various aims for this, ranging from the protection of the construction sites in the south to installing South African-friendly movements in power in Angola. Department of Foreign Affairs played a limited and back-seat role in this important conflict, and was not able to influence the decisions, despite its well founded assessment of how South Africa’s image abroad
could be negatively affected. The military intervention proved to be a disaster, and South Africa, UNITA and FNLA were beaten by MPLA reinforced by Cubans. Their strategy of secret intervention was exposed, and massive international criticism followed.

Department of Foreign Affairs was opposed to the military intervention, but as the operation was set in motion, Foreign Affairs played on the side of Vorster and Defence in holding the operation secret, lying about the situation and covering up the mistakes. Interestingly, my research has shown that the leadership of Foreign Affairs held information secret from the embassies, which now had to deal with massive criticism from local media and politicians.

Furthermore, it seems Vorster based his decision on the premises that United States supported the military intervention. It is not possible to establish who gave Vorster this idea, probably someone in the American administration or secret services. However, if Vorster had taken into account the frequent reports and analyses which Foreign Affairs’ embassy in Washington sent Pretoria, he could have understood that official American politics would never support an open cooperation with South Africa in Angola. Several examples of this have been quoted in this chapter. Moreover, the ambassador to Washington at the time, Pik Botha, claims later that he even warned Vorster about this personally with no success. The conflict within the government, where Foreign Affairs was sidelined by BOSS and the stronger departments of Defence and Information, meant that their firsthand experience with American politics did not come to the fore.

Foreign Affairs reason to oppose large scale military intervention in Angola was by and large because of what this might do to South Africa’s image abroad. But their low profile meant that this argument never prevailed. The consequences of this will be analysed in the next chapter on the period from 1976 to 1978.
3 From Angola to Botha, 1976-78

Introduction

South Africa’s controversial intervention in Angola from October 1975 till March 1976 destroyed much of the careful diplomacy conducted by Foreign Affairs, BOSS and Department of Information in the previous years. In 1976 South Africa was therefore in greater need of improving and repairing its foreign relations than ever before. Foreign Affairs was trying their best to convince the United States and the rest of the world that South Africa had done nothing wrong, and that relations with the continent had not changed, something several examples from the archives of Foreign Affairs indicate.

When the South African government was still coping with the effects of Angola, another defining episode took place: the Soweto student riots in June 1976 and the unrest which rocked South Africa for several months afterwards. The brutal suppression of the riots, which had soon spread across all of South Africa, was strongly condemned all over the world. The killing of opposition leader Steve Biko and the banning of several oppositional organisations and newspapers a year later was condemned even more. It was in this setting of international condemnation and domestic chaos that former Minister of Defence P.W. Botha replaced Prime Minister Vorster in 1978. The crisis that triggered Vorster’s resignation was the Information Scandal regarding Department of Information’s many secret projects, projects intended on boosting South Africa’s image abroad. Another important factor was most probably P.W. Botha’s disagreement of Vorster’s foreign and security policy.

The invasion of Angola changed South Africa’s relations with the world to the worse. The impact could be felt during the end of 1975 and early 1976. The defeat against MPLA and the Cubans was humiliating in itself, and addition legitimated Soviet and Cuban presence in Angola. Furthermore, relations with the United States soured and the contacts with African states made during Dialogue and Détente were now seriously weakened. Much of its former diplomacy and goodwill from Détente was lost because of Angola. The situation also gave the enemies of the apartheid Government new ammunition, and the ANC used the situation to come on the offensive against the South African government.

This chapter will firstly look at how South Africa responded to the negative effects of the invasion in Angola and how they tried to mend their foreign relations after this. Thereafter
follows a discussion on how the domestic crisis during 1976 and 1977 affected South Africa’s foreign relations. These developments were together undermining Vorster position in the government, and paved the way for P.W. Botha’s take over. This take over will be discussed at the end of this chapter, in addition to a brief outline of how these issues shaped South Africa’s foreign relations and international position in the next decade. In this final chapter on the apartheid regime there will not be enough space for a detailed chronological summary of all the events from 1976 to 1978. However, the attempts by the South African diplomats to counter South Africa’s deteriorating foreign relations, which are evident in the primary sources, will be emphasised and analysed. The discussion will have to focus only on the more important and shaping cases, such as Soweto, Biko’s death and the Information Scandal leading to Vorster’s fall from power. These events will naturally be discussed in relation to South Africa’s foreign policy and foreign relations.

The political aftermath of Angola

A special OAU meeting on the situation in Angola was convened in Addis Ababa 10 to 13 January 1976 to discuss the situation in Angola. The meeting was important for South Africa because it would establish the legitimacy of the MPLA government and in the extension of this the legitimacy of South Africa’s actions in Angola. Angola (MPLA) declared its independence on 11 November 1975, but at the time the majority of the OAU members declined to recognise MPLA as the sole Government of Angola. They referred to the Alvor agreement which recognised all three liberation movements as equal parties in a joint government. This would again affect South Africa’s credibility and future relations with the continent. South Africa hoped it could count on backing from the African countries which initially had supported South Africa’s support for UNITA and FNLA: Zaire, Zambia, Senegal and Ivory Coast. They also hoped that OAU would recognise that their intervention had been an effort to protect a newly independent African state from Cuban and Soviet aggression.

At the OAU meeting, the African countries were initially divided in half, with 22 states voting to recognise the MPLA Government and 22 against. When some of the politically heavy states, like Nigeria, switched side and supported MPLA – partly because MPLA won more territory inside Angola – the OAU Council of Ministers decided on 11 February 1976 to
recognise MPLA as the legal government of Angola.\(^1\) A few days later senior South African officers told UNITA and FNLA of South Africa’s decision to withdraw, to the protests of Savimbi, Roberto and Chipenda. By March 1976 the South African troops had crossed over the border back into South West Africa.

The split vote in OAU in January 1976 on whether to accept the MPLA government showed to a certain degree how difficult and unpredictable Africa’s view of the situation in Angola was. This can explain how South Africa thought they could win support for their controversial strategy towards Angola. On the other hand, one of the reasons the OAU finally came down on MPLA’s side – even if they now received massive backing from Cuba and the Soviet Union – was because they realised South Africa was backing UNITA and FNLA. In the end, the African opposition to South Africa weighed stronger and united the support for MPLA. This must be considered an example of how the apartheid government failed to understand the depth of the opposition to its domestic policies.

**South African Parliament debates Angola**

The South African Parliament opened again 23 January 1976, just a few days after the OAU meeting on the future of Angola. The “vote of no confidence”-debate raised by the two opposition parties United Party and Progressive Reform Party, was the arena for the first public discussion on South Africa’s invasion of Angola. Only one of the opposition parties, United Party, had been informed about South Africa’s activities in Angola, but forbidden to disclose any of this information. The censorship on newspapers also prevented a public discussion. Foreign Affairs had foreseen that Angola would be discussed at the opening of Parliament and asked the embassies to monitor how this debate would be covered abroad. This is one of the first signs of concern showed by Foreign Affairs regarding how Angola could have affected South Africa’s image abroad.

When the State President J.J. Fouché opened the Parliament in Cape Town 23 January 1976, he started his speech trying to deny any problems regarding the events the previous months: “Despite hostile propaganda against South Africa we have made good progress in improving our relations with countries in Africa, South America and elsewhere”.\(^2\) He also tried to forestall the opposition by brushing aside any criticism of the operations in Angola:

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South Africa has no real territorial ambitions in Angola. [...] Our involvement is the same as that of the Free World and the interest of Ovambo in the Cunene scheme, as well as the defence and security of the borders and territories for which South Africa is responsible.³

The State President subsequently made another interesting statement, regarding Détente and South Africa’s military strength:

It is essential beyond doubt for South Africa to have the military strength to defend itself, but at the same time it must be emphasized that its defence force and armaments organization are not being built up as a threat to others in Africa. The détente policy the Government is pursuing and a strong defence capability are complementary and not irreconcilable.⁴

It is difficult to see the intervention in Angola as anything than the opposite, since South Africa’s strong defence force had certainly acted as a threat to “others in Africa”, and its actions had proved to be irreconcilable with détente. The statement can be seen as an attempt to brush aside criticism he knew was coming, but one must not ignore that the State President and people within government actually believed this was true. The two opposition parties to the left of government, the United Party and Progressive Reform Party used the “Motion of no confidence” three days later to attack the government on its actions in Angola. The primary concern was the way the Government had kept the invasion secret from the public while it was widely covered in international media. Secondly they were worried about the destiny of the South African soldiers kept as prisoners of war by the MPLA. The opposition was concerned how the operations in Angola had affected South Africa’s foreign relations. The Leader of the Official Opposition and leader of the United Party Sir de Villiers Graaff, stated:

“Let us evaluate their [Military’s] merits in order that we may weigh the military needs against the enormous political issues that are at stake in the maintenance of our peaceful relations with the continent of Africa. I have in mind here not only the Prime Minister’s détente efforts which have the full support of this side of the House, but also attempts at settlement in South West Africa and elsewhere.”⁵

Minister of Defence P.W. Botha replied with the explanation that South Africa had secured the Calueque constructions and taken care of refugees. There was however a vague admission that “on occasion we were also involved in other engagements”, at the border. He bluntly omitted their involvement in heavy fighting hundreds of miles north of the border. Furthermore, P.W. Botha disputed: “the statement that the actions of the Republic of South Africa have been

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prejudicial to us in Africa. On the contrary. Today we are being regarded in a different light in Africa. A large part of Africa is realizing to an ever-increasing extent that South Africa may be relied upon as an African State.”

The discussions at the OAU meeting days before had clearly shown how controversial South Africa’s intervention had been, and not even those who had initially supported South Africa in Angola would now come to its defence. The Minister of Defence was again challenged by a renowned member of the Progressive Reform Party, Colin Eglin, who remarked that South Africa had been under diplomatic pressure from both the British Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, and his US colleague, Henry Kissinger, to withdraw from Angola. According to Eglin:

[I]t is quite clear that the Government overestimated Western European response to the Russian involvement in Angola. […] But much more important than that, the indications are that the Government made a serious mistake or evaluated incorrectly the degree of fragmentation which exist within the total American system of government, and that agreement or tacit agreement with one arm of the government does not necessarily mean the approval of the American Government as a whole.

Eglin’s remark supports the argument that the government and the Department of Foreign Affairs had failed to predict USA’s withdrawal from Angola. The research for this thesis shows that the problem was rather that the government failed to take the warnings from Foreign Affairs seriously. Foreign Affairs had, as shown in the previous chapters, repeatedly informed about the ambivalence and hostility in the American government and bureaucracy. The problem was how Vorster and the government failed to take this into account when deciding upon the intervention in Angola.

Minister of Foreign Affairs when he addressed the Parliament did not admit any more than P.W. Botha. Foreign Affairs had opposed an invasion, but would not challenge Defence in Parliament: “our actions in Angola did not frustrate our endeavours to expand contact with African countries. On the contrary” and “the Angolan crisis should definitely not be seen as a confrontation between South Africa and Africa. […] It is in fact a struggle between Africans, White and Black on the one hand, and White Russians and Cuban imperialists on the other.” The issue was “fundamentally a Soviet Russian issue”, and the real intervention was the Cuban-Russian invasion in Angola. The South African intervention was only an answer to the former:

6 Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha, House of Assembly Debates, 26.1.76, col. 48. In the same speech, Botha states that the South African losses have been “relatively small” and occurred “from 14 July 1975 to 23 January 1976”, which is the first indication of when the first South African raids across the borders happened, i.e. long before the DFA was informed.

7 Mr. C.W. Eglin, House of Assembly Debates, 27.1.76, col. 105.
“Instead of being a setback to our détente policy in regard to Africa, our reaction to the intervention [by Cuba and Soviet] by means of force by foreign powers in a neighbouring state promoted our peace offensive, *inter alia*, because it has furnished proof of our *bona fides.*” Its worth emphasising how these justifications are *post facto*, by explaining South Africa’s actions because of the Soviet and Cuban presence which to a large degree was caused by South Africa’s invasion.

Clearly, the Minister of Foreign Affairs did not want to step out of line with the rest of the government, and preferred to downplay Foreign Affairs’ opposition to military involvement in Angola even if his Department had opposed the invasion. Regardless of the Ministers statements in Parliament, South Africa’s internationally position had clearly deteriorated after Angola, although the South African government would not admit this. This debate in Parliament in January 1976 was however important, as it opened the lid slightly on what had happened the year before and which had already been discussed in international media – that South Africa had been involved in the civil war in Angola at one level or the other. In the debate, the government also tried to justify its actions and claim they had strengthened rather than weakened South Africa’s international position.

This is clearly a distortion of the situation. *Africa Contemporary Records* summarised the situation as follows: “However, despite protestations to the contrary, the ‘détente exercise’ ground to a halt after the Angola episode. There were still contacts between Pretoria and the Presidents of Ivory Coast and Zaire, but with few others of any consequence.” The intervention in Angola had ended in a humiliating defeat, and had showed the both the national liberation movements that South Africa itself was not invincible. Furthermore, the balance of power which started to shift when Portugal gave up its colonies had now ended in South Africa’s disfavour. South Africa was still the strongest military power in the region, but had now an even more hostile government in power in Angola than before the invasion. Finally, the invasion had also accomplished much of the opposite of what they had hoped to do; strengthening MPLA and justifying the presence of Soviet Union and Cuba close to South Africa, as well as destroying much of South Africa’s credibility built up during Détente.

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Foreign Affairs assess and responds to the criticism

The operations in Angola had severed South Africa’s foreign relations on many fronts. The Department of Foreign Affairs now had to do its best to counter the bad effects of Angola and again improving South Africa’s foreign relations. First they needed to understand how the situation had affected the international view of South Africa, then they had to do their best to mend the relations with any country where the relations had deteriorated. Foreign Affairs was especially concerned of any changes in perception on Southern Africa after Angola which might have endangered foreign investment and business in South Africa. In March 1976 Pretoria received a translated article from the Belgian Le Soir newspaper. In relation to this “the Department, wishing to gauge the extent to which the view expressed by the columnist [of shaken confidence in the white-minority regimes and economic stability] was shared by members of the financial and economic communities in those countries with which South Africa conducts the greatest portion of its trade and raises its foreign loans”.

The 11 pages long document summarises the conclusions of the various South African missions. Foreign Affairs’ conclusion is that “there is no evidence to suggest that any representative group of the international economic community has written off South Africa as an important and reliable source of raw materials”. Foreign Affairs claimed “that recent events have not taken their toll of investor confidence”. But Foreign Affairs did admit there was an “unease experienced by investors in the majority of nations” in regard to southern Africa. They did however put the blame not on South Africa, but on the West itself: “It is clear that the apparent lack of commitment of the Western powers to maintenance of stability in the region is an important ancillary factor”. They also seem relieved that the investor community was less concerned about the conflict situation in southern Africa than were the “journalistic community and the small private investors”.

What is important is how Department of Foreign Affairs drew the same conclusion as before and probably believed their own explanations: The problem was not South Africa’s invasion of Angola – which they continued to claim was only a matter of protecting the construction of the hydro power projects. The problem was how the West’s did not support South Africa more actively against the new threat of the Soviet Union in Southern Africa. Foreign Affairs therefore continued to downplay South Africa’s own involvement in Angola. The United

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9 Department of Foreign Affairs to missions, "International perceptions of Southern African stability: Economic and Financial Effect", (No date, no signature) "United States relations with South Africa" Vol. 36, 12.8.76-16.9.76, BTS 1\33\3.
States decision to withdraw its support from the operations also meant – in the eyes of the South African government – that the West was to blame for the presence of the Soviet Union. Still, due to South Africa’s increasing isolation, they were eager as ever on preserving relations with the region and with the United States.

**Improving South Africa's international image**

During January and February 1976, South Africa continued their strategy of denial and putting the blame on Cuba and Soviet Union. But behind the scene, South Africa was now putting efforts into establishing good relations with MPLA. South Africa was concerned with trying to establish official links with MPLA, probably in a bid to “move away” from the conflict, settling a deal with MPLA regarding the hydro-electric power station on the Cunene river, and organising the return of the prisoners of war. If South Africa could establish contact with MPLA, they could possibly in retrospect give credibility to the claim that they were only trying to secure their interests in the south, not to defeat the MPLA. This could again rescue some of the poor credits South Africa had got from the conflict.

According to a document in the Foreign Affairs’ archives, filed in March 1976, contact with MPLA was made through the Soviet Embassy in Pretoria. South Africa had somehow signalled Moscow that they were “now ready to get in touch with the government of the People’s Republic of Angola with a view to finding solutions to some questions of mutual concern”. MPLA refused any official contact as long as there are South African troops in Angola. Additionally, the MPLA stated they would not destroy the hydro-power station, as they see it as Angola property – and neither would “wish to harm the people of Namibia by depriving it of electricity supply”. One of South Africa’s key arguments regarding the hydro station had been that it was meant for the Ovambo people in Northern Namibia. In a draft for a reply, the South African government calls MPLA’s contact and demands via the Soviets for “encouraging development” which “in general appear to be acceptable to us”.

The relations improved from here, and there are several documents in the archives referring to meetings between South Africa and MPLA. Already in June 1976, South Africa, represented by two people from Foreign Affairs, Fourie and Mr. P. R. Killen, the SADF, by Constand L.

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10 “1. The Soviet Ambassador called this morning …”, (no date, no title, no signature), “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 8A, 14.3.76-30.3.76, BTS 1\22\3.

11 “A. Would you kindly thank your Government …”, (no date, no title, no signature), “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 8A, 14.3.76-30.3.76, BTS 1\22\3.
Viljoen, and C. Truebody, the Director of Water Affairs in Windhoek, met representatives of the MPLA government and FAPLA.12 In another example indicating a shift in South Africa’s relations with Angola, a joint meeting between the Army, Foreign Affairs, police and others decide to contact the MPLA directly when they feared SWAPO attacks on Calueque during an Angolan holiday.13 However, while South Africa managed to improve relations with MPLA in 1976 they did not last. South Africa invaded Angola again several times during the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s when P.W. Botha was Prime Minister and President.

Relations with the United States after Angola

The South African government was bitter and disappointed because of what they saw as a betrayal by the United States when USA pulled out of Angola. Vorster complained in parliament that “when it comes to the worst, South Africa stands alone” while Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha claimed USA had “left South Africa in the lurch”.14 According to Africa Contemporary Records: “The shift in US-South Africa relations in 1976 was one of the most sudden and dramatic setbacks for the Republic’s foreign policy since the advent of the apartheid regime. Until the crisis over Angola, it still seemed possible that Pretoria could rely for understanding, if not support, from the leading Western power.”15 Chapter one established the importance of South Africa’s relations with the United States, and it was now important for Foreign Affairs to improve South African-United States relations, even if Vorster and P.W. Botha openly expressed their bitterness.

The crisis in Southern Africa had on the other side pushed the Americans to take more interest in the region. Kissinger had two issues on his agenda when he in 1976 turned his attention to Southern Africa: Zimbabwe and Namibia. Regarding Zimbabwe, Kissinger promoted majority rule, on Namibia he pushed for the recognition of UN decisions and independence for Namibia. Both issues were difficult for the South African to accept and was seen as an indirect attack on white rule in Southern Africa and on South Africa itself.

In April 1976 Secretary of State Henry Kissinger went on an important trip to the region. The South African government invited Kissinger to South Africa, who declined claiming “it has

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13 “If there are celebrations on Friday and drinking is taking place, this could possibly lead to spontaneous actions against RSA workers at Calueque,” from DG Ops, Maj. Gen., “Secret. Aide Memoire, Summary of discussions re possible Swapo actions” 26 August 1976, “Angola relations with South Africa”, Vol. 9 1.4.76-31.8.76, BTS 1\22\3.
14 Vorster, House of Assembly debates, 30.1.76, col. 375, found in Geldenhuys, Diplomacy, p. 81.
not been possible to include a visit to South Africa in the itinerary of my forthcoming trip to Africa”. 16 Kissinger’s choice not to visit South Africa must have been a great disappointment for Foreign Affairs. But Kissinger probably alarmed the South African government even more when he in a speech in Lusaka “put the US firmly on the side of majority rule in southern Africa and called on South Africa to end the ‘institutionalized inequality of the races’ ”. 17 Not only did Kissinger avoid South Africa, but he continued the political line of his predecessors of interfering with South Africa’s “domestic affairs”.

The situation in Zimbabwe was the most burning issue for Kissinger. The negotiations between the Smith regime and the liberation movements had broken down after the Victoria Falls conference in August 1975. Kissinger during 1976 urged Vorster to take up his role form the year before, of pushing Ian Smith to negotiations and concessions. The situation was similar to Détente the year before, only this time Kissinger was pushing both sides to the negotiation table, and Vorster now seemed more like Kissinger’s errand boy than he had done the previous year. Working with Kissinger on Zimbabwe must however be seen as an attempt by Vorster to rebuild his relationship with the United States, although Kissinger’s “lack of understanding” for South Africa’s situation must have been frustrating and discredited Vorster in the eyes of his rightwing domestic opposition.

In addition to renewing efforts for peace in Zimbabwe, South Africa now promoted the establishment of independent “Bantustans” as a strategy to show her intention of democratic rights for the black population. In the context of increased international pressure against apartheid, and as an attempt of fulfilling the core intentions of apartheid, South Africa in 1976 prepared the first of the so-called independent homelands, Transkei, for independence. Transkei would be given independence in October 1976. The argument was that while black South Africans would not have full political rights or citizenship in the Republic of South Africa itself, they would all be citizens of independent homelands, “Bantustans”. The homelands were all located on the geographical periphery of the Republic itself, and with a separate homeland for each of the apartheid-classified black nations; the Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, Sotho etc. They were all characterised by poverty, poor soil and infrastructure, with borders jig-sawing around white land. Transkei was the first of four Bantustans which was granted independence, and even diplomatic

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17 Africa Contemporary Records, 1975-76, B615.
representation in Pretoria. The homelands was granted some sort of semi-independence under South African control, but were never recognised by any other state in the world.

When the German Foreign Minister on 16 January 1976 demanded answers from South Africa regarding Angola, the embassy in Bonn was instructed by Pretoria to use the standard denial of any wrongdoing in Angola. Furthermore, Pretoria used the scheduled independence for Transkei as a proof of this:

South Africa has no territorial ambitions whatsoever in any part of the world, including southern Africa and Angola. On the contrary the South African Government is absolutely committed to the principle of self-determination of the various peoples of South Africa and the Transkei is scheduled for independence in October 1976.  

South Africa hoped an independent Transkei would ease the international criticism, and raise credibility for the survival of the “white nation” and “separate development”. Transkei was scheduled for and gained independent 26 October 1976. Despite the intentions and hopes in the South African government, this did not serve the purpose of increased credibility and international respect. Two years later, in 1978 Transkei even broke off international relations with South Africa. Vorster’s renewed efforts to solve the conflict in Rhodesia, this time pressured by Kissinger, was another attempt to ease the problems after Angola. In the earlier mentioned summary of the effect of Angola on the international business community, Washington claimed: “I am confident ...... that we have now reached the low point in investors’ confidence in South Africa, and except for any unforeseen and negative political developments, the economic side will start to improve over the next twelve months.” The “unforeseen” development was the infamous Soweto student riots which started in Orlando, Soweto on 16 June 1976. This became one of the most dramatic milestones in recent South African history.

Soweto 16 June 1976

In June 1976, the school children of Soweto, the large, poor township south west of Johannesburg started to organised themselves against the regime. The Government had decided Afrikaans would be the new medium of teaching in black schools, a language few of them could

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18 Also called the TBVC-states, or Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei.
20 See discussion of terminology and understanding and defending apartheid in previous chapter.
21 Department of Foreign Affairs to missions, ”International perceptions of Southern African stability: Economic and Financial Effect”, (No date, no signature) ”United States relations with South Africa” Vol. 36, 12.8.76-16.9.76, BTS 1\33\3.
read or write. They were also frustrated by the lack of black opposition against Government, the banning of the ANC meant that the youth barely knew it existed. They decided to make a student protest march against Afrikaans and the so-called “Bantu education” in schools. On the day of the demonstrations, 16 June 1976, the students marched from school to school, gathering thousands of students from all over Soweto. Arriving at a school in Orlando, Soweto, they were met by armed police blocking the road. Soon after, the students and police clashed, the police opened fire and killed several students. This sparked off riots all over Soweto, soon spreading to many other townships all over South Africa. During the next months, several hundreds – up to a thousand – youth were killed. Thousands of others were imprisoned and tortured. Antoinette Sithole (born Antoinette Peterson) took part in the demonstrations in Soweto on 16 June, and her brother, Hector Zolile Peterson was one of the first students shot and killed. The picture of Sithole and her brother later became an important symbol of the youth resistance in Soweto. She today still remembers the situation vividly:

It was hell! What I saw, I really call it hell. It was chaos. It was unbearable. It was nobody who could say, well it happened yesterday. The situation was very very bad. Mind you, provinces around us, in support of what happened yesterday, ah it was hell. Hell broke loose. No one could stop the other. It was so bad. And I always say it was worse than 16 June itself. It was revenge, sort of a revenge, and you know how people are like when they are in revenge. It was very very bad.22

The Soweto youth had no organisational affiliation but were to some degree influenced by two important factors; the rising of Black Consciousness and the freedom of Mozambique and Angola. Some of the members of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) had helped the students with forming slogans and demands, and around the time of the Soweto riots, support for Frelimo and slogans and banners with “Viva Frelimo” appeared in Soweto. According to Hallett “there is certainly a connection” between Angola and Soweto. He uses examples from the notorious Cape Flats townships outside Cape Town where local gangs changed names from “Panorama Kids” and “Naughty Boys” to “Cuban Kids” and “MPLA Terrors”.23 Newspapers reported how Coloured pub customers cheered when they saw MPLA or Cuban soldiers on the TV news.

22 Antoinette Sithole was eyewitness and victim during the Soweto student demonstrations 16 June 16 1976. She was captured on the world famous photo while running next to her dying brother, Zolile Hector Peterson. Sigurd Jorde, "Historien bak et berømt bilde" in Bjørnsen, Magnus (ed), Apartheid – en verden i svart-hvitt (Oslo:Norwegian Council for Africa, Solidaritet forlag, 2004).

Soweto was followed by massive international protests. Using live ammunition to suppress unarmed youth demonstrated the brutality of the apartheid regime, and what measures it was willing to use defending itself. Soweto became a symbol both of oppression and resistance. It opened up a new chapter of black opposition in South African history, and the white community felt even more isolated and under threat than ever before. Not only where they now the only white regime left in southern Africa – they were also under increasing pressure from within. The state’s violent clamp down of the Soweto riots shocked the public in the United States as it did everywhere else. It became an issue which the anti-apartheid and black political groups could mobilise around. They accordingly increased their pressure on the embassy. Shearar describes the mood in USA, and remembers how the picture of Antoinette Sithole and Hector Peterson was used against South Africa:

We were faced all around the United States of course meetings and so on, and there was, and that was when Burt Sullivan and the same time Jesse Jackson started a strong pressure, so the element of pressure increased under the black caucus, the NAACP and others, because of this incident [Soweto] and what they saw on television and the Petersen boy being carried on photographs and so on.24

The pressure against the embassy came more from the anti-South African groups than from the American authorities. But this did not save South Africa from problems created by the authorities in other ways. According to Shearar, the State Department “were difficult”, and they refused to supply South Africa with “riot control equipment that would enable us to control riots without taking the extreme measures with which it had happened in Soweto. But they were not ready to do this despite our argument and any case they cant criticise us if we don’t have particular things that they had, and that they had used against the students in 68, 69 and so on.”25 The increased political pressure on the embassy in Washington was duly reported to the Department of Foreign Affairs. On 29 June 1976 the embassy reported on demonstrations which had been held on the Saturday before. The embassy was not impressed by the attendance, noting “the fact that the same faces are seen at demonstrations over widely differing issues”. On the issue of media, the coverage of the “[Soweto] events in the media has not been as dramatic as on the occasion of Sharpeville”. The report also added “but one cannot be too optimistic as a result”.26

24 Interview with Jeremy B. Shearar, 2 June 2003.
25 Interview with Jeremy B. Shearar, 2 June 2003.
Even if Foreign Affairs claim the Soweto uprisings gained less coverage than Sharpeville, the Department still found it necessary to write a memo on the reactions. The memorandum repeated that: “Even though the Soweto events did not have the same impact with the news media as Sharpville [sic] had, it nevertheless received big prominence in radio.” This was of great concern for the embassy. In addition, the “Soweto unrests obtained wide publicity in Canada” as well.

But the student riots continued well beyond Soweto and June 1976, and the police continued to crush the unrests with severe brutality. The media coverage in the United States therefore continued and in a short while exceeded what had happened after Sharpeville: “The Soweto-events received since 16 June 1976 big prominence in American news media including television, radio and newspaper. [...] The role of children and students provoked intense emotions against the South African government.”

The embassy was naturally concerned how these “intense emotions against the South African government” would affect the already troubled economic ties between the two countries. In the report written after the invasion of Angola (see previous discussion in this chapter), Foreign Affairs seemed quite confident that the situation was under control and that international business was not shy of investing in South Africa. Now, after the Soweto riots, the embassy seemed much more concerned:

Also in American economic and financial circles there is disturbing reactions over the unrests. The impression is that bankers, industrialists and exporters are worried about the events in Southern Africa, especially Angola and the still worsening Rhodesian question. The Soweto-events have now added another dimension by reductionist commentary in influential news media in the country, supposedly being portrayed such that economic ties with South Africa with long-term projections has become cautious undertakings.

The South African Consul General in San Francisco also found reason to report the possible consequences of Soweto to Pretoria and the embassy in Washington, emphasising the potential damage for investment; “however, there can be no doubt that, in the public mind at

least, any reference to Southern Africa continues to conjure up visions of total unrest and instability which are damaging to us, especially as a potential field for investment”.31

The effects of Soweto was also be felt personally by the embassy staff, something which caused concern and indignation. In November 1976, the wives of Pik Botha, Shearar and Hans Beukes had to withdraw from participating in a YWCA charity function despite being invited already in April. This seems to have been personal and upsetting for the embassy. Initially, there had been “certain amount of opposition within the staff” against attending the function “on the grounds that some of the funds the Association were channelled to terrorist movements”.32 They decided nonetheless to participate because of the Christian fundament of YMCA. Early in November, the wives of the embassy staff were approached by YMCA and requested to stay away from the function, partly because of threats of demonstrations, partly because “two black members of the YWCA in South Africa had been arrested and detained without charge during the riots which followed the school demonstrations in Soweto earlier this year.”33 The embassy requested Pretoria for information regarding these arrests, and initially told YMCA their accusations were incorrect. After a new enquiry, the embassy learnt they had subsequently been arrested, and thereafter reporting to Pretoria that “the Embassy was embarrassed by not having been advised about the detention of these two women, in whom an interest had already been expressed.” The embassy went on to point out that there are several similar rumours of arrests in South Africa, and that “the arrests have, of course, seriously affected our overseas image and in the absence of any official information, allegations of whatever nature are impossible to counter.” Finally the embassy sugged: “Is it not possible to provide those missions who, like ourselves, are most under attack with official information concerning numbers of arrests and relevant details concerning the better known detained such as an indication of the relevant section of the Act under which they are held.”34

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The embassy staff obviously found it embarrassing being turned away from a charity function. Furthermore, they found it difficult to counter political attacks in the USA when not being provided with information from Pretoria. Noteworthy is that this mild criticism of the Department only came when the staff were made to personally feel the increased animosity against South Africa. This letter also gives an indication of how the effects of Soweto have left a more permanent mark on the relations with United States, as it became more and more difficult to claim South Africa was peaceful and without political oppression.

On a higher level, the ambivalence in the US-South Africa relations were evident in the United Nations. Africa Contemporary Records wrote in 1977 that “SA experienced one of its toughest years in the UN during 1976. Demands for its expulsion grew sharper, and several attempts were made to enforce a total arms embargo”.35 Shearer claims on the other hand that “The Soweto story did not go to the Security Council in any serious format, it may have been, and it was of course that the three western major powers would use their veto against any serious chapter 7 approach. So nothing really seemed to happen.”36 What happened was that while criticism was raised in the UN General Assembly, the United States still chose to protect South Africa from any serious harm in the UN Security Council. This changed however in 1977, when a mandatory arms embargo sanctioned in the UN.

International reactions to Soweto and Biko’s death

In June 1976, the same months as the student riots started in South Africa, Vorster an Kissinger met in West-Germany. This was a small landmark in the relations between South Africa and United States, as the relations seemed to be healing after the conflict around Angola. The issue on the agenda was trying to put the Zimbabwe-negotiations from the previous year back on track. Donald B. Sole, then ambassador to Bonn, made the arrangements for the meeting in cooperation with American and German authorities. When Vorster and Kissinger met, “the rapport established between Vorster and Kissinger was quite remarkable”, according to Sole’s private memoirs.37 The meeting took place some months after Angola, but negotiations over Zimbabwe and Namibia were the main topics on the agenda. The good spirit between Vorster and Kissinger again indicates the ambivalent South African-American relations; while the South African

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36 Interview with Jeremy B. Sheear, 2 June 2003.
37 D.B. Sole, This above all, p. 333. According to Sole, he as an ambassador only got to know of Vorster's visit from the German and America authorities, long before his own Foreign Affairs warned him, a sign of either lack of trust between the Department and its mission, or their tendency of keeping their cards close to the chest.
appreciated Kissinger’s charm, they could not understand why he failed to appreciate South Africa’s efforts and problems.

Vorster’s meeting with Kissinger stood out in contrast to his subsequent meeting with the German Chancellor Helmuth Schmidt. This meeting did not work out too well for the South Africans, “partly because the meeting took place in the immediate aftermath of the Soweto riots which had led to a major outburst of international condemnation of South African Government policy”. But, according to Sole, “the real reason for the failure of the discussions was the inability of Schmidt and Vorster to get on the same wave length with one another”. It is more reasonable to believe that the problem was not the “failure” of finding the “same wave length”, but that West Germany was sincerely concerned with the brutal oppression of Soweto. Foreign Affairs’ lack of understanding for the international indignation towards the apartheid political system seem to have been a common feature marking Foreign Affairs’ diplomacy.

The embassy in Washington had been following the American election campaign, and carefully analysed the two candidates and their international politics. Already in June 1976, several months ahead of the American elections, did the embassy in Washington send an analysis of Jimmy Carter to Foreign Affairs in Pretoria. This was followed with another analysis of Carter’s Africa policy a month later, with several warnings for the future. The letter made the following summary: “On the basis of these considerations it may be prudent for us to prepare ourselves for a more active meddling in U.S./S.A. affairs under a Carter presidency than the more benign neglect approach, especially during the Nixon administration.”

In August 1976, after the two parties National Conventions, the embassy made an evaluation comparing the two parties’ foreign policy. The embassy clearly favoured the Republicans and in line with the previous conclusion, warned that the “presidential election campaign assumes even greater importance to us” because of the differences between the two towards South Africa. The embassy continued to follow – and warn – about the possibility of Carter becoming president of the United States. The embassy’s impression of Carter when he entered office was briefly more positive, but this proved to be without basis. The South African

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ambassador Pik Botha, together with Shearar, were among the first guests to see Jimmy Carter, together with his inner cabinet, when he became president. Shearar remembers today that:

We thought it was going to be positive. [...] [Carter] said he would look for any opportunity to say positive statements, but he never made them, and the relationship certainly got very chilly. [...] it was four years of hiatus for us, four years were we wouldn’t even think to move on Angola, so yes there was a tightening, and a negative feeling under Carter.41

The friendly atmosphere during the meeting between Vorster and Kissinger in June the previous year would never come back. With Carter in White House, South Africa was in for a difficult time in the United States. Shearar wrote an assessment of Carter in February 1977 only a month after Carter had entered the White House, describing the situation in a letter to Pretoria:

In the circumstances South Africa can expect little overt understanding and no assistance either from the Administration or from Congress. It is in fact doubtful in the current climate whether the situation would have been much improved had President Ford been elected.42

The relationship between South Africa and the United States met its lowest point in May 1977 and stayed cold for the next four years. According to African Contemporary Records, Vorster claimed later that the US had become a greater enemy of SA than Russia, because Russia “wanted to kill us off by force, while the US wants to strangle us with finesse”.43 Vorster claimed the breaking point in the relations between South Africa and USA was January 1977, when Carter took office. The relations became irreparable in May 1977 when Vice-President Mondale after a meeting with Vorster in Vienna demanded a “one-man one-vote system” in South Africa.44

Donald B. Sole, at the time ambassador in Washington, was present at the press conference, and wrote in his autobiography:

It was this statement which in truth was the real beginning of the confrontational build up between South Africa and the United States that became the dominant feature of the relationship between the two countries from 1977 to 1981. Mondale’s dreadful faux pas deprived the U.S. Government of all credibility in the eyes of the South African Government, whose attitude towards the United States progressively hardened as the U.S. embarked on a policy of “big stick” vis-á-vis South Africa.45

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41 Interview with Jeremy B. Shearar, 2 June 2003.
43 Parts of this paragraph and Vorsters quote from Africa Contemporary Records, 1977-78, B949.
44 Parts of this paragraph and Vorsters quote from Africa Contemporary Records, 1977-78, B949.
45 D.B. Sole, “This Above All”, p. 367. According to Sole; “Since such a system [one-man, one-vote] does not apply even to the United States, the South Africans were furious, quite naturally so.” His reasoning is that not even in USA
The Carter administration, just like the previous administration, had again used the occasion to attack what they thought of as South Africa’s domestic policies.

In September 1977 Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko died in police custody after severe torture by the notorious security police in Port Elisabeth. Biko had not been a member of any of the banned liberation movements, but was a central figure in the new Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). The BCM had educated and radicalised a new generation of black opposition. While Biko and BCM had not yet formal contact with ANC in exile, they were in the process of forming such links when Biko was killed.46

The death of Steve Biko and the subsequent banning of the BC newspaper “The World” and most of the Black Consciousness organisations, lead to an even larger international outcry than Angola and Soweto.47 According to Shearar, the strongest reactions again came from the United Nations and from the Student movements in the United States, while not so much from the State Department. Even so, documents and telegrams in the Foreign Affairs’ archives show that the death of Biko had an impact on the embassy, which reported the increased hostility in the United States.

The case of Biko’s death is interesting because it caused one only a few examples were pressure on the embassy made the ambassador, Sole, request actions in South Africa itself. In a telegram from Sole to the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Sole urged the government to appoint an independent judicial enquiry into the death of Biko. The ambassador had met with top businessmen and bankers in USA, and “there has been virtual unanimity that what has happened in the case of Biko could not have come at a worse time and that it is extremely urgent to defuse the situation without delay.” According to Sole, what was at stake was “the credibility of the South African Government” itself.48 Sole went on to suggest that Pretoria should secure “best medical attention available” for the sick PAC leader Robert Sobukwe, fearing the consequences if he also would pass away in the aftermath of Biko’s death. Sole continued to ask for information on the investigation and findings on Biko’s case the next few months, trying to answer all the questions from American public, media and business. He was not shy of quoting controversial suggestions from American contacts: “Thus in the Steven Biko case the credibility and standing

are all votes equally weighted, but fails to note that the Americans were demanding/urging for blacks to get the right to vote.

46 See discussion in chapter four.

47 This is not to say that the international public found Biko’s death any worse than the invasion of Angola or the crushing of the Soweto riots, rather that they now were more alert and more organised against South Africa.

of the South African Government would have been given a boost of almost inconceivable proportions had the prime minister taken the dramatic decision of transferring the Minister of Justice to another portfolio” – something which would be “in the interests of South Africa”. 49

When asked in 2003 what Pretoria replied to his rather controversial suggestions he sent to Pretoria, he answers: “Nothing! Nothing!” 50 Sole was clearly more outspoken than his predecessors, but this is one of the very few examples were the missions urged Foreign Affairs to change domestic politics in order to save South Africa’s status abroad. This indicates both how American pressure on the South African embassy now had an effect, and some of the desperation the Foreign Affairs staff felt over the difficult situation they were in.

**Continued problems with the United States**

There are some issues which come up repeatedly in the correspondence from Washington to Pretoria. The refusal to issue South African visas to Americans critical of apartheid is one area of friction, and a good example is Anthony Lewis’ request for a visa so he could cover Steve Biko’s inquest and the elections. He was denied a visa, and now after Biko’s death, Sole warned Pretoria not to continue to irritate the Americans over this issue: “I must stress once again that it would be entirely contrary to South Africa’s interest to extend the area of confrontation with the U.S. into the field of issues or refusal of visas.” 51 Sole now thought there were enough issues straining the relations with USA, and would avoid any new problems.

There was now also a growing fear at the embassy that USA might impose sanctions on South Africa. Good relations with American business were considered almost as important as relations with the US Government. The business sector was far less critical of South Africa’s political development than the politicians and diplomats. But now after Biko’s death and the banning of Black Consciousness organisations and newspapers, even business started to worry about the possibility of sanctions: “In my talks with top executives of Mobil and Caltex in New York this past week the dominant theme was their preoccupation with the prospect of sanctions – a concern which was shared, although to a lesser extent, by most but by no means all of the other


50 Interview with Donald B. Sole, 25 June 2003.

51 Ambassador Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, “Telegram No 454(454”, Washington, 10 November 1977, “USA relations with South Africa”, Vol 45A, BTS 1\33\3.
leaders of the business community with South African interest with whom I conducted discussions during the week.”

The increased hostility towards South Africa slowly began to affect business relations between the two countries. Shearar remembers another problem was an increasing use by anti-apartheid activist when “a few people buying shares and then causing tremendous problems in their annual general meetings, shareholders meetings and stockholders meetings” by criticising the company’s activities in South Africa.”

International business had a weak point when it came to anti-apartheid activists threatening their profits and investments. Business therefore increasingly during the 1970s started to shun South Africa. The embassy analysed the American business community’s thoughts of South Africa in a report, stating: “To the average American investor dependent upon daily newspapers and weekly reports, South Africa epitomises an economy dependent very largely on gold which is a dying monetary metal, on the cheap black labour, also a diminishing asset and working against time to solve its political problems.”

Chapter one showed how the embassy tried to organise American business operating in South Africa into a lobby, so they could solve these problems together. This was no success, and American business slowly pulled out of South Africa. They did not leave completely, but left companies in South Africa operating under American licenses. The embassy’s attempts to talk to American business did not help much. Slowly South Africa was affected by lack of investment, a cooling business climate and threat of sanctions. Foreign Affairs had for many years warned about the growing political problems with the United States. Now South Africa was starting to feel the economic isolation. South Africa’s fear of isolation was now, after the invasion of Angola, Soweto and Biko, slowly becoming a reality, and the South African diplomats were now unable to stop this development.

The fall of Vorster – the rise of Botha
The relations between South Africa and the United States continued to be chilly and confrontational in 1978. The issues of confrontation were not fundamentally different from the issues already outlined. What was going to mark 1978 was another domestic development;

53 Interview with Jeremy B. Shearar, 2 June 2003.
54 Department of Foreign Affairs to missions, ”International perceptions of Southern African stability: Economic and Financial Effect”, (No date, no signature) “United States relations with South Africa” Vol. 36, 12.8.76-16.9.76, BTS 1\33\3.
increasing confrontation within the South African government which ultimately led to Vorster’s fall from power. His successor was Pieter W. Botha, the former minister of Defence and one of Vorster’s strongest opponents in government. The “Information Scandal” brought down both the Department of Information and Vorster – with P. W. Botha standing left as the new, strong man in South Africa.

In 1972, when Minister of Information had appointment Eschel Rhoodie as Secretary of Information, the Department started a “large-scale secret propaganda offensive” to improve South Africa’s rating with the rest of the world. Information had several information offices inside South Africa, 16 offices in South Africa and 4 in Namibia, as well as offices in 18 countries. In the United States alone there were five offices alone. More controversial, Information started more than 150 secret projects both in South Africa and abroad, to win over influential people, diplomats, journalists, politicians and others to a more favourable view of South Africa. In more controversial projects, Information with the help of agents or straw men, tried to buy into press both in South Africa and in USA to make sure there were South Africa-friendly press coverage. Information also employed two lobbyists and a public relations consultant. Among the several projects they started in USA was providing financial support to American politicians and trying to buy into the newspaper market. There were also several low-level projects concerned with promoting South African interests in the United States – which from South Africa’s point of view was greatly needed.

In 1974, Information received almost the same slice of the national budget as Foreign Affairs. As mentioned in chapter 2, there were serious friction between Information and Foreign Affairs. The main reason for this was Information’s hidden diplomacy and charm-campaigns, which ran parallel to and secret for Foreign Affairs own diplomacy. Even if staff from Information were stationed at the embassies, the ambassador was not always informed of what they were doing. Minister of Information, Connie Mulder, was a close political ally of Vorster. Although Mulder and Rhoodie did not agree on some important policy – especially racial policy – they agreed that Department of Foreign Affairs was not active enough and that South Africa needed a much more aggressive foreign policy. They also played an important role in Vorster’s Détente policy.

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55 Geldenhuys, Diplomacy, p. 108. Geldenhuys is used for several of the facts used in this section. Another interesting account of Information’s secret work is Eschel Rhoodie’s The Real Information Scandal where he describes several of the projects in detail largely to defend the projects successfulness.

56 Geldenhuys, Diplomacy, p. 113.
In 1978 information about the secret programmes, in addition to self-enrichment and corruption by Rhoodie and others, was leaked to media. This was known as the “Information Scandal”, and the South African public gradually learnt how Information had spent large amounts of money on wild secret projects home and abroad.\textsuperscript{57} “The tales of high living, especially by the information department’s Eschel Rhoodie, and of massive unauthorised expenditure caused a series of sensations,” according to Terry Bell.\textsuperscript{58} In September 1978 Vorster announced his resignation as Prime Minister (he continued as State President until 1979). In “the week between the announcement of Vorster’s resignation and the election of a new National party leader saw the most intense lobbying by the main contenders in the Party’s history”.\textsuperscript{59} The three main contenders were Minister of Defence, P. W. Botha, Minister of Information, Connie Mulder and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pik Botha, with P.W. Botha winning the final election as leader of the National Party, which also made him Prime Minister. The information scandal played a major role in Botha’s victory, but was not yet publicly known. When Botha had become Prime Minister; “he clearly did not at first intend to open up the affair to public scrutiny or expose the bitter divisions within the Government, but he failed to prevent exposure because of the courage and determination of a Supreme Court Judge and of some newspaper editors and journalists”.\textsuperscript{60}

The reasons for Vorster’s fall from power can be traced back to Vorster’s active regional diplomacy, the outcome of the invasion in Angola and finally, the rivalry between Defence and the Department for Information. Terry Bell argues that the Information Scandal was a successful plot by P.W. Botha to get rid of Vorster, van den Bergh and his strongest contender to premiership: Connie Mulder. Botha skilfully and carefully leaked information about Information’s secret and sometimes extravagant spending of tax money, to the press – while using agents inside the press to make sure the scandal developed in a way which gained Botha and Defence. P.W. Botha and his Foreign Minister Pik Botha both came out of the scandal without loss of credibility, while Vorster, van den Bergh, Connie Mulder and Eschel Rhoodie were all tainted by the scandal and had to leave government and politics completely.

This view of the rise of P.W. Botha is also shared by the TRC report which states: “Within the security establishment, the growing influence of the military was evident in the rise to power

\textsuperscript{57} The "Information Scandal" is also known as the "Info scandal", "Infogate" and "Muldergate" (After Minister of Information Connie Mulder").

\textsuperscript{58} Bell, \textit{Unfinished Business}, p. 73.

\textsuperscript{59} Barber, \textit{South Africa's foreign policy}, p. 247.

\textsuperscript{60} Barber, \textit{South Africa's foreign policy}. 
of P.W. Botha. Through a series of manoeuvres involving the intelligence structures of the SADF, information about the Department of Information was leaked to the press, precipitating the 'Infogate' scandal and the demise of both Vorster and Van den Bergh. On 28 September 1978, P.W. Botha became Prime Minister and moved rapidly to implement a policy soon dubbed the 'total strategy'.

There is no confirmation of any of this in the archives of Foreign Affairs. However, it is important to note how the scandal which brought Vorster down, was a scandal involving foreign relations and the attempt to win international friends in spectacular ways. The scandal brought down not only Vorster, but also his closest allies; van den Bergh and Connie Mulder. The three of them were also the strongest opposition against P.W. Botha during Détente and the invasion of Angola. Pik Botha and the Department of Information had also argued against invasion of Angola, but Foreign Affairs had been the weaker part in conflict, and had always been opposed to Department of Information.

South Africa's foreign relations by 1978

Africa Contemporary Records conclude that 1977 was the year when South Africa's relations to the West reached a freezing point: “The strategic bond between South Africa and the US […] snapped in 1977. This decisive change in relationship was formally acknowledged by Vorster in his 1977 New Year's speech in which he stated that if South Africa came under attack from the communists, they would have to fight alone.” With Pik Botha as Minister of Foreign Affairs, the department had a more active Minister. It was difficult however to mend relations with the United States and the embassy staff in Washington were arguing for more resources:

I send you these two annexures because, quite frankly, I have the impression that there is too little appreciation in Head Office of the size of the problem with which we are confronted. We report from time to time, but our reports seem to have very little impact. We find it difficult to understand why we should be asked for more information as happened recently …

Some of the reasons for South Africa's strained relations with USA were the same as in the beginning of the decade, i.e. apartheid. But the level of criticism and hostility had increased significantly.

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63 D.B. Sole to Secretary for Foreign Affairs, "Anti-South African groups in the United States", Washington, 8 June 1978, "USA relations with South Africa", Vol. 49B, 1.6.78 – 29.6.78, BTS 1\33\3.
As we have found with most top Americans, they would like to have good relations with us. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they are fully aware of our strategic, mineral and diplomatic importance, they cannot and will not do so while internal policies, which are unacceptable to them, are being pursued by us.\textsuperscript{64}

While South Africa’s own domestic and regional actions are the fundamental reasons why the United States now were more hostile towards South Africa, the change to President Carter was another important factor. The embassy staff, while trying to defend South Africa the best they can, made a quite frank summary in early 1978, acknowledging the hopeless position South Africa was in:

The basic hostile attitude of the United States to South Africa since the advent of Carter was accelerated enormously by the death of Biko and by the banning of The World and various individuals on 19 October 1977, which were necessary in the interests of internal order and security. Because these events could be represented as being diagonally opposed to American concepts of justice and freedom, especially freedom of the press, these events had a significant adverse affect on the United States public in general and assisted various anti-South African organisations in the United States significantly.\textsuperscript{65}

The United States was South Africa’s most important ally, but the same development marked South Africa’s relations with most of the rest of the world too. Relations with the neighbouring states were tense and to some directly hostile. Relations with Germany, France and the United Kingdom were also difficult. In these countries, the anti-apartheid movement was also increasingly stronger and active. The United Nations was still an important player in the campaign against apartheid. South Africa had no arena where it felt it was treated as an equal and could no longer trust any other nation or ally, except the odd individual supporter abroad. South Africa was isolated, and would be so for the rest of the decade.

**Reasons and consequences for Vorster’s exit**

Pieter W. Botha became South Africa’s new Prime Minister 28 September 1978 and this started a new chapter in South Africa’s modern history. His premiership lies outside the scope of this thesis, but it is still useful to mention some of the characteristics of Botha’s rule; first what ended with Vorster, then what would mark Botha’s time as head of South Africa. When Botha came to power, most of the inter-governmental power struggle ended. Pik Botha continued as Foreign


Minister, while the Department of Information was incorporated into Foreign Affairs as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Information. While Pik Botha had contested P.W. Botha in the election for leader of the National Party, Pik Botha had withdrawn in the second round of the elections in favour of P.W. Botha. Pik served as Foreign Minister from Vorster’s government, through P.W. Botha’s time and until 1994 when ANC came to power. When the National Party lost for ANC in 1994, Pik Botha had been one of the world’s longest serving foreign ministers. He was also a much more visible and viable Foreign Minister than his predecessor Hilgard Muller.

With the fall of Vorster, South Africa’s various foreign policy initiatives like dialogue and Détente also ended. The domestic and regional conflicts which brought Vorster down had driven South Africa even further into isolation. One of the most striking developments in Botha’s rule, was the strengthening of the military, and the militarization of South African politics. The Military doctrine of “total strategy” – developed to fight back the perceived “total onslaught” by the communists – would militarise almost all sides of the South African society. Botha also used the army in a much more active role in the neighbouring states through “destabilisation” tactics. During the 1980’s the military attacked all of South Africa’s neighbouring states either in one way or the other.

All in all, there was a significant change in government style and approach from Vorster to Botha. South Africa’s relations with the outside world changed dramatically. The developments under Botha in the 1980’s had their roots in the conflicts during the 1970s where PW Botha was opposed to the “softer” and more diplomatic line of Vorster. The increased militarization of the Southern African conflicts in the 1980’s is partly caused by ideology formed by Botha and Defence through the 1970’s. The other political line, held by Vorster, Foreign Affairs, Boss and Information, was one of dialogue and co-operation at least on their own terms.

Conclusion:
The secret invasion of Angola had severe effects on South Africa’s foreign relations. South Africa had attempted to help an allied liberation movement to power in Luanda, with perceived backing from various African countries and the United States. When the intervention failed, South Africa’s aggression was exposed, the fragile African coalition behind the FNLA-MPLA-front all but collapsed, the United States withdraw its support and South Africa was condemned and isolated. The little but valuable credibility South Africa had gained from the Dialogue and Détente initiatives were also lost. The last point was emphasised by the South African liberal
opposition when Parliament opened in early 1976 and debated the situation after Angola. Indirectly, South Africa had also improved ANC’s regional and international position. But despite these rather obvious failures, no one in the government or the Foreign Affairs would admit any wrongdoing and continued to reject and conceal the truth. Foreign Affairs, which had opposed the invasion the year before, was even strongly involved in hiding and downplaying South Africa’s involvement. This is evident in the correspondence found in the archives of Foreign Affairs.

South Africa’s response to the increased isolation was one of bitterness, especially towards the United States, and this would mark the relations between the two countries for many years. Despite this, documents from the archives of Foreign Affairs show that South Africa in secret shortly after the withdrawal from Angola tried to establish contacts with the new MPLA government, probably in a bid to repair the damage from the invasion. South Africa’s next move was an attempt to work with Henry Kissinger to pressure Ian Smith to new negotiations over the situation in Zimbabwe. The fact that Vorster agreed to work with – or for – Kissinger with an unpopular issue in South Africa this short after USA had “let South Africa down in Angola” must be understood as a rather desperate wish to re-establish good relations with the United States. Foreign Affairs’ international denial of any wrongdoing in Angola should as well be understood as an attempt to repair the damage.

However, any attempts to improve South Africa’s tattered image after Angola was further shattered when the police and army brutally crushed the student riots in Soweto and elsewhere from June 1976 and the rest of that year. Soweto led to new levels of international criticism against South Africa. This happened about the same time as Vorster and Kissinger tried to restart the negotiations in Zimbabwe, which meant that South Africa lost much of the initiative here too. Things got even worse when Jimmy Carter was elected president later that year and inaugurated early 1977. From this point onwards, the relations with the United States were rather hostile, as several of the files in Foreign Affairs’ archives show. The situation deteriorated even further after the killing of opposition leader Steve Biko in September 1977. Now even the United States and United Kingdom supported a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, the first in the history. The files in Foreign Affairs’ archives show how the new South African ambassador in Washington in 1977, Donald B. Sole, made a few attempts to influence Pretoria towards taking Biko’s death seriously. He was worried how the situation strained relations between the United States and South Africa, and hoped a real investigation could deflate the criticism. His request was not listened to, indicating again how little weight Foreign Affairs carried in the South
African government. During 1977 and 1978, it is not possible to find any optimistic assessments coming from the South African embassy in Washington, and the embassy seemed to have concluded that they were not able to establish any good or working relationship with the United States under Carter’s Presidency.

The increasing failure of South Africa's foreign policy is one of the key issues behind Vorster’s fall from power in 1978. The immediate reason was the secret and out-of-control projects of Department of Information, the “Information Scandal” during 1977 and 1978. The aim of these projects was in reality an extensive foreign policy programme, meant to improve South Africa’s image in the rest of the world. Foreign Affairs opposed these programmes because they interfered with their delicate diplomacy. More importantly, the strong Department of Defence, who’s budget funded Information’s projects, opposed both Information, Vorster and his close ally Hendrik van den Bergh in BOSS. Defence Minister P.W. Botha and the army preferred to improve South Africa’s security sector and to aim for self reliance. They lost all trust in South Africa’s foreign allies as Vorster’s foreign policy initiatives failed one after the other, and opted for increased militarization of the South African state and society. Using the Information Scandal to gain control of the South African government, P.W. Botha commenced a development towards increased militarization, regional destabilisation and international isolation. The emergence of this new, militaristic political line in South Africa must be seen as a response to how John Vorster and Foreign Affairs failed to win international recognition and credibility through diplomacy and sound foreign relations. The irony is that Defence and the Security apparatus to a large degree created this hostile environment themselves through the aggression analysed in these chapters.
4 ANC’s foreign relations, 1969-1978

Introduction

1969 was a turning point in the history of African National Congress. During the next decade, the movement consolidated its organisation and gradually increased in size, strength and importance. If one wants to understand how the ANC became a credible challenge to the apartheid regime and the leading South African liberation movement, one has to analyse this process during the 1970s. In 1969 ANC was weak and almost paralysed by problems. By the end of the 1970s the ANC was strong enough to again challenge the regime in Pretoria, as it had done in the 1950s. Organisational consolidation, increased inside and exile activity are some of the causes. Improved international relations and diplomacy are other answers to the questions raised. The two latter are the focus of this chapter.

In 1970, the apartheid regime was rather unaffected by ANC’s actions, and there were few areas where the two parties interacted or confronted each other. As a result there are very few references of the ANC in the archives of Foreign Affairs in Pretoria, apart from some references to the “terrorists”, which was used for ANC, PAC, SACP and SWAPO in general. The ANC on the other side directed all of its efforts towards bringing down the regime, and staged increasingly successful international campaigns against it. The apartheid regime features in most of ANC’s propaganda and internal discussions. The previous chapters showed how the apartheid regime gradually weakened its international position weakened during the 1970s. ANC improved its strength and international position in a corresponding but opposite movement. This development would continue and gradually lead to the negotiated settlement of the early 1990s.

This chapter will try to explain to what degree ANC managed to contribute to Pretoria’s increased isolation through its foreign relations and diplomacy. ANC’s slow but steady international work of establishing contacts and cooperation with liberation movements and independent states in Africa was vital both for ANC’s survival and for its expansion. This process will be discussed here in relation to documents found in the ANC archives. These efforts were then used in building an African and international campaign against Pretoria. ANC also established and maintained relations outside Africa, most importantly with the Socialist Bloc, the Scandinavian countries and the international anti-apartheid movement. All these relations improved during the 1970s, contrary to the development the apartheid regime was experiencing.
It is unfortunately not possible to give a comprehensive account of all relevant aspects of ANC’s history within the frame of a single chapter. The narrative of this chapter therefore has to be brief. Some of the sources and examples used will not necessarily follow in chronological order, but used when they can illustrate the points made. This chapter will start with a brief description of ANC in exile in the early 1970s; the ANC missions and its foreign policy. The ANC consultative conference in Morogoro, Tanzania in early 1969 was an important landmark in ANC’s history, and serves as a starting point for a more – but not strict – chronological outline of ANC’s history in exile during the 1970s. The emphasis will be on ANC’s foreign relations with the states and liberation movements in Southern Africa. The episodes discussed in the previous chapters, such as the South African invasion of Angola, the Soweto riots and the death of Steve Biko, will be used in a discussion on how these events changed ANC’s foreign relations. ANC’s relations with the world outside Africa, mainly the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the Scandinavian countries, will be discussed in the context of these events and in connection with sources from the archives. The limited space for this chapter leaves out a more in-depth analysis of several aspects of ANC’s more general politics. There are several issues which unfortunately only can be mentioned briefly, for example whether ANC’s national liberation should be seen as an anti-colonial struggle or as a Cold War socialist struggle. Other important questions like the relationship between the ANC and SACP or ANC and PAC lie outside the scope and space of this thesis. However relevant and interesting these and other topics are, the focus in this chapter lies on ANC’s foreign relations and how they were used in the struggle against the apartheid regime during the volatile 1970s.

An overview of the ANC in the early 1970s

The feeling of progress, peace and security for white South Africa at the start of the 1970’s was linked to their success in suppressing the black and democratic opposition to apartheid in the 1960’s. By 1970, ANC inside South Africa had been forced underground and was hardly operational. The banning of ANC in 1960, the Treason Trial and the Rivonia Trial in 1964 had destroyed ANC’s leadership, most of them were now in prison or in exile. ANC-leader Oliver Tambo had been sent abroad in 1960 to initiate an international solidarity campaign for South Africa. Because of the repression of the ANC Tambo remained in exile as ANC’s Acting President until December 1990. When Tambo was in Ghana in June 1960, it was decided to open up offices for the South African United Front (SAUF) of Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), South African Indian Congress (SAIC) and South West African National Union (SWANU, later
SWAPO). Offices were opened in Accra, Cairo and London, with a fourth office established in Dar es Salaam later. The united front collapsed a year later, but the offices continued as ANC missions for the next 30 years.

In the absence of any real ANC work inside South Africa, the ANC missions abroad soon became crucial for the survival of the movement. The repression of opposition politics inside South Africa forced the movement to transform itself from a national mass movement to an exile movement based in offices and camps scattered all over Africa, Europe and other parts of the world. In an ANC circular from 1971, Secretary-General Alfred Nzo listed the following ANC external offices: Lusaka, Dar es Salaam, Cairo, Algiers, London, India and New York, while an office in Sweden was being negotiated. Of these, the office in Morogoro, Tanzania was the most important, hosting the Provisional Headquarters. The Headquarters (unofficially) moved to Lusaka in 1972 while the military camps and some of the ANC departments (the Women and Youth sections) remained in Morogoro. The London Mission was another key mission. Great Britain became the new home of a large number of South African exiles and political refugees due to the historical ties and ancestral roots of many South Africans. In London were some of the most important anti-apartheid institutions, such as International Defence & Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF) and the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM). London was a natural destination for many South Africans going abroad, something which provided the ANC mission there with information from home.

ANC was not only a political organisation but an armed liberation movement. Some of the leaders of SACP and ANC together founded the Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK, the Spear of the Nation) in 1960/61, and MK was soon accepted as the joint army of both organisations. When the leaders of MK were arrested during a raid on its headquarters in Rivonia, the External ANC Missions became responsible for normal diplomatic and solidarity work as well as building and organising a military organisation. The new army was built after training of cadres in several independent African countries, and afterwards stationed in Tanzania and later Angola. Military cooperation also became one of the key aspects of ANC-Soviet relations during the 1970s and 1980s. Being the military wing of the ANC and SACP, MK’s aim was to fight the apartheid regime with arms and sabotage. This was easier in theory than in reality because most of the

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1 Shubin, ANC, p. 49
2 Provisional Headquarters in Morogoro, Tanzania to all units, “Circular to all our units”, Migroro, 21 October 1971, “Department of Foreign Affairs”, Lusaka Mission, Box 4, ANC archives, University of Fort Hare Library.
3 Shubin, ANC, p. 131.
4 Thomas, The diplomacy of liberation, p. 50.
leadership had been jailed in the mid-1960s and because of the very asymmetric level of military sophistication between the MK and the South African armed forces. In the late 1960’s MK had tried to send missions of soldiers from the camps in Tanzania back to South Africa. The most important mission, the Wankie campaign in 1967-68 failed, and by early 1970’s there were no urge for any new campaigns. Disillusionment among the MK soldiers was a harmful element of the life in the ANC camps due to the distance back to South Africa, lack of activity and weak prospects of engaging the enemy.

Morogoro 1969 and Foreign Policy in the early 1970s
The Morogoro conference in 1969 was an important turning point in the history of ANC. 1969 marked the beginning of a slow but steady recovery of the ANC from being on the brink of collapse to again being a vital and strong liberation movement. Later, the acting president of the ANC, Oliver Tambo, labelled the period from 1969 to 1974 the “Period of Regrouping and Recovery”. From 1969 and onwards, ANC was able to slowly consolidate and strengthen its organisation in exile. Regionally, an important landmark was reached when the summit in Lusaka in April 1969 launched the Lusaka Manifesto on Southern Africa. In the manifesto the independent African states pledged support for the liberation movements in the region. The manifesto was later endorsed by the OAU and the UN General Assembly. Additionally both the Soviet Union and the United States clarified their Africa policy in 1969: the USSR was backing the AAPSO-conference in Khartoum in January 1969, where several of the regional liberation movements were united in a common front. The conference recognised the ANC as the sole legitimate South African liberation movement and in the process discredited the rivalling PAC. USA clarified their own strategy in the region through Kissinger and Nixon’s “National Security Study Memorandum 39” where the United States opted to continue dialogue and engagement with white apartheid regime, while at the same establish better relations with the independent African states in the region.

For the ANC, the Morogoro-conference in April 1969 initiated a major change of the ANC itself. In the words of Chris Hani, a former MK commander and member of the ANC leadership National Executive Committee (NEC): “Morogoro […] marked the beginning of

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5 “Period of Regrouping and Recovery”, was a label used by Oliver Tambo on a ANC NEC meeting in 1975, cited in Shubin ANC, p. 132.
7 Sellström, Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa Vol. II, p. 29-33. The NSSM 39 was a secret strategy document, but soon leaked to the press and therefore became an open political strategy.
serious building of the ANC inside [South Africa]. After Morogoro we never looked back.”⁸ The Morogoro-conference was a so-called consultative conference, called together after serious criticism from the lower ranks of the ANC and MK. The criticism of the ANC leadership surfaced after a very critical memorandum written by Chris Hani, which had participated in the failed Wankie campaign in 1967.⁹ During the Morogoro-conference, the criticism was aired and this resulted in a serious reorganisation of the whole movement. At Morogoro, serious changes were made in the upper structures of the ANC leadership. Furthermore, the alliance with the South African Communist Party was strengthened through a new Revolutionary Council. The conference also stands out as a starting point for a change and renewal of the whole organisation, which is why it is highlighted here. The conference itself spurred new energy into the movement, and became a symbol for “a new start” within the ANC.

Because of the banning of ANC and imprisonment of most of the national ANC leadership, the external missions more or less became the de facto ANC in the early 1970s. Consequently, the movement was completely dependent on the effort of its external missions. ANC’s diplomacy, foreign relations and international solidarity defined and shaped ANC’s struggle for liberation. Vice-versa, the dependency on foreign hosts and contributors of financial and military aid – with their own agendas and shifting political ideas – remained a serious challenge for ANC during the period in exile. ANC’s main allies at this point in time was Tanzania and Zambia, but the movement also had important connections with other African countries like Algeria, Egypt and others. The Soviet Union was also an important ally, with important aid for ANC channelled through the Soviet backed Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) and the World Peace Council (WPC).

The ANC did not see its international politics as “Foreign policy” as such, since they identified themselves as a liberation movement and not a government. ANC’s primary goal was to secure political and material support for its struggle for national liberation. With this in mind, they also saw how political support, solidarity and cooperation with other liberation movements with similar goals and in the same position was a necessary concern:

We acknowledge on gratitude and indebtedness to our friends and allies and affirm our solidarity with them. At the same time we must recognise that our movement is not a government, and cannot therefore, adopt and implement an international policy in any real sense of the word. We can, and we will

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⁸ Chris Hani, MCA 6-284, Mayibuye Centre - Oral History Of Exiles Project, Oral history and sound, University of Western Cape - Robben Island Mayibuye Archives.
⁹ Shubin, ANC, p. 85.
continue to express our sympathy with progressive cause but apart from verbal
demonstrations, we as a movement cannot give material aid to our allies.10

ANC’s weak position in the early 1970s made it seek contact and cooperation with
likeminded organisations and movements. Since the banning of the ANC in the early 1960s,
ANC had worked closely with the South African Communist Party, an alliance which exists even
today. This alliance has been characterised as surprisingly free of conflicts and controversies, for
example by Shubin, and it is not possible to find any evidence of the opposite in the archives. The
alliance was however controversial especially for the apartheid regime, but also for forces within
the black opposition such as PAC or BCM (see later). In exile, ANC made contacts with already
independent African countries and with other movements in the region fighting for national
liberation. These alliances were however complicated, and ANC noted that:

[...] we find that our allies are not always united. Our friends who are in
agreement with our objective of liberating Southern Africa from White
minority rule are not always in agreement among themselves. [...] For these
reason, it is necessary that our movement, must as from now refrain from
identifying itself with one particular section of the anti-imperialist and anti-
colonial [sic] sector of the countries and forces that have made as a stand
against world imperialism and colonialism.11

ANC saw the liberation struggles in southern Africa and elsewhere as a common struggle
against colonialism and imperialism. In 1969, a large conference – the International Conference
of Solidarity with the Peoples of Southern Africa and the Portuguese Colonies – was arranged in
Khartoum by AAPSO. The conference led to the so called Khartoum-alliance of “sole official and
legitimate” or “authentic” liberation movements, which established close relations between ANC
in South Africa, FRELIMO in Mozambique, PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, MPLA in Angola,
SWAPO in Namibia and ZAPU in Zimbabwe.12 This alliance did give ANC a close relationship
with neighbouring liberation movements, but also with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe
which backed the alliance through AAPSO. ANC was however aware of the potential danger of
being caught up in the power struggle within the Socialist and anti-imperialist camp and loosing
focus of the primary aim – to liberate South Africa:

However all such collaboration [with the broad “Anti-Imperialist front”] and
ties of mutual friendship and assistance must not in any way be detrimental to
our struggle. Our immediate task is laying the foundations for a revolutionary

10 “Recommendations for the forthcoming A.N.C. conference”, (no date, no signature) “Foreign Relations”, ANC
General memoranda 1969-92, B.2.2, Oliver Tambo Papers, University of Fort Hare Library.
11 “Recommendations for the forthcoming A.N.C. conference”, (no date, no signature) “Foreign Relations”, ANC
General memoranda 1969-92, B.2.2, Oliver Tambo Papers, University of Fort Hare Library.
People’s War and determined prosecution of this objective is the finest contribution we can make to the world-wide anti-imperialist struggle.\textsuperscript{13}

This quote points out how being in exile affect the movement to put too much emphasis on international work as opposed to work inside South Africa. ANC should always have its primary focus on the situation inside South Africa, which had forced them into exile in the first place. The ANC therefore stressed “that the purpose of our international activities is to focus world attention on the internal situation. We could thus direct our energies towards obtaining the assistance that will enable us to concentrate more and more on solving the real issue, i.e. that of liberating our oppressed people.”\textsuperscript{14}

ANC also tried to create links to the West and to build the solidarity movements there. Most of the governments in the West were not supporting the ANC, but the solidarity movements were established in many Western countries challenged their governments on their support or silence regarding the situation in South Africa. ANC was concerned that the solidarity movements focused too much on the repression, and lost sight of the actual goal of liberating South Africa. They needed solidarity also when the apartheid regime used less violence due to ANC’s inactivity:

\begin{quote}
It was largely felt that our activities internationally had taken and continued to be erroneously pursued in the form of moral campaigns. A great deal of the South African situation had been explained to the extent that Anti-Apartheid Movements had been set up. Even then, these campaigns have been partially successful. The reason is that the sixties were politically explosive and the world could perceive what was happening in South Africa. But seemingly, the situation is now quiet and there can be no doubt that our credibility has been somehow reduced.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

In the early 1970s, it was important to show the world that ANC was representing a real and credible opposition to the apartheid government, and was more than simply one or two offices of complaining exile South Africans and a handful of frustrated guerrilla soldiers. This was the fundamental aim of the ANC, and it was therefore crucial for the ANC to establish close and reliable relations with countries and movements which could help it survive as well as grow. This process really started in 1969.

\textsuperscript{13} “Foreign Relations and international solidarity” (no date, no signature), P14 + P14.1, Ray and Jack Simons archive, BC 1081, Department of Manuscripts and Archives, University of Cape Town.


ANC and Dialogue, 1970-74

The early 1970s was a defining moment for the future of the ANC because of Vorster’s Dialogue initiative. Dialogue established ties between the South African apartheid regime and various independent African countries. In the process, this split the African countries in their stand towards ANC. This was dangerous for ANC, as it eroded the thin base of their existence. It has already been pointed out how ANC was dependent on Africa for support and bases. ANC tried to argue that South Africa was a colony, and that the anti-colonial struggle which had brought independence to the northern part of the African continent had to be continued in southern Africa. Through Dialogue, Vorster argued that South Africa was not a colony, and that the Afrikaners were native to Africa. This argument – where it was bought – destroyed ANC’s strategy of arguing that their struggle was an anti-colonial struggle. Thomas Nkobi, at the time Chief Representative in Lusaka and member of the NEC argued: 16

It is a tragedy that now – when black South Africa is preparing to launch a unflinching, full-scale armed struggle against Vorster and his henchmen – African states like Malawi, which is in the forefront, Malagasy, Ghana and the Ivory Coast have seen it fit to have a “dialogue” with white South Africa. Real Black Africa is determined to see the fight to its inevitable end – complete freedom for the black people of Southern Africa.17

In chapter 1 and 2, we saw how Vorster nearly cracked the isolation of South Africa from the African continent when he began to establish contacts with African countries further north. What the ANC needed was a united African response to apartheid, denouncing the racist regime in Pretoria and its charm initiatives. If Vorster succeeded, ANC could lose much needed legitimacy and credibility as South Africa’s liberation movement and the real representative of the South African people. The ANC thus had to use their diplomatic energy to prevent Vorster from making inroads into the African continent. Roger Pfister argues that “the African diplomatic anti-apartheid front was exposed to one serious test in the period from 1960 to 1990. […] The crisis was brought about in the late 1960s by the policy of Dialogue […]”.18 According to Pfister, ANC was initially during the early phase of Dialogue in the late 1960’s not very successful in countering Vorster’s strategy. However, in 1970 and 1971 ANC came on the offensive, and actively managed to push the African states not to accept Vorster’s invites. In a speech or written contribution to the 17th Session of the OAU Council of Ministers in June 1971, Secretary-

16 Shubin, ANC, p. 92
General Alfred Nzo also called upon the member states to see the “imperialistic nature” of the South African state. The notion of imperialism had a potential of bringing the African countries together, with their common colonial history: “As an imperialist state South Africa needs less developed regions in which to export not only her goods but also her capital”. The African states being vowed by Vorster should in other words be warned that South Africa was seeking more than real friendship:

It should also be borne in mind that “dialogue” is Vorster’s strategy intended firstly, to break the isolation of his fascist regime and to win more “friends” in Africa. Secondly, to disunite Africa, and to isolate the liberation movements from support in Africa, with the view to involving African States in the liquidation of the liberation movements. Thirdly, it is the spearhead in the imperialist plot for the recolonisation of Africa.

In a different ANC statement written by Thomas Nkobi, he emphasised how Vorster could never be the representative of black South Africans:

The African National Congress of South Africa calls on Africa to dismiss any dialogue with racist South Africa as a trick and a fraud. As for our struggling people, they have no need for a dialogue with Vorster. Nor do they need a black emissary to visit Vorster from independent Africa, to beg him to free the black South African masses. Black South Africa will free itself, using methods that it only can choose.

Again according to Pfister, the “final death knell to the Dialogue debate [among the OAU members] came at a meeting of the Conference of East and Central African States in October 1971 in Mogadishu”. This was one of the first victories of the revitalised ANC in the early 1970s. They had managed to show they were a vital liberation movement, countered a potentially dangerous initiative by the apartheid government and stopped a serious split in the African states towards Pretoria. There were still some African countries with relations with Pretoria, but they were few and of little influence. Altogether, neither the ANC nor the radical African states which had spearheaded the drive against Dialogue, like Tanzania, had really harmed Vorster. But they

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22 Pfister, Gateway, p. 62.
had managed to stop a potentially dangerous political development where the apartheid regime could have become a legitimised African regime.

**ANC, Tanzania and Zambia**

Dialogue was stopped because it was resisted by certain radical African countries, notably Tanzania and Ghana. ANC was always first and foremost dependent on support from these independent African countries for its survival. Their support was mainly political, in the way that independent African states let ANC establish offices and in some countries camps for refugees and soldiers. ANC’s African allies also stood up against the apartheid regime in international organisations, mainly the OAU and United Nations. Most of ANC’s material and military support was received from outside Africa; in the beginning mostly the Soviet Union and the Soviet align solidarity movements – such as AAPSO. Later Scandinavia also provided extensive material and financial support. But without the support from the independent African countries, ANC would never have been able to keep relations with the struggle inside South Africa with its international work outside:

> Our organisation has always recognised the importance of maintenance of good relations with the independent African countries because of their importance to the struggle of our people not only as an important rear base for our revolutionary, but also as an area from which to launch and maintain the international solidarity movement with our struggle.\(^{23}\)

During Vorster’s Dialogue initiative, the close relations between ANC and some of the independent African countries worked in ANC’s favour. But during the early 1970s these relations were often far more complicated and difficult. Relations between ANC and the host country were ANC had offices or camps could shift from a warm and close relationship to being almost hostile. ANC’s room for manoeuvre was often small, and this forced ANC to strike a fine balance between being active and not upsetting its hosts. The history of ANC’s relations with Tanzania and Zambia are good examples of this. Tanzania and Zambia were ANC’s most important allies throughout its history in exile. In Tanzania ANC had its first headquarters and probably the most important military and training facilities. The Headquarters were later moved to Zambia, which became the other main ally of ANC. The move to Zambia can be explained by a wish to establish itself closer to South Africa, but at the same time, ANC needed to establish itself outside Tanzania where the government limited its options.

Oliver Tambo established offices in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in the early 1960s. For many years Dar was a hub for several of the southern African liberation movements. This meant that ANC could keep close contacts with the liberation movements of Namibia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Angola. Tanzania’s president Julius Nyerere was also a firm supporter of the liberation movements in bodies like the OAU and UN. But the presence of several, militant liberation movements also represented a problem for the Nyerere Government. They feared the foreign movements would interfere in Tanzanian politics. In 1964, ANC was forced to move its offices, except a small office in Dar, to Morogoro, which became the most important ANC camp and offices for many years. This was possibly because PAC established offices in Dar the same year. Later, in 1969 just after the Morogoro conference, the relations with Tanzania soured even more because some within the Tanzanian government feared ANC was supporting a coup against the government. ANC was forced to move all its MK soldiers to the Soviet Union for three years.²⁴ They were later able to return to Tanzania, and ANC remained there until the early 1990s.

Zambia was ANC’s other principal ally, and it was in Lusaka ANC established its new headquarters in 1972. Zambia’s former president Kenneth Kaunda, which was president from 1964 until 1991, claims today that the relationship between Zambia and ANC was always close and cordial:

When we won independence, they [the liberation movements] moved to Lusaka. All of them; Angola, Namibia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique. All of them moved to Lusaka. From the beginning I treated them as leaders, as heads of state deprived of a state. The all lived in the State House.²⁵

In reality, the relations between Zambia and the ANC were even more complicated than with Tanzania. ANC’s first real military campaign, the Wankie campaign in 1967-68, was launched from Zambian territory. The Wankie campaign failed its goal of opening a path from Zambia to South Africa which ANC could use for infiltrating soldiers back to South Africa after having received military training abroad. The campaign furthermore exposed Zambia for letting ANC operate from its territory. Vorster used a carrot-and-stick approach to deal with Zambia. During the early 1970’s, Pretoria increased its pressure on Lusaka and launched several military attacks there directed against the ANC.²⁶ At the same time South Africa contacted Kaunda and

²⁴ Shubin, ANC, p. 98-99, the main reasons for this were South African pressure, possibly influence from the PAC on Tanzania Government (both PAC and Tanzania were more aligned with Beijing than Moscow) and a fear from Tanzanian Government that ANC and MK soldiers could be used in a coup against the Government.
²⁵ Interview with Kenneth K. Kaunda, interview, 30 August 2004.
²⁶ Shubin, ANC, p. 158.
tried to improve relations as part of the Dialogue-initiative. Vorster never managed to generate the same, close relations with Zambia as he had done with for example Malawi. But the talks and negotiations between Vorster and Kaunda – which continued during Détente and the invasion of Angola – created a very difficult atmosphere for ANC in Zambia. Although their presence was tolerated, Kaunda could for example impose restrictions on the number of ANC personnel being allowed in Zambia or visa restrictions etc. This must be seen in connection with the diplomacy between Vorster and Kaunda and in the light of Kaunda’s need for credibility as a supporter of the liberation movements on the one hand and a need to make concessions towards Vorster on the other. For the ANC, this meant uncertainty about their future in Zambia, and fear of certain pro-South Africa forces within the Zambian authorities.

ANC’s relations with Zambia deteriorated even further during Détente and the invasion of Angola, which will be discussed later. Regardless of ANC’s problems with both Tanzania and Zambia, there are no references to this in the ANC archives. Neither was this discussed for example with ANC’s close allies in the Swedish embassies, although the topic was raised with the Soviets. This was probably due to ANC’s vulnerability in exile, and the need for keeping good relations, offices and bases in Tanzania and Zambia. Despite the problems mentioned, these two countries therefore must be considered among ANC’s most important and longest standing allies in Africa.

ANC relations with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland
ANC also tried to keep good relations with Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, but this was always more difficult. These countries were more dependent on South Africa and therefore more vulnerable to South Africa’s pressure. There was clearly a will to support the ANC, although this usually had to be done in secret. In letters from the ANC office at the UN, Thami Mhlambiso in 1972 described his contact with members of the missions from these countries: “I have also been asked by Lesotho as to what they should do. […] Botswana has also expressed a similar sentiment.” This developed into more serious contacts. Mhlambiso later reported:

In a way I am glad I met the Foreign Minister of Lesotho when he was here in October. Since then I have continued to maintain contact and good relations with their Mission. This is the case with all the so called former Protectorates. I

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27 Shubin, ANC, p. 97-100.
mention this because I think the fact that they have had such contact must really influence their attitude toward us.29

Such low level but important contacts, not only in the UN but also through meetings and secret ANC presence in the countries, laid a basis for ANC presence in all these three countries. This presence was always smaller and more secret than in Lusaka, Dar es Salaam or Morogoro.

To the Swedish Embassy, ANC described its presence in Botswana in the following way:

Botswana certainly tolerates that refugees and representatives from the liberation movements visit the country, but they are very restrictive on the question of their political activity.30

From 1973-74, ANC started to rebuild underground structures in South Africa, and at the same time ANC worked successfully towards “establish a political presence in what it called the ‘forward areas’ of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland”.31 The relations with the BLS-states improved toward the later part of the 1970s, and according to Shubin, relations with both Swaziland and Lesotho improved after 1975.32 Subsequently, both Lesotho and Swaziland became important for underground ANC and MK work and as stations for sending people in and out of South Africa. But this activity was always more dangerous than in the states further north, and led to repeated South African incursions and attacks on ANC members in these states. In 1974, ANC summed up its efforts in BLS:

During the period under review we have noted bold attempts to shift away from the fascist Republic of South Africa by these countries especially by the Republic of Botswana and to some extent also by the Kingdom of Lesotho. [...] Positive developments in ooth [sic!] Botswana and Lesotho have been definitely advantageous to our efforts to deepen our relations with these countries.33

All these three states, with their small populations, were rather weak states. Their political support for the ANC was therefore of limited importance. The reason ANC needed good relations with these countries were because they could serve as a hinterland for ANC’s underground work inside South Africa, which slowly increased after the reorganisation following

29 Permanent Representative for UN and North-America Thami Mhlambiso, to Secretary for Administration Mr. Msimang, “Dear Brother”, New York, 29 November 1972, “ANC HQ + USA Correspondence and Reports”, “International Affairs”, Box IV, Lusaka Mission, ANC archives, University of Fort Hare Library.
30 From Royal Swedish Embassy (Kungliga Svenska Ambassaden), Gabarone to Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Utrikesdepartemnetet) Stockholm, “Förtrolig, Bistånd til ANC-Sydafrika i Botswana”, 14 November 1975. NAI AB18-41, TorSellströms collection, Nordic Africa Institute. Translated ("Confidencial, Funding for ANC-South Africa in Botswana").
32 Shubin, ANC, p. 160-162,
Morogoro. The willingness on the part of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland to allow clandestine ANC work was vital for the ANC and this became increasingly important during the decade.

**Independence and Détente, 1974-75**

Neither the apartheid regime nor the ANC had foreseen the coup in Portugal than anyone else. And while Pretoria had cooperated with the Portuguese in Angola, ANC was already allied to the liberation movements in the Portuguese colonies – FRELIMO, MPLA and PAIGC – through the Khartoum-alliance. Even if the coup itself might have been unexpected, the independence which followed was the central issue for all the liberation movements and was celebrated also by the ANC. The ANC congratulated FRELIMO and added: “This was indeed a victory not only for the Mozambican people but for all the Liberation Movements in Southern Africa.”

ANC understood the advantage of the new situation in southern Africa. Although being slightly cautious, the leaderships found reason to believe the new situation could benefit the struggle against South Africa:

> Whilst not over-estimating the results of the coup in Portugal in relation to our struggle in South Africa, it is imperative that we take urgent steps to meet any favourable situation that may arise in Mozambique and Angola as a result of the emergence of a new government which has replaced the fascist regime of Caetano. This meeting therefore urges the NEC and the RC to keep the situation constantly under review and to urgently implement the decisions of the 1969 and the 1971 meetings in Morogoro and, the Bush respectively, to work for a working relationship with FRELIMO and MPLA as well as the Zimbabwean and Namibian movements so as to effectively co-ordinate the strategy and tactics of our respective armed struggles.

In 1974, the ANC had reason for a more positive view of the future. Following the argument in the previous chapters, the fall of the white-ruled colonies of Angola and Mozambique, South Africa was weaker and more isolated. If ANC’s allies FRELIMO and MPLA came to power in two of South Africa’s neighbouring states, this could provide ANC with new and very promising opportunities to infiltrate as well as attack South Africa. There was another benefit for the ANC as well. Previously, the liberation movements in the former Portuguese colonies of Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau had received more attention and support than ANC from the solidarity movements, especially in Scandinavia. When FRELIMO, MPLA

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35 “Resolutions adopted at the extended meeting of the NEC of the African National Congress held in Lusaka from 16 to May, 1974”, “NEC reports (generated by)”, Box 34, B.4.3, Oliver Tambo Papers, University of Fort Hare Library.
and PAIGC now had won independence, the much of the international solidarity and world attention shifted to Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa.

When ANC therefore summarised the situation towards the middle of the 1970s in a collection of Oliver Tambo’s speeches, they looked back at a period they would later name the “period of Regrouping and Recovery”.

In the five years following the Morogoro conference the political balance shifted significantly against the South African Government. The process began with the reawakening of black working-class militancy beginning with the 1972-73 strikes in Natal, Transvaal and Cape, and the impending success of Frelimo in Mozambique and MPLA in Angola. [...] The ANC also chalked up major successes in mobilizing international opinion against apartheid. Its secretariat was moved from Morogoro to Lusaka, where it was not so isolated, and offices and representatives were established in numerous countries throughout the world. This expanding network gave the ANC a higher international profile than ever before.

1975 now marked the first year in the new “Period of Consolidation and Advance”. By 1975, ANC appears as a stronger and more confident organisation following years of organisational improvement and growth. In a declaration from the Enlarged Session of the National Executive Committee in Morogoro, 17-20 March 1975, the ANC acknowledge:

A new situation has come into being in Southern Africa. Portuguese colonialism has collapsed [...] In Namibia and Zimbabwe the struggle for liberation has reached new heights. In South Africa itself, the level of confrontation between the oppressed and their oppressors is at its sharpest in a decade.

There were several reasons why ANC was more confident in 1974 and 1975 than the more fatalistic mood which had marked the movement before the Morogoro conference. One of the reasons was the fact that ANC had managed to consolidate and strengthen itself as well as expanded in numbers of people and offices. Another reason was how South Africa was now more isolated because of the altered regional balance. But furthermore, during the latest years ANC had managed to derail Vorster’s Dialogue in cooperation with the other radical African countries. The diplomacy and alliances built with FRELIMO and MPLA now meant that ANC had a close ally in power in Maputo, while MPLA would possibly take over Angola soon – either alone or in coalition with other and weaker liberation movements. A combination of organisational work and

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36 Shubin, ANC, p. 132, citing a document from ANC NEC 1975.
38 Shubin, ANC, p. 132, citing a document from ANC NEC 1975.
international and regional diplomacy had during the last years greatly increased ANC’s position vis-à-vis the apartheid regime by 1974-75.

ANC challenges Vorster and Détente

In chapter 2 we saw how Prime Minister Vorster tried to handle the changed regional situation with establishing good relations with Mozambique and continuing to build relations with other African states. Even if ANC had managed to put a halt to Vorster’s Dialogue initiative, with help from the more radical African states, Détente posed a new threat. Détente sought to settle the conflict in Zimbabwe, and Vorster therefore formed a close but controversial relationship with Zambia’s president Kaunda. The renewed and closer contacts between the two presidents affected ANC negatively. In 1974, Kaunda ordered ANC to “curtail its activities and not to undertake any actions against South Africa from Zambian soil for at least three months”.

ANC’s relations with Mozambique had been of a different nature than its relations with Zambia, due to the Khartoum-alliance and ANC’s and FRELIMO’s common experience as liberation movements. After the fall of the regime in Lisbon, ANC was soon established in Maputo (still named by its old colonial name Lourenco Marques), which became a sort of forward-base for ANC and MK because it was close to South Africa and the Johannesburg-Pretoria area. Inside South Africa, the independence of Mozambique was celebrated in the black townships. But as soon as FRELIMO took over the power in Mozambique, the relationship was markedly cooler. The new Prime Minister of the Transitional Government in Mozambique from 18 September 1974, Joachim Chissano, immediately warned that the South Africans themselves had to change South Africa, and that Mozambique did not want to start a war with Pretoria. ANC was treated with great respect and support at the independence ceremony 25 June 1975. But afterwards, thousands of South Africans tried to cross the border to see the liberated Mozambique, and the new government closed the border in fear of provocation. When Vorster promised good relations with Mozambique in 1974, FRELIMO also knew South Africa was powerful and ready to attack if they let ANC become too active, and used the country as a “springboard”.

Just as ANC had to fight Vorster’s Dialogue, it now became crucial for the ANC to counter-attack Vorster’s “Détente” strategy. If the apartheid regime with Détente managed to

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40 Shubin, ANC, p. 158
41 Shubin, ANC, p. 160
42 Shubin, ANC, p. 161
establish some sort of legitimacy among the African states – it would set the liberation struggle back many years. ANC was therefore quick to counter-attack Vorster’s Détente, and to lobby among the members of the OAU not to buy Pretoria’s invitations. In the Council of Ministers of the Organisation of African Unity Meeting in April 1975 in Dar es Salaam, ANC’s secretary-general Alfred Nzo raised this issue in his speech “Don’t be duped by Vorster” for the OAU members:

Reports of visits by various delegations from some independent African countries to South Africa and those of representatives of the fascist Apartheid regime, including its Prime Minister, to certain independent African countries have become too frequent to be ignored. […] The ruling circles in South Africa are fully aware that once they have succeeded to divide the Member-States of the Organisation of African Unity, the African countries’ opposition to the continuing crimes of the Apartheid regime and also their support for the Liberation Movement of the oppressed people will have been weakened.43

At the meeting ANC again attacked the Détente, and tried to gain recognition both for itself and for its armed, revolutionary struggle. ANC’s president Oliver Tambo also linked the South African struggle against apartheid, with the struggle of the former Portuguese colonies, with Zimbabwe and Namibia and the gains they had recently made when he spoke at the conference:

These developments have radically shifted the balance of forces in our sub-continent towards the fulfilment of the objectives of the liberation movement and confirm the correctness of the stand taken by ourselves and the OAU.44

ANC had done a great deal of diplomatic work before and during the meeting, and this paid off. According to Shubin, “the results of the session could not have been better for the ANC.”45 President Nyerere of the host country, Tanzania, pointed at South Africa as the dominant force behind not only the racism in South Africa itself, but also in the neighbouring countries: “Whether, therefore, we are talking about Rhodesia, Namibia, or South Africa itself, the effective Authority is South Africa.”46

In other words, none of the conflicts in the region could be solved independently, one first had to deal with the apartheid regime itself. This view increased the credibility of ANC’s own struggle, which tended to be seen as less important than the struggle of its neighbours. Because of

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44 Oliver Tambo, ”ANC Calls on the OAU to … Increase our striking power”, in Sechaba, 9 (6+7) 1975. (Statement delivered by Tambo on the 9th Extraordinary Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OAU, Dar es Salaam.)
45 Shubin, ANC, p. 160
46 Julius Nyerere, ”Advancing Southwards”, Sechaba, 9 (6+7) 1975. (Statement delivered by Nyerere on the 9th Extraordinary Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OAU, Dar es Salaam.)
ANC’s diplomatic offensive towards the OAU member states before and during the meeting, OAU started to turn down Vorster’s Détente moves. The event which really destroyed Vorster’s diplomatic adventures in Africa was the failed Victoria Falls conference and invasion of Angola in 1975 half a year later. But ANC’s diplomacy and lobbying towards its African allies had once more helped to stop one of Vorster’s initiatives.

**ANC’s response to the invasion, 1975**

A year before the South African invasion of Angola in October 1975 had ANC argued that South Africa did not have the strength to attack Mozambique or Angola: In a text draft from November 1974, most probably by Oliver Tambo, the situation in Angola and Mozambique was analysed. After asking “What then of the future in Angola and Mozambique?” Tambo (?) argued:

> [...] first, there will be no South African military intervention. The Portuguese coup caught them completely by surprise. Their troops are already over extended in Northern Namibia in the West; in Zimbabwe in the North, and at home in the Eastern Transvaal. They cannot afford also to clash militarily with Portugal and the armed forces of MPLA and Frelimo. This does not mean that the South African regime will not allow mercenary forces to recruit and assemble on its territory and to use it as a base.47

Tambo clearly underestimated the South African army. More or less at the same time as this was written, the Military Intelligence was planning an intervention in Mozambique, and a year later they did intervene in Angola on a much larger scale. However, ANC’s assessment was not too wrong. The coup clearly took South Africa by surprise, and was followed by conflict in the government on what to do. When SADF finally did enter Angola a year after the assessment was made, they did so in small numbers and covered themselves as mercenaries. When South Africa’s invaded Angola in October 1975, the ANC naturally supported the MPLA’s and made statements to its defence:

> The recent invasion of Angola by South African troops is the most dangerous crisis faced by Africa since the U.S. intervention in the Congo (Leopoldville) and later the invasion of Guinea by fascist Portugal.48

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47 Oliver Tambo (?), “Current political trends in Southern Africa: paper prepared by: The African National Congress of South Africa” (no signature, probably Oliver Tambo), November 1974, “ANC General Reports 1967-83”, B.2.3.-2.31, Oliver Tambo Papers, University of Fort Hare Library. Underlining in original text. Added in handwriting: “First 3 pages leave out. (take from notebook)”, which means that the quote might have been left out of the finished paper. It is regardless an interesting assessment.

MK had not been able to attack South Africa for a decade, but now South African troops were fighting outside its borders and against one of ANC’s allies. ANC offered and sent MK soldiers to help the MPLA – by suggestion of the USSR – but their actual contribution was more of a political than military importance. Interestingly, ANC personnel did participate in interrogation of the SADF prisoners of war at the end of 1975.\footnote{Shubin, ANC p. 164.} ANC was however quick to exploit the invasion politically and used it in their propaganda as an example of South Africa’s brutality and aggression:


The ANC were present on the OAU Extra-Ordinary Meeting of African Heads of State and Government in Addis Ababa 10-12 of January 1976 where the future of Angola was discussed among the OAU member states. In the statement by ANC, delivered by its secretary general Alfred Nzo, he made the following analysis of the situation in Southern Africa following the invasion of Angola:

The imperialist forces of aggression having failed to destroy the MPLA in the months before November last are therefore now seeking a victory in Angola aimed first at the overthrow of the People’s Republic and the installation of a neocolonialist regime; a victory aimed secondly at taking the initiative completely out of the hands of the liberation movements in South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe permitting the Smith and Vorster regimes and their international imperialist allies to exercise sole power in determining the direction and pace of change in these three countries. Such an imperialist victory also aims to consolidate the positions of imperialism in Southern Africa with a view to rolling back the advance of the African Revolution and to recolonise Africa.\footnote{Alfred Nzo, ”Hands off the People’s Republic of Angola”, in Sechaba, Second Quarter 1976. (Statement by Alfred Nzo to the OAU Extra-Ordinary Meeting of African Heads of State and Government, Addis Ababa, 10-12 January 1976)}

It was important for the ANC to exploit the situation when the world attention was concerned with the actions of its enemy. Based on this analysis, Nzo argued that Africa was faced on two options only; to step up the struggle against a weakened enemy, or to succumb “to the frenzied anger of a wounded beast”.\footnote{ibid.} ANC also used the invasion of Angola in propaganda operations inside South Africa. Sometime in early 1976, a “pamphlet bomb exploded in front of
the offices of the Rand Daily Mail and scattered posters of the African National Congress”. One of the leaflets distributed in this dramatic manner was titled “The A.N.C. says: Hands Off Angola!” and urged people in South Africa to “help defeat this racist aggression in Angola by organising strikes in our places of work, demonstrations, rallies and protest meetings in support of the struggle of the people of Angola; and be ready to answer the call from the ANC for armed guerrilla action”.

South Africa’s defeat towards the end of 1975, and the subsequent defeat in the OAU and loss of integrity in the rest of the world was a major victory for the ANC as well as the MPLA. Both movements increased their legitimacy in the OAU and towards the rest of the world. With South Africa’s status deteriorating, ANC’s status improved. The invasion also brought ANC and MPLA closer. The new MPLA Government even suggested ANC should take over the former South African consulate in Luanda as its offices. ANC was now allowed to establish military bases in Angola, and now all basic military training took place in Angola – while most of the training earlier had taken place in the Soviet Union. Tambo visited Angola in March 1976, and was very positive of the future after what he saw and heard. In talks with the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in May 1976, ANC leader Oliver Tambo confirmed the good relations with MPLA: “Talks which Tambo had with the leadership in Luanda confirmed the Angolan Government’s and the party’s full support of the ANC. Tambo had several proofs of this.” After South Africa’s withdrawal of its troops from Angola, ANC was therefore more optimistic than for many years. A statement from the ANC in April or May 1976 concluded:

With Vorster’s troops out of Angola, tails between their legs, each day brings signs of our people’s growing militancy and determined struggle for freedom. [...] The defeat of the whites by the black MPLA forces, comrades-in-arms of our Umkhonto fighters, and the consolidation of the Mozambican revolution completes the stage of struggle that began when Portuguese colonialism and fascism crumbled. It opens a new stage in the freedom struggle in Southern Africa with new fronts in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa.

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53 Sechaba, Third Quarter 1976, p. 4-7. (No author or dates given.)
54 Shubin, ANC, p. 166.
55 Shubin, ANC, p. 166.
Even if ANC’s position in Southern Africa had improved considerably after the defeat of South Africa in Angola, the movement still had problems with some of its regional allies. Towards the end of 1975 and early 1976 the relationship with Zambia deteriorated, since Kaunda had supported UNITA while ANC supported MPLA in the civil war in Angola.\textsuperscript{59} Relations slowly improved but in the archive collection of Oliver Tambo’s papers, there are several documents from the Zambian government, “Office of the President, Defence Division” regarding (failed) travel arrangements of ANC personnel in Zambia, and even a letter from the ANC office in Lusaka written to the Immigration Officer, Lusaka Regional Office, with “a list of names of all African National Congress of South Africa members who are accredited in Zambia”.\textsuperscript{60} The list was a response from the Zambian authorities’ demand for information regarding all ANC members in Lusaka.\textsuperscript{61} Relations with Mozambique were also complicated, even after South Africa’s failure in Angola. In the talks with the Swedish Embassy in May 1976, Tambo had concerns about the future of ANC there:

In comparing Tambo’s assessments of Angola, his views of Mozambique were more cautious and I got the impression that Tambo did not have full confidence in ANC’s possibilities there. He certainly assured of the old and confident bonds between FRELIMO and ANC. He even expressed understanding for FRELIMO’s existing problem. But even so he pointed out several practical problems they had had there. He also found Mozambique to be excessively careful towards South Africa. But he hoped the closure of the border and the following more open criticism of South Africa would mean better possibilities for activities for ANC. He would meet with [president Samora] Machel again the following week.\textsuperscript{62}

With South Africa’s peaceful attempts of coerce the neighbouring states into submission, South Africa could still use the stick. For the next 14 years, until 1990, South Africa carried out attacks against ANC offices and hiding places as well as the against infrastructure in all of the neighbouring states, which now became known as the Frontline states. Many of the neighbouring states, the BLS-states and Mozambique in particular, were accordingly hesitant to let the ANC operate in their countries in fear of South Africa’s aggression. But the same time did the aggression increase ANC and the liberation struggle increased legitimacy. The ANC was therefore

\textsuperscript{59} Shubin, *ANC*, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{61} Shubin, *ANC*, p. 165-166.
forced to find a fine balance between the need for operating in the Frontline states while not putting them in danger of South African aggression.

The ANC and the Organisation of African Unity

The special OAU meeting in Addis Ababa in January 1976 on the situation in Angola was important to the ANC, and as we have seen, the ANC was able to address the meeting and argue for the connection between Angola and its own struggle. But ANC’s relations with the OAU had been difficult for many years. The OAU was also a battle arena between member states opposed and favouring Dialogue with South Africa. Some states seemed to view South Africa different from Namibia or Zimbabwe, and to a degree accepting the notion of the Afrikaners as legitimate and native rulers of South Africa. It was also difficult for ANC to manoeuvre between alliances and agendas of the independent African powers like Tanzania, Zambia and others, since ANC were so dependent on these countries acceptance and support.

The most challenging arena was OAU’s Liberation Committee which was meant to provide financial support for the various African liberation movements. According to Scott Thomas, reliance on the OAU and its Liberation Committee became increasingly difficult towards the end of the 1960’s, as “the liberation struggles in southern Africa were increasingly hindered by the OAU’s internal politics. Liberation movements were forced to conduct “patron-hopping” diplomacy among African states in order to maintain the approval to the Liberation Committee if they were to receive badly needed funds and material assistance.”63

A particular problem with the OAU Liberation Committee was that it insisted on the unification of ANC and PAC. The two movements had tried to form a Unity Front in the 1960’s but this soon fell apart. The ANC was very opposed to any new alliance with the PAC, something which is repeated in several of the documents and interviews in the archives. PAC had better contact with Tanzania’s government and the OAU Liberation Committee, based in Tanzania. ANC sought to be accepted as the sole authentic South African liberation movement, but this was for many years hampered by PAC’s good relations with various OAU members, such as Tanzania and Ghana. ANC therefore experienced some problems with receiving funding from the OAU Liberation Committee. The problem eased as PAC got into more serious organisational problems while ANC strengthened itself during the span of the 1970s.

ANC’s alignment with the Khartoum alliance must be seen in the light of the difficulties with the Liberation Committee, as this alliance declared ANC as the sole and legitimate South

63 Thomas, The diplomacy of liberation, p. 60.
African liberation movement. In addition, this Soviet aligned movement provided financial support which did not go through the OAU Liberation Committee. According to Scott Thomas, ANC’s problems with the OAU Liberation Committee can be seen as a reason for ANC’s political move towards the Soviet Union.64

In the “Dar es Salaam Declaration” on 17 January 1975, the OAU Liberation Committee had called for intensified pressure on South Africa and intensified armed struggle against the regime. However, the Liberation Committee would give special priority to the struggle in Zimbabwe and Namibia, something which did not suit the ANC.65 But after South Africa’s invasion of Angola, ANC was in a much better position to ask for help and assistance at the OAU Liberation Committee meeting on 19-20 January 1976. They had now won acceptance for the idea that ANC military actions inside South Africa would also be an important contribution to the liberation struggle in neighbouring Zimbabwe and Namibia.66

ANC and the Cold War: The East …

The Soviet Union increased its presence in Southern Africa after it had stepped in to save MPLA from South Africa. The Soviet presence in Angola drew ANC and the Soviet Union into a closer relationship, a relationship which had been close for many years due to the alliance between the ANC and the SACP and Soviets aid for their joint army Umkhonto we Sizwe.67 ANC’s relations with the Soviet Union have been extensively researched and analysed in Shubin’s history of the ANC, and there is little to add to his work. For the discussion in this thesis, it can be useful to add certain points about ANC’s foreign policy and the Cold War setting. ANC’s struggle against the apartheid regime was an anti-colonial liberation war, similar to the other liberation wars which took place in Asia and Africa during the 1960s to 1980s. The movement’s demands for abolishing racism, democratic rights and power, are all similar to the demands of the broad anti-colonial struggle. However, ANC also identified itself within the socialist and anti-imperialist camp. In one of the preparation papers for the Morogoro conference, the following assessment was made:

The South African ruling class is part of an international political and economic order; which is dominated by private capital and capitalistic imperialism. That basically is the reason why 25 years of protest and pressure at

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64 Pfister, Gateway, page 62, Thomas, The diplomacy of liberation, p. 60.
66 Shubin, ANC, p. 166.
67 There are very few references to the bonds between the ANC and SACP in the archive sources from the ANC, and the SACP archives are still not open for research. There is however some discussion on this topic in Ellis and Shubin.
It has been mentioned how ANC mainly received political support from the African countries. When the ANC and SACP decided to take up arms against the apartheid regime in 1960/61, a choice they made independent of outside pressure, they became dependent on support in form of military training and equipment. In the beginning, ANC and SACP could get military training from states like Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Ethiopia and The Republic of Congo (Congo-Brazzaville). But only the Soviet Union was willing to provide the amount and level of military support over a long period of time which the ANC and MK needed. All military training and specialisation was done in the Soviet Union until Angola’s independence when Soviet military personnel started to train MK soldiers in Angola. In addition, the Soviet Union and the Socialist Bloc were among ANC’s firmest supporters in international bodies like the UN and also stood behind movements like the AAPSO (based in Cairo) and World Peace Council (based in Helsinki, Finland) which provided a lot of the support for ANC. In an ANC report from sometime in 1974, it made the following summary was made regarding its foreign policy:

“Relations between our organisation and the countries of the socialist system have continued to flourish. This is so in particular in respect of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic, the German Democratic Republic, Rumania, Bulgaria Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary.”

According to Shubin there are almost no examples of Soviet Union asking any return of favours from the ANC – except a rare suggestion that the ANC should help the MPLA fight back the South African troops in Angola in 1975. It is difficult to believe that the close cooperation with Soviet did not also influence the development of ANC. For instance, the ANC argued that they should not take sides in the rivalry or conflicts existing between the socialist countries (see earlier quote). However, the ANC chose to align itself with the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet

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70 Shubin, ANC, p. 164: “At this meeting [between SACP and Boris Ponomarev] possibly for the first and last time, the Soviet side intervened in the practical activities of the South African liberation movement. Deeply concerned about South Africa’s aggression in Angola, Ponomarev asked if the SACP and the ANC were able to render practical support to the MPLA”.

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conflict during the Cold War. This can be explained by political influence by the Soviets, or a feeling of gratitude because of the support ANC received. There are otherwise few references to the Soviet Union in the ANC archives, and none which contain any negative statements against the Socialist Bloc.

ANC’s foreign relations must been seen in the light of such a dual approach – national liberation and socialist revolution. The ANC itself did probably not see any contradiction between these two, but as two sides of their struggle against the apartheid regime. Consequently, the ANC therefore forged strong links with the independent African states, whether they were socialist and oriented towards the Socialist bloc (Tanzania and the Khartoum alliance) or oriented towards the West (Zambia). ANC’s formed close relations with regional liberation struggle, but also with the Soviet Union and the Eastern Europe. On the other hand, one must not forget what ANC’s primary aim was: the liberation of South Africa from white racist rule. ANC’s list of possible allies was limited to those countries which supported their struggle. These were mainly found in Africa and Eastern Europe.

... and the West
ANC’s relations with the Western world was more complicated than with the East, which can be explained with the West’s reluctance of putting any serious pressure on the apartheid regime. Nkobi made the following summary of ANC’s view of the situation in 1971-72:

African Independent States, Socialist countries and progressive mankind have succeeded in their efforts to isolate South Africa, whilst reactionary forces headed by the USA, UK, Japan, France and West Germany have been and are still nursing South Africa.⁷¹

The ANC never saw the United States or any of the Western powers’ criticism of South Africa as serious efforts to remove the apartheid regime. But ANC nonetheless had to engage with South Africa’s allies in the West, especially Great Britain. The mission in London was one of the earliest external offices of the ANC, and probably the most important outside Africa. The historical ties between Great Britain and South Africa were relevant both for most South Africans, whether supporting or opposing the apartheid regime (see also chapter 1). For many South Africans fleeing the brutal oppression of the regime, London was the natural place to go. England soon had a large exile group and the ANC office there was the most important outside the African continent. Great Britain also housed a large and influential anti-apartheid movement,

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with the Anti-Apartheid Movement and Idaf being the most important.\textsuperscript{72} Analysing its own efforts in Western Europe in 1974, the ANC concluded:

However it must be emphasised that in spite of our efforts, the ANC lobby in Western Europe still remains very week. Our voice is not strong enough. Our contact with the progressive forces in Western Europe must grow considerably.\textsuperscript{73}

The same document outlines some strategic moves for the future:

[…] special attention should be paid to Western Europe, where as we indicated earlier our lobby is rather weak. We now have two new missions in this region [Italy and Sweden] around whom our campaign can develop drawing assistance from the experienced comrades who are temporarily living in London.\textsuperscript{74}

Gradually, ANC also opened offices in other European countries, and forged strong links with the European anti-apartheid movement. This was however accelerated after the 1976. The United States was on the other hand was not a priority for the ANC. Early in the 1970’s ANC opened an office in New York, which served both the USA and the UN. This became an important office, because they could here monitor and lobby the activities in the UN. The ANC representative in New York made some interesting assessments in 1972, showing how ANC was met in New York:

[…] in America, we perhaps are the least important of all the Lib. Movts. in the estimation of some people. Frelimo and PAIGC are the most important, especially Frelimo. But thank goodness I am now here because they know they cannot get away with all that. […] I cannot overemphasise as to how important this is. Here we have the ear of the whole world, and every Ambassador. They all rush for information, others with advice. Oh it’s a mad house.\textsuperscript{75}

But, establishing missions were never easy, nor without danger: “New York is very dangerous and we are not sure what the South African Govt. and its agents may not do. This is very important.”\textsuperscript{76} Even if it wanted to, ANC was not able to create the same, strong links with American political parties and movements as it had done in Europe. ANC also saw it as

\textsuperscript{72} The work in London is extensively covered by Arianna Lissoni, (“The Anti-Apartheid Movement, Britain and South Africa”) and the archives from this mission is for the time being not open.
\textsuperscript{75} Permanent Representative for UN and North-America Thami Mhlambiso, to Secretary for Administration Mr. Msimang, “Dear Brother”, New York, 29 November 1972, “ANC HQ + USA Correspondence and Reports”, “International Affairs”, Box IV, Lusaka Mission, ANC archives, University of Fort Hare Library.
\textsuperscript{76} Permanent Representative for UN and North-America Thami Mhlambiso, to Secretary for Administration Mr. Msimang, “Dear Brother”, New York, 29 November 1972, “ANC HQ + USA Correspondence and Reports”, “International Affairs”, Box IV, Lusaka Mission, ANC archives, University of Fort Hare Library.
important to establish networks with the black movements in the United States, such as the Black Panthers, but this proved more difficult than they had foreseen:

I think the point about the Blck Panthers [sic!] merits serious attention. […] I do hope with funds permitting one of you comrades will visit the US and see for yourselves some of the problems and sometimes what some of us mistakenly dismiss as nonsensical and naivity on the part of Black America.77

In a different report, Fred Dube gave a quite interesting résumé in “The Black Americans”, in 1971:78

The Black Americans: They are a well meaning but confused people. Most of them would like to be truly seen and regarded as Africans, but the Africa they want to be identified with is not the Africa as Africa is, but an Africa which exist only in their imagination. Not only this, but they would also think Africa is a place that they could dominate inhabited by people who are still backward or lacking in leadership.79

These arguments show why the ANC never put much emphasis and priority on working in the United States. This also explains why the South African embassy, discussed in the previous chapters, never paid much attention to ANC itself, but directed most of its efforts and attention to American politics.

Soweto and its aftermath, 1976-1978

The Soweto uprising in June 1976 came as a surprise to the apartheid government. ANC was less surprised and had for some time expected the resistance against apartheid to increase. In a meeting with Swedish Embassy in Lusaka in April 1976, two months before the Soweto unrest started, the ANC representatives claimed that most of the opposition actions and activities inside South Africa at the time had some sort of link to ANC, while not being run by the ANC.80 The ANC predicted that the situation inside South Africa would change in the near future. The organisation had itself strengthened and improved its structures inside South Africa and the radically new balance of power in the region had given black South Africans increased self esteem.

77 Permanent Representative for UN and North-America Thami Mhlambiso, to Secretary for Administration Mr. Msimang, “Dear Comrade”, New York, 16 May 1972, “ANC HQ + USA Correspondence and Reports”, “International Affairs”, Box IV, Lusaka Mission, ANC archives, University of Fort Hare Library.
78 I have not been able to establish who Fred Dube was. Many of the ANC members used one or more false names, and it is difficult to find out who was behind a name unless it was a well known ANC member who used the same cover for a long time.
79 “Report. The Black Americans” (no date, no signature) “Correspondence ANC, 1971/72”, B.1.2., Oliver Tambo Papers, University of Fort Hare Library.
80 Ann Wilkens Flyktningeberedningen (Swedish MFA), “Samtal med representanter för ANC (South Africa)” 22 April 1976, NAI AB18-92, Tor Sellströms collection, Nordic Africa Institute. (“Talks with representatives of ANC (South Africa)”).
ANC pointed out that there was an “explosive mood of the oppressed in South Africa”, which they believed would lead to increased activities in 1976.81

But the ANC itself was still weak inside South Africa and did not have the force to plan or carry out resistance on the scale of Soweto. The Soweto demonstrations were orchestrated by young, unorganised students and were only vaguely influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement.82 When the riots spread to the rest of the country, what existed of ANC structures inside South Africa and in the neighbouring countries – especially Lesotho – stepped in with the little resources and skill they had to aid the youth and helped those most wanted by the police to escape into exile.83 When the student protests were crushed by the police and the army, an “exodus” of youths went to exile and many eventually joined the ANC.84 A trickle of youth fleeing South Africa had begun already before June 1976. “As we move into the ensuing and undoubtedly eventful year” ANC wrote in their yearly submission for financial support to Swedish SIDA in early May 1976, the ANC were expecting more people coming to exile:

[…] the numbers are expected to rise much more sharply than they have done in the recent past. This is because a substantial number of mainly young people are leaving South Africa under pressure of conditions resulting from the mounting confrontation in the country. Unavoidably these people become our responsibility.85

ANC had in line with their predictions doubled some of the expected costs from the previous year.86 The ANC now expected to cater for the following amount of people in exile: 370 people in Tanzania, Lesotho 50, Swaziland 50, Zambia 280, Mozambique 25, Angola 150 and Botswana 25.87 After the Soweto riots, the number of youths fleeing South Africa grew rapidly and exceeded these numbers by far, although it is difficult to tell exactly how many because of the chaotic situation. According to Shubin, ANC had to cater for “several hundred young people

83 Shubin, ANC, p. 169.
84 Shubin, ANC, p. 171.
85 Acting Treasurer-General T.T. Nkobi to SIDA "Memorandum Submitted by the African National Congress (SA) to SIDA in support of a request for assistance for the year 1976/77", May 1976, NAI AB21-90, Tor Sellströms collection, Nordic Africa Institute.
86 Ove Heyman, "Framställning från ANC (Sydafrika", Swedish Embassy in Lusaka, 5 May 1976, NAI AB21-90, Tor Sellströms collection, Nordic Africa Institute. ANC might have exaggerated the numbers, but for this argument the interesting point is how ANC before June 1976 expected increased numbers of youths to run away from South Africa.
87 No number is given for Botswana, but the estimated food costs for Botswana are almost identical to the 25 stated for Mozambique.
from within South Africa”, while Ellis state “as many as 4,000 men and women had left South Africa by early 1977”. Some have argued that the ANC was not capable or strong enough to react to the Soweto riots in any significant way. What makes this example interesting is how ANC made predictions just a few months before the 16 June 1976 how the level of conflict inside South Africa would increase and result in a rise in people fleeing South Africa.

**ANC responding to Soweto**

Soweto had several important implications for ANC. Firstly, the arrival of a new generation aggressive and fearless youth rejuvenated the MK and gave ANC and MK increased esteem and possibility to attack South Africa militarily. Secondly, the new arrivals provided ANC in exile with up-to-date information on the resistance and situation inside South Africa. Last but not least, Soweto gave ANC increased international legitimacy. The shooting of unarmed students showed the world how far the apartheid regime was willing to go to protect it from black protest. ANC’s argument that the situation could not be changed by international peace talks but must be confronted with arms if necessary was now seen in a new and more positive light abroad. The ANC argued that South Africa’s allies had to share some of the guilt of killing the children in Soweto, as they were killed by “the most deadly weapons that French, Belgian, British, U.S., Israeli and South African industry could produce”. The rest of the world had responsibility to stop the apartheid regime and its brutality and should isolate South Africa even more:

> The need is ever more pressing that the Vorster regime be completely isolated internationally. The Security Council has just reaffirmed that apartheid constitutes a crime against humanity. It is the urgent task of democratic humanity to bring to book the international collaborators of the criminal Vorster regime. All effort must go towards forcing the governments and the multi national corporations of Western Europe, North America and Japan to break their ties with racist South Africa.

The call from ANC for international solidarity and support was widely taken up all over the world and increased the activity of the international solidarity movement which now could use the brutal oppression of Soweto as examples of the nature of the apartheid regime. According to Shubin, “The Soweto uprising significantly influenced international attitudes towards South

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88 Shubin, *ANC*, p. 172; Ellis, *Comrades against Apartheid*, p. 84. Shubin’s numbers are probably the most accurate.  
Africa, and the ANC in particular. In order to capitalise on the rising political temperature at home and on the independence of Mozambique and Angola, the ANC made it a priority to improve relations with countries bordering South Africa.”

ANC continued its diplomatic efforts towards the Front Line States which it had initiated in the early 1970s, but with mixed results. The June riots had raised ANC’s “stature in Africa, and as a result the Front Line States started to invite the liberation movements to their summit meetings”. ANC was successful in improving relations with some of the neighbouring states. It improved relations with Botswana and Lesotho, but had more problems with Swaziland, Mozambique and Zambia. Mozambique was still afraid of retaliation from South Africa because of ANC presence there. Swaziland was also influenced by South Africa and became increasingly dangerous for ANC members. Zambia was still a difficult place to be, and the Revolutionary Council, a joint committee of SACP and ANC established after Morogoro, therefore moved to Luanda. Outside South Africa, ANC also improved relations with the Scandinavian countries, receiving increased and annual financial support. International organisations, such as the World Council of Churches now also came forward with donations. In 1977, the ANC NEC concluded:

“A position has been reached where the African National Congress viewpoint cannot be ignored even by the Security Council of the United Nations. This is consistent with the tremendous authority and respect which the President of our organisation, Comrade O. R. Tambo, generated at the United Nations General Assembly when he addressed that body on the 26th October 1976.”

Even if Soweto was a tragedy in South Africa’s modern history, it also marked a new beginning for the opposition against apartheid. For the first time in more than a decade was there massive resistance against white oppression inside South Africa. The ANC was partly forced by the circumstances, partly because of its new-built underground structures inside South Africa and in the neighbouring states able to connect to and tap into the new domestic resistance. Outside South Africa, the brutal oppression gave the movement a new level of international support and solidarity.

92 Shubin, ANC, p. 178
93 Thomas, The diplomacy of liberation, p. 140.
94 Shubin, ANC, p. 178-179.
95 Shubin, ANC, p. 180
ANC’s contacts with BCM and Scandinavia

During the 1970s, a new political movement had established itself and became an important factor in black opposition politics; the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). ANC had in the beginning no formal links with the Black Consciousness Movement, or with its central character Steve Biko. In an interview with Anders Bjurner at the Swedish Embassy in Lusaka in 1976, Oliver Tambo was asked about ANC’s view of the BCM organisations Black People’s Convention (BPC), South African Students Organisation (SASO) and Black Allied Workers Union (BAWU). Tambo answered that they “encouraged their sympathisers inside South Africa to join all kinds of legal organisations which did not work against ANC’s goals”, and that the “mentioned organisations generally worked for the same ends as the ANC”.

Steve Biko on the other hand, claimed the BCM had as a goal to create a united front of ANC, PAC, Unity Movement of South Africa (UMSA) and the BCM, even if many thought this impossible. Biko himself found the close relationship between the Moscow oriented SACP and ANC difficult, as the BCM could not accept being dominated by the Soviet Union. During 1976 and 1977, several efforts were made to make a joint meeting between Steve Biko and Oliver Tambo, either in Botswana or Amsterdam. The efforts were hampered by the frequent arrests of Biko in South Africa. One of the proposed meetings was planned for September 1977, where Biko, Tambo and Olof Palme (at the time leader of the Swedish Social Democratic opposition) should meet in Botswana. Such a meeting “would have brought together South Africa’s foremost internal black politician, representing the post-Sharpeville generation; the head of the strongest liberation movement, commanding a sizeable military force; and the representative of a leading donor country, also acting on behalf of a powerful international political community”.

Biko was sadly arrested and beaten to death at the time when the meeting was scheduled. If ANC and Biko had succeeded in this meeting it would have been an important step forward for both movements. This could also have strengthened ANC’s internal as well as international

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97 “The Black Consciousness movement (BCM) was a polycentric force encompassing a variety of student and youth organisations, women’s groups, churches, welfare organisations, associations of writers and journalists, and trade unions”, Thomas, The diplomacy of liberation, p. 63. Stephen “Steve” Bantu Biko was the informal leader of the BCM.


99 Swedish MFA, ”Samtal med Steve Biko, en av de ledande inom ”black consciousness”-rörelsen”, 8 September 1976, NAI AB05-188, Tor Sellström’s collection, Nordic Africa Institute. (“Talks with Steve Biko, one of the leaders of the “black consciousness” movement”).


position, if ANC could show that it had genuine links to what happened inside South Africa and was not just an exile movement which had lost touch with the internal resistance. The secret police in South Africa/BOSS knew of the plans for a meeting between Tambo and Biko due to the very successful apartheid spy Craig Williamson. This information could also very well be the reason why this arrest ended in Biko’s death. According to Williamson:

[T]he reality is that Biko’s detention was at the time when he was secretly going to leave the country to meet Tambo. It was all funded by Swedish money thorough IUEF. That was bad news. […] It was set up by the Swedes and by Lars-Gunnar [Eriksson]. I reported that it was going to happen, but I don’t know if the fact that they then beat him up and killed him was based on that.102

The planned meeting between Tambo, Biko and Palme also demonstrated how ANC had managed to establish close links with Scandinavia. While the largest ANC structure in Europe existed in England, ANC’s influence towards the British authorities was rather poor. This was different when it came to the Scandinavian countries and Finland.103 Through the 1960’s, for various reasons, political solidarity work together with humanitarian concern for the Portuguese colonies in Africa was built up in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland. This was later extended to the other Southern African liberation movements, and finally to the South African liberation movements. From 1973 in Sweden, 1977 for Norway and 1978 for Finland, the Nordic countries started to give direct financial support for ANC.104 Equally important was the political support for ANC in the United Nations. The ‘UN/OAU Conference of Experts for the Support of Victims of Colonialism and Apartheid in Southern Africa’ in Oslo, Norway in 1973 was an important landmark, with ANC and Tambo present. This conference also marked a beginning for the growing relations between ANC and the Scandinavian countries.

Sweden was the first Nordic country to allocate funding directly to the ANC. Most of the financial support was initially given through various international and humanitarian organisations, but gradually financial aid was also given directly to the liberation movements. The financial support was followed by close political ties between the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Swedish International Development Authority – SIDA towards ANC. Various documents, including joint declarations, funding proposals and interviews with leading ANC,

103 This topic has been extensively researched in the Nordic Africa Institute research project: ”National Liberation in Southern Africa.
104 Sellström, Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa Vol. II, p. 34. Sweden’s first official financial allocation to ANC was in February 1973, Norway followed with allocations to many of the liberation movements in 1974, and ANC and PAC in 1977. Finland gave financial assistance to ANC the year after.
PAC and BCM people from the Swedish MFA are a proof of this. In an assessment by the Swedish embassy in Lusaka, the embassy claimed that: “The contribution [from Sweden] is among the largest the ANC receives, including for the armed struggle. Without this humanitarian aid ANC could possibly disintegrate as result of dissatisfaction among the cadres.”

Similar support and political ties were developed with Norway, Finland and Denmark. Some main features of the Nordic support are worth mentioning. None of these countries ever supported ANC or PAC with military equipment or training, but provided funding for food, housing, transport, education, health and various projects for ANC refugees and personnel. The Nordic governments were fully aware that the liberation movements were conducting armed struggle, but nonetheless the support from Scandinavia was given with very no conditions or strings attached. Thabo Mbeki, today the president of South Africa, points out two important features of the Swedish support for the liberation movements in southern Africa:

[...] the particular role of Sweden [...] was to say that the people have got the right and the duty to rebel against oppression and that the concept of emancipation of a people cannot be reduced to a protest movement, but concerns the right to self-determination of small nations. That is something which is legitimate, which is necessary and which must be supported. There is a second element to this, which is that as part of the recognition of that right to self-determination you support the people who are engaged in the struggle. You do not define what they should be.

The same could be said about the support from the other Scandinavian countries. Another interesting feature is that the support for ANC continued regardless of there being a Social Democratic or right-of-centre government in power. This character of political support made the Nordic countries especially valuable for ANC. They provided quite substantial financial support for the ANC without strings attached, and this gave ANC more independence and room for manoeuvre. Also, being a country in Western Europe, “the position of Sweden created more space than the African or non-aligned position. It created a space for ANC to be able to deal with the rest of the Western world”. Being respected by the Nordic countries, ANC’s legitimacy in the Western bloc also increased. One should not overlook the political impact of these

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107 This point is emphasised by both Sellström and Linné Eriksen and by Vladimir Shubin in Sellström, Liberation in Southern Africa – Regional and Swedish voices, p. 248
108 Thabo Mbeki in Tor Sellström, Liberation in Southern Africa – Regional and Swedish voices (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1999), p. 154
connections with Nordic social democracy on the ANC. The social democratic model could be seen as an alternative to the socialist model which the ANC-SACP alliance learnt from the Soviet Union. The Scandinavian political model had proven its relevance as the ANC here found a political consensus to support the ANC, while other Western countries proved unwilling to put real pressure on the apartheid regime.\(^\text{109}\)

**ANC improves international relations, 1977-78**

After Biko’s death, the apartheid regime cracked down on all the major BCM organisations and closed down its leading newspaper the World. This was met with widespread international condemnation. In October 1977, the UN Security Council requested that all member states and organisations took measures against South Africa with the aim of abolishing apartheid and political oppression. Later, the Security Council, including the United States and Great Britain, adopted Resolutions 417 and 418 which constituted a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa. This was the first time in UN’s history that binding sanctions against a member state had been adopted.\(^\text{110}\) Previous arms embargos had not been mandatory. The embargo was a major defeat for Pretoria, as never before had the world been so unanimously united against apartheid. Most other attempts of imposing mandatory sanctions on South Africa had been stopped by the United States and Great Britain.

What was a defeat for Pretoria was a major victory for the ANC. The acknowledgment of the need for real and serious change in South Africa increased ANC’s international legitimacy. The United Nations had for a long time been one of the most important arenas for international opposition against apartheid. But the criticism had never manifested itself as clearly as in Resolution 418. At an ANC National Executive Committee meeting in 1977, a report was presented with the following analysis of the international situation:

> The international prestige of the African National Congress has grown tremendously. More and more African states now accept the African National Congress as the only authentic revolutionary vanguard of our struggle. Our organisation is now actively participating in the periodic meetings of the 5 “Front Line” African states which have been charged with the task of assisting the revolutionary movements in Southern Africa to successfully and rapidly

\(^{109}\) There could also be added several critical comments to the Nordic support for the ANC, such as why it took place, the time, the lack of willingness to implement real sanctions etc., but again, this is not the issue of this chapter.

develop the oppressed peoples struggles against the remaining vestiges of colonial and racial oppression.111

With increased strength and increased level of activity and civil unrest in South Africa, ANC was now able to devote more energy to the situation inside South Africa. International work and diplomacy was still vital, but in the NEC meeting, “international solidarity” was placed only as number 8 on the list of “tasks facing our revolutionary movement today”:

8) raise the level of our international solidarity work to new heights. The African National Congress must be accepted by all as the only authentic leader of the revolutionary struggle of our people. This will further enhance support for our heroic struggle for national liberation.112

Being accepted as the “only authentic” liberation movement was an important issue for the ANC, and must be seen in the light of socialist ideals at the time favouring unity and a single, strong alliance as opposed to various movements and plurality. ANC saw PAC as its main South African opponent, and was eager to push PAC out on the sidelines.

By the end of the 1970s ANC’s international relations were being strengthened and improved in almost all directions. According to Shubin, “reasonably good relations were established by the ANC with all countries of the Southern African region (with the exception of Malawi and Zaire) as well as with SWAPO and the ZAPU wing of the Zimbabwe Patriotic Front”.113 Relations with Tanzania, Zambia, Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana were all improving. The tension which had been between ANC and Tanzania and Zambia respectively, were now easing. Increased guerrilla activity in Zimbabwe and in northern Namibia, by SWAPO, was promising also for the ANC. Relations with ZANU in Zimbabwe and FRELIMO in Mozambique were still difficult, but not hostile. Relations with Mozambique turned seriously difficult only in 1984 with the Nkomati-accord between Mozambique and South Africa, but this is outside the scope of this thesis. The relationship with the socialist countries was still strong, and improved because of the continued military support for ANC’s close ally MPLA in Angola.

Outside Africa, the relationship with the Socialist Bloc was still strong, while the relations with the Nordic countries were growing. In addition to the Scandinavian governments which started to provide financial support to ANC after the mid-1970s, a broader spectre of

112 Ibid, p. 700.
113 Shubin, ANC, p. 207.
Scandinavian society now became active in solidarity work with South Africa: churches, labour movements, solidarity organisations etc.

ANC also increased cooperation with the Middle East and Asia. In 1978 a delegation from ANC and the MK went to Vietnam. The visit demonstrates how ANC now had international allies as far away as Vietnam. It also provided ANC with important lessons and political input.\footnote{Ellis, Comrades, p. 100. The trip to Vietnam also resulted in the so-called "Green Book", a political document where the ANC was defined as a socialist organisation. ANC usually defined itself as nationalist and not socialist, while the SACP was socialist part of the alliance. According to Jeremy Cronin, ANC MP and member of NEC, (which I interviewed in June 2003 for an article in the Norwegian newspaper “Klassekampen” about contemporary South African politics), the “Green Book” document was available at ANC’s web page among its historical documents, but was removed because of the controversial significance for contemporary ANC politics.} The visit to Vietnam led to a rethinking of ANC’s military strategies, leading to the theory of “armed propaganda”, where the MK should focus on military activities of spectacular nature. South Africa should see that the MK was alive and active, which would lead to increased mobilisation and recruitment to the struggle. This shift in strategy is also a symbol of the shift in focus from the situation in exile to increasing the fight at home. ANC finally felt confident enough to attack the regime at home.

In summary, these improved regional and international connections had several advantages for the ANC. Increased financial and military aid was necessary because of the flood of new recruits for the MK. The political oppression inside South Africa gave ANC credibility and more room for secret and clandestine operations in the neighbouring countries. All in all, the ANC was in a much better position at the end of the 1970s than was the case at the start of the decade. The building and use of foreign relations and international diplomacy were fundamental reasons for this fundamental improvement.

**Conclusion**

ANC was in a rather hopeless position in 1969. Inside South Africa most of its members were in jail or their actions restricted by the secrecy and immobility of underground activity. The few ANC members and soldiers who were stranded in exile were frustrated by the lack of possibilities of returning home to fight the enemy. During the next decade however, the organisation improved its situation drastically, and by 1978, ANC appears without doubt stronger and more viable than in 1969. ANC’s achievement in the 1970s was partly a successful consolidation of the organisation in exile, partly improved relations with its international allies. ANC was based in several African and European countries, where it was weak and dependent on the hospitality of its hosts. This made the movement vulnerable for political pressure from its host countries and of
economic contributions by other countries and organisations. Tanzania and Zambia were ANC’s most important hosts and allies in Africa, but often restrained its activity because of their own political agendas. Outside Africa, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe were the movements’ main allies and provided military and material support.

The research presented in this chapter shows how the ANC worked steadily towards improving its relations with both with the independent African countries in the region, and with countries and movements around the world. ANC also chose to join the Soviet-aligned Khartoum-alliance, connecting it to several other liberation movements in southern Africa. Gradually and intentionally, ANC managed to create good relations with several of the Front Line States, regional liberation movements, international organisations and foreign countries. ANC were no longer so dependent on only a few African countries, but relied on several and strong international relations.

Vorster’s Dialogue in the early 1970s has been called one of ANC’s most serious challenges during their time in exile. If Vorster had succeeded in the early 1970s when ANC was still weak, there would be far less room for ANC to build its international alliances. But ANC quickly mobilised against Dialogue, using its relations with the independent African countries. When Vorster repeated his diplomatic initiatives during 1974 and 1975, ANC again mobilised against Vorster and was now even able to use the Organisation of African Unity as a platform against the South African Apartheid regime. 1974 and 1975 were crucial years for all of southern Africa, since the coup d’état in Lisbon generated independence for both Mozambique and Angola. The shift of power gained ANC, especially since two of its allies in the Khartoum-alliance now were about to gain power in two of South Africa’s neighbouring states. This created new and promising opportunities for the ANC to attack the regime. The ANC was therefore quick to celebrate this victory and establish even closer relations with FRELIMO in Mozambique and MPLA in Angola. In addition, the victories in Angola and Mozambique lead to more international attention on the situation in South Africa itself.

South Africa’s invasion of Angola in the end of 1975 completely undermined Vorster’s peace efforts in the region. The documents, papers and speeches analysed in this chapter documents how ANC persistently attacked the apartheid state and used its failures as arguments for increased isolation of South Africa. This again improved ANC’s own credibility and situation. Therefore, the failed invasion strengthened ANC’s legitimacy internationally, and brought ANC even closer to the MPLA. Also ANC’s difficult relationship with the OAU Liberation Committee improved drastically after South Africa’s aggression in Angola.
After South Africa’s withdrawal from Angola in 1976 and the attempts to restart negotiations over Zimbabwe, the next development which affected South Africa and the region was the Soweto student riots and its aftermath. It has been argued that ANC was not prepared or capable of contributing to the new domestic resistance against Apartheid. Nonetheless, their increased level of activity, as shown for example in their yearly applications and discussions regarding funding from Sweden, show that they were expecting increased level of resistance already before Soweto happened. ANC also used the international attention towards South Africa after Soweto to attack the regime politically and argue for the necessity of its armed struggle. The death of opposition leader Steve Biko, who ANC was in the process of establishing links with, even further increased the international focus on South Africa. This was an advantage ANC used for all its worth.

These developments from 1975 to 1976 increased ANC’s international status drastically. The regional changes meant that ANC could establish better and more reliable relations with all the Front Line States – despite continuous difficulties with for example Zambia and Mozambique. But ANC was now able to improve its relations with for example the Scandinavian countries, which increased their support and financial aid drastically towards the end of the decade. The ANC was in the early 1970s worried that the international campaign against South Africa had taken the form of only a moral campaign (see quote in the beginning of this chapter), which was then on the retreat due of the low level of opposition activity inside South Africa. Towards the end of the decade, ANC’s increased activity and improved international relations had revitalised the solidarity movement for South Africa around the world.

The crucial developments and events outlined in this chapter were usually started by the Apartheid regime itself, such as the invasion of Angola, Soweto and the death of Biko. However, a gradually stronger ANC, evident in some of the sources presented here, managed to use these issues to strengthen its own position. More importantly, ANC used every opportunity to attack the South African government and contributed decisively to its increased international isolation. The failure of the South African government to counter the international criticism and isolation was one of the key reasons why P.W. Botha managed to unseat Vorster and take over as Prime Minister (later State President). Moreover, P.W. Botha’s period as leader of South Africa was marked by increased violence, militarization and regional instability caused by South Africa. During the 1980s, ANC became a real challenge to the South African regime. This development resulted in the negotiated settlement and final victory for the ANC at the first democratic elections in 1994.
Conclusion

In 1970, South Africa was a promising land for its white minority population. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants left Europe after the Second World War to take part in the substantial economic growth experienced in South Africa. They immediately became part of the advantaged population group and could afford luxuries like secure high wages and access to domestic servants and gardeners. The fundament of all this was apartheid; an attempt to completely segregate the South African population along racial lines. Likeminded regimes ruled in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Angola and Mozambique. It was easy to be optimistic about the future for the white population.

The black and white opposition against the apartheid government was however in a seriously difficult situation; either in jail, forced underground or in exile. The main opposition movement, the ANC, had almost all of its activity was confined to its camps and offices in exile far from South Africa itself. The whole future of the movement depended on the skill of its leadership in exile and their international diplomacy. During the next decade, through slow but steady consolidation and reorganisation, the movement managed to overcome its problems and grow in size and importance.

Even if white South Africa was feeling secure and confident in the future, the country was being criticised for its racial policies. Newly independent African and Asian countries, some with connections or sympathies for the ANC, led the attacks. The Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the Scandinavian countries among others were also critical of white South Africa. Even South Africa’s allies, the United States and Great Britain among the closest allies, increasingly disapproved of apartheid and racial oppression. South Africa saw this in the early 1970s mainly as a nuisance rather than a real threat. The research presented in this thesis show how the South African diplomats in Washington tried their best to explain apartheid’s rationale and benefits for all South Africans. They also tried to rectify what they saw as a “misunderstanding” among their international friends.

This strategy was on the other hand not seen to be sufficient or active enough, and the Department of Information launched a large scale propaganda programme aimed at improving South Africa’s image abroad, much to Foreign Affairs’ annoyance and disproval. Former South African diplomats even today can tell how they disliked the rivalry in foreign policy by
Information. The other strategy to defuse criticism against South Africa was Dialogue, an offensive programme to win friends on the African continent with the aim of breaking out of isolation and improving its credibility to the West. This strategy was by and large played out by BOSS and Information, and to lesser degree the Department of Foreign Affairs. These efforts were only temporarily successful; United States stated their approval of Dialogue, but repeated criticism both behind the scene and in public, much to the diplomats’ annoyance, as shown in the sources presented here. Another factor which halted Dialogue was a active diplomacy by ANC and its main African allies which mobilised the African continent against Vorster’s diplomacy.

Despite the success of stopping Dialogue, ANC experienced problems with its international allies in the early 1970s, although of a different sort. The movement was vulnerable because of its dependency on the host countries where it had its offices and camps. Another weakness was the complicated task of keeping an exile army and organisation running with money, food and supplies. The countries in Southern Africa were either pressured, economically or militarily by South Africa, and were cautious of giving shelter and support for the ANC, such as in the BLS-states, Zambia and later Mozambique. In addition, they could have political ambitions for the future of ANC and therefore threatening its autonomy, something ANC experienced in Tanzania. ANC therefore had to balance between sticking to its own agendas, and not upsetting its allies. There are few evidences in the archives of any direct pressure against the ANC in this period, the ANC was careful not to criticise its allies. In addition, ANC put efforts into building relationships with other regional liberation movements with similar goals and situations, like MPLA in Angola, FRELIMO in Mozambique and ZAPU in Zimbabwe, to broaden its network of regional and international allies and supporters. The documents and speeches of ANC at the time stress the importance of international solidarity.

White South Africa’s sensation of peace and security was shaken in April 1974 when the Caetano-regime in Portugal fell, partly because of the liberation wars in its African territories. South Africa was not affected immediately, but it soon became clear that Mozambique and Angola would gain independence and be ruled by black nationalists (and even Marxist) liberation movements. The other friendly white regime to the north, Rhodesia, was getting more and more involved in a civil war with ZANU and ZAPU, partly aided by South Africa. The balance of power in Southern Africa had shifted and South Africa’s white minority felt threatened and insecure.

Prime Minister John Vorster’s first response was one of cooperation, not confrontation. He started with a cautious but friendly gesture, stating that South Africa would not interfere and
would welcome any new government in neighbouring Mozambique. His main foreign affairs priority for the next two years was Détente, an attempt to work with Zambia to settle a deal for the civil war in Zimbabwe. The ANC found it crucial to counter Vorster’s diplomatic moves towards Africa. ANC’s existence rested on its struggle against what they saw as an illegitimate minority regime, and they had to counter any moves from Vorster which could give the South African government legitimacy. Through active diplomacy and with the help of among others Tanzania, did the ANC successfully challenge Vorster yet again. Another important development for the ANC was how its allies FRELIMO and MPLA were now posed to take over the power in two countries bordering South Africa. This opened new perspectives and opportunities for ANC and the liberation struggle.

Vorster’s peaceful approach to the new situation in Southern Africa was not popular with every sector of the white society. This became more evident during 1975 and on the issue of the civil war in Angola. SWAPO was building up its strength in southern Angola, and using it as a spring board for operations against South Africa in northern Namibia. South Africa was also constructing hydro power stations a short distance north of the border inside Angola, which were attacked by Namibian and Angolan forces. The South African government gradually saw the need to do something about the situation in Angola. The archives of Department of Foreign Affairs’ holds information on how the department was involved in talks with the Portuguese (temporarily in control) to secure the situation on the border between Namibia and Angola. At the same time, another government agency, BOSS, together with the army was working jointly (or parallel) with CIA to support two liberation movements opposing MPLA. The army was also involved in military clashes in the border area and were protecting the construction sites, often without even informing Foreign Affairs which was responsible for the official talks with the Portuguese.

In July 1975, Vorster opted for the strategy launched by Department of Defence’s and BOSS of arming UNITA and FNLA. The Department of Foreign Affairs was opposed to this, in fear of how this could damage South Africa’s foreign relations and international image. Besides, Foreign Affairs was more involved in the situation on the border and did not want to get South Africa involved in the power struggle taking place in Luanda. Despite this, Vorster in October 1975 again supported Department of Defence’s plan, this time to use SADF forces to back a large scale military operation against MPLA. The plan failed; the joint South Africa- FNLA-UNITA forces were beaten soundly by MPLA and Cubans. South Africa’s secrecy failed and it was exposed for the invasion of Angola when South African soldiers were paraded in international
media. The Americans pulled out and “left South Africa in the lurch” as Minister of Defence P.W. Botha declared later. Department of Foreign Affairs was right in their predictions, and the failed intervention had serious implications on South Africa’s foreign relations both regionally and towards the United States and Great Britain. Even if Foreign Affairs opposed the invasion, the sources in the archives of Foreign Affairs show that the Department in Pretoria was actively involved in trying to cover up the failed invasion. The Department even denied any real and true information to its own embassies which now came under severe international criticism. The case of Angola by and large confirms previous claims that Foreign Affairs was a weak department in Vorster’s government.

The ANC on the other hand significantly improved its position because of the new situation in Southern Africa and independence for Mozambique and Angola. ANC was already allied with the two strongest liberation movements, FRELIMO (Mozambique) and MPLA (Angola). ANC confirmed their relations with both, and after South Africa’s invasion of Angola, ANC and MPLA established even closer relations. ANC was now allowed to open new military bases in Angola, and the Soviet military aid for MPLA benefited ANC as well. The international condemnation of South African invasion of Angola meant increased attention on South Africa, and indirectly more attention to the ANC. When Mozambique and Angola gained independence, aid and solidarity which had earlier been directed to FRELIMO, MPLA and PAIGC were now directed towards the ANC. This was the case especially in Scandinavia. Another improvement was that the OAU Liberation Committee which had earlier prioritised support for the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and Namibia now gave more credit and support to the ANC, based on analysis that South Africa was the key to all the conflicts in the region. The ANC had now a broader and firmer network of friends and allies, and less dependent on a few, weak states as it had been in the beginning of the decade.

The failed invasion of Angola seriously strained South Africa’s relations with its main ally, the United States. South Africa had to mend relations with the United States, and when US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, put pressure on Vorster to restart negotiations regarding Zimbabwe, Vorster accepted and tried to work with Kissinger in order to be cooperative and repair the relationship. This strategy failed, this time because of the brutal repression of the Soweto student riots in June 1976, which once again directed international attention and criticism against South Africa. The election of Jimmy Carter as president of the United States later in 1976 was another blow. During Jimmy Carter’s presidency the relations between South Africa and United States were on the edge of hostile, and the sources from the Foreign Affairs’
archives show a clear pessimism on part of the South African diplomats in Washington. Matters were only made worse with the death of Steve Biko and the following political oppression. These events during 1975-77 were crucial in turning world opinion against South Africa. In 1977, South Africa could no longer rely on USA’s protection in the Security Council which now passed a resolution demanding mandatory arms embargo towards South Africa. South Africa was close to isolated and had through its actions given legitimacy to the enemies of the regime, among them ANC. South Africa’s ambassador to Washington tried to influence Pretoria on the issue of Biko, hoping a serious investigation could defuse criticism, but he was not listened to.

ANC was not fully prepared for the Soweto riots, but some of the sources researched here show that the movement had expected increased domestic resistance to apartheid. After the first chock because of the brutality and scope of the repression, ANC was able to exploit the situation better than if it had happened in 1970. It had during the last few years critically improved its internal and external organisation, and was able to use the situation to mobilise support for the liberation struggle. Soweto gave the ANC a wave of new recruits, a new generation of activists burning with ambition and courage to fight the regime. The brutal oppression increased the focus on South Africa, gave ANC’s armed struggle legitimacy and a boost to the international solidarity movement working with and for the ANC. Biko and the BCM which were targeted the year after were in the process of linking up with the exile struggle when Biko was killed and the organisations banned. Even if this was a major blow to the internal political struggle, it again improved the international climate in favour of ANC. It furthermore made the ANC focus more on the struggle inside South Africa, and to turn the focus of its international work towards support for the internal struggle, an argument found in the ANC’ documents from this period. When P.W. Botha came to power in 1978, ANC had become the main South African liberation movement, it had increased its size, its strength and mode of operation. This would mark South Africa in during the next decade.

The fall of John Vorster during the “Information Scandal” in 1978 must be understood as a consequence of several issues. Department of Information’s secret projects were controversial enough in themselves to topple Vorster. But Terry Bell, basing his conclusions on the research done in connection with Truth and Reconciliation Commission, adds more details to the picture when he outlines how P.W. Botha used the scandal to get rid of Vorster. Botha’s reasons were linked to the disagreements outlined in this thesis as the conflict regarding the invasion of Angola. The Department of Foreign Affairs had for several years reported to Pretoria about the international criticism of South Africa and apartheid. If we believe Pik Botha’s statements as
former ambassador, Vorster did not even believe his prediction that USA would pull out if the
treatment failed. When the conflict on Angola reached its climax, Foreign Affairs was all but
sidelined and its arguments about the possibly negative effects of a military operation was
overlooked.

The consequences of the invasion of Angola and the brutal oppression of opposition
politics in the next couple of years led to South Africa’s growing isolation. While the isolation
first and foremost was caused by South Africa’s own controversial and racial policies, it failed to
convince the world of its good intentions. More important, the South African government also
failed to listen to the concerns raised by its own Department of Foreign Affairs and its embassies,
which explained how even its closes allies could and would not support its racial policies nor its
aggression towards Angola. This inevitably led to the isolation of South Africa, and to its
increased regional aggression in the next decade.

The research and assessments presented in this thesis show how two developments took
place in South Africa during the 1970s. One was how the South African apartheid regime was
increasingly isolated and condemned, to a great extent because of its failed foreign policy and
deteriorating foreign relations. The main opposition movement ANC experienced an opposite
development. Starting almost from scratch in Morogoro in 1969, ANC managed to use the
apartheid government’s failures as well as its own political consolidation and international
diplomacy to improve its situation and strength. During the 1970s ANC grew from a small,
vulnerable exile movement to a credible liberation movement capable of challenging the regime.
The scene was now set for the militarization of South Africa, the destabilisation of Southern
Africa and the increasingly violent conflict between the apartheid government and the liberation
movement which would mark the 1980s.
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- “United Kingdom relations with South Africa”, BTS 1\20\3
- “United States relations with South Africa”, BTS 1\33\3

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- Archive from the Private Secretary to the Minister of information, 1966-1978: "Vorleggings aan die Minister”, MNL 90-99

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Karis-Gerhart Collection:

Tor Sellströms collection:
The Nordic Africa Institute has an extensive digital collection of archive material from Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Swedish International Development Authority assembled for Tor Sellströms Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa Vol. I+II (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2002). The collection is available through NAI, but access is restricted by the author and the institute.

Interviews
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• Donald B. Sole, former ambassador in Bonn and Washington, interviewed 25 June 2003, Cape Town, South Africa.

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