

South Africa's Intervention in Angola: Before Cuito Cuanavale and Thereafter

by

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Summary

Since South Africa's military intervention in the Angolan conflict twenty years ago, many scholars have written various conflicting accounts on the subject. Why did South Africa become involved in the first place, what made the SADF withdraw, and why did the country decide to become involved once again in a conflict that seemingly did not concern them? What happened at Cuito Cuanavale? These are the questions this study aims to address by drawing on the work of several influential authors. But why the differing narratives? Internal factors such as South Africa's regional policies during apartheid as well as external factors such as pressure on the Nationalist government from the international arena, all played significant roles in the decision to become more deeply involved in Angola.

South African regional policies during apartheid have been regarded in very different ways by various authors which this study will explore. SA's policies during apartheid were characterised by anti-communism and influenced mainly by the thought that if SA supported a Western ideal, SA would be able to regain some international credit from Western powers. In addition, pressure from international actors increased on SA to protect the southern African region from communist domination. As a result, SA's second intervention in Angola became prolonged as the clashes between the SADF/UNITA and Angolan/Cuban/Soviet forces grew in intensity. The battle/siege of Cuito Cuanavale is still considered to be the watershed moment that ended the Angolan conflict. The outcome of this battle, however, is still a very controversial subject to this day as some authors claim Cuba won, while others claim the SADF won. At the time there was no surrender.

However, establishing exactly who the winner was is very difficult as every party to the conflict has its own ideas about what really happened. The military outcome and political consequences may have influenced this debate. For that reason it is imperative to remember all important influence that various schools of thoughts have on different observers and therefore accounts of the conflict as many of them were written in a time when Cold War and liberation sentiments thrived. Twenty years later is a good time for better informed hindsight.

Opsomming

Sedert Suid-Afrika se militêre betrokkenheid in Angola twintig jaar gelede, het verskeie kontrasterende verhale van dié konflik die lig gesien. Hoekom het SA in die eerste plek betrokke geraak, waarom het die SAW die eerste keer onttrek en hoekom het die land besluit om weer 'n keer betrokke te raak by 'n konflik wat op die oog af niks met hulle te doen gehad het nie? Wat het by Cuito Cuanavale gebeur? Dit is die vrae wat hierdie studie sal probeer antwoord deur gebruik te maak van verskeie invloedryke outeurs. Maar hoekom die uiteenlopende stories? Interne faktore soos SA se streeksbeleide tesame met eksterne faktore soos internasionale druk op die NP regering, het almal deurslaggewende rolle gespeel in die besluit om dieper betrokke te raak in Angola.

Suid-Afrikaanse streeksbeleide gedurende apartheid word anders geïnterpreteer deur verskillende outeurs afhangende uit watter oogpunt hulle skryf, hetsy liberaal of realisties. Streeksbeleide gedurende apartheid was gekenmerk deur anti-kommunistiese sentimente en is hoofsaaklik beïnvloed deur die denke dat indien SA hierdie Westerse ideaal ondersteun het, die land dalk 'n mate van sy reeds kwynende internasionale aansien sou herwin. Hoe dit ook al sy, die druk op SA om Suider Afrika te beskerm teen die kommunistiese aanslag, het geleidelik vergroot vanuit die internasionale arena. Dit is dan ook die rede waarom SA se tweede inval in Angola 'n meesleurende en uitgerekte saga geword het aangesien botsings tussen die SAW/UNITA alliansie en die Angolese/Kubaanse/Russiese alliansies meer intens en op 'n meer gereelde basis voorgekom het. Die laaste offensief by Cuito Cuanavale word dus steeds gesien as die oomblik wat die einde van die Angolese oorlog ingelui het. Die uitkoms van hierdie geveg/beleg word egter steeds in kontroversie gehul aangesien daar steeds nie konsensus bereik kan word oor wie die eintlike wenner was nie. Sekere outeurs voer aan dat die Kubane sonder twyfel gewen het, terwyl ander beweer dat die SAW gewen het. Op daardie punt was daar egter geen militêre oorgawe nie.

Juis om daardie rede is dit baie moeilik om vas te stel wie die eintlike wenner was, aangesien elke betrokke party sy eie idees gevorm het oor wat eintlik gebeur het. Dit is waarom dit belangrik is om te let op die invloed wat verskeie outeurs kan hê op dié onderwerp aangesien baie daarvan geskryf is gedurende 'n tyd toe die Koue Oorlog en bevrydingsoorloë aan die orde van die dag was. Twintig jare later is dalk 'n goeie tyd vir 'n terugblik.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
CIA	CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
FAPLA	<i>FORÇAS ARMADAS POPULARES DE LIBERTAÇÃO DE ANGOLA</i> (PEOPLE'S ARMED FORCES FOR THE LIBERATION OF ANGOLA)
FNLA	<i>FRENTE NACIONAL DE LIBERTAÇÃO DE ANGOLA</i> (NATIONAL FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF ANGOLA)
FLS	FRONTLINE STATES
MPLA	<i>MOVIMENTO POPULAR DE LIBERTAÇÃO DE ANGOLA</i> (POPULAR MOVEMENT FOR THE LIBERATION OF ANGOLA)
NATO	NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANISATION
OAU	ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY
PLAN	PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY OF NAMIBIA
SADCC	SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION CONFERENCE
SADF	SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENCE FORCE
USSR	UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS
SWA	SOUTH WEST AFRICA
SWAPO	SOUTH WEST AFRICAN PEOPLE'S ORGANISATION
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNITA	<i>UNIÃO NACIONAL PARA A INDEPENDÊNCIA TOTAL DE ANGOLA</i> (NATIONAL UNION FOR THE TOTAL INDEPENDENCE OF ANGOLA)
ZANLA	ZIMBABWE AFRICAN NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY
ZIPRA	ZIMBABWE PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

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Chapter 1

1) Introduction

1.1) Problem statement

This study is about South Africa's interventions in Angola, culminating in the battle/siege of Cuito Cuanavale in 1988. There is a political history about the build-up to this event. But because there were very few, if any, credible witnesses to this event, the narrative became extremely politicised. The meaning of the outcome is still contested today.

On the one hand there was a school of thinking that claimed "the defeat of the South Africans". They got in first, as early as 1989. A good example is an article by Horace Campbell (1989) with the same title. As far as can be ascertained he never visited the battle front, and based his assessment of what transpired from Havana and Luanda. This was an influential publication. In 1992, Hasu H Patel repeats this line of thinking in a publication of the Centre for Southern African Studies at the University of the Western Cape ("South Africa's defeat at Cuito Cuanavale..."). The source of reference is Horace Campbell. Patel's subtitle was "the frontline view".

On the other hand there were the earlier writings of Bridgeland (1990), Heitman (1990) and Chester Crocker (1992). The first two were military correspondents with ties to the SA Defence Force. They had access to files and military personnel. Their stories were different from the "frontline view" cited above. Their books were much better documented. Chester Crocker's work had a different origin. He was President Ronald Reagan's Secretary of State for Africa and used his own experience and sources for this book, essentially an autobiography. He writes of some Angolan and Cuban humiliations on the battlefield in late 1987. However, the conventional wisdom at the time was shaped by the so-called "frontline view" which believed that because the SA Defence Force withdrew from Angola, and South Africa agreed on an American-driven but United Nations sanctioned peace plan for Namibia (UN Resolution 435), the South African military could only have been defeated at Cuito Cuanavale. This was also the official line from Fidel Castro and Havana.

On the South African side, primary actors began to write. This included former SADF functionaries such as Jannie Geldenhuys (1993), Jan Breytenbach and Magnus Malan (2006). Their versions were remarkably similar to those of the military correspondents referred to earlier. According to them, the South Africans were far from being defeated. The plot thickened as many questions remained unanswered. This study will ask some questions about

the “what” and the “why” of 1988. This is twofold: what really happened at Cuito Cuanavale and why is there this discrepancy about the events of 1988, and its aftermath? To answer this, post-1988 outcomes are also relevant. However, for a better understanding of the South African interventions into Angola before 1988, an overview of events is required.

The 1974 military coup in Lisbon set a train of events into motion on the Southern African subcontinent. When Portugal withdrew from Africa, the white cordon sanitaire crumbled. Barber and Barrett (1990) argue that South Africa feared political and security threats that might result from decolonisation in the region. South Africa faced immediate border problems (at that stage, the north of Namibia) as most of the movements that were coming to power were supported by the Soviets or the Chinese or the Cubans, all Communist states. They also argued that South Africa was in dire need of a barrier as SWAPO increased its penetration of Northern South West Africa. The reason this was important to SA, was the fact that SA had become more and more concerned about SA’s further isolation in the West because of apartheid, but also due to the ongoing dispute over Namibia. Increased international isolation of SA, made SA realise that they would be judged on internal policies as well as their policies towards neighbouring states.

As the Namibian liberation movement SWAPO used bases in Angola it made more sense to try and stop SWAPO from inside SWA. At that time (1974), SA therefore decided to support UNITA, because it drew its support from the south of Angola and could aid SA in forming a buffer zone between Namibia and Angola. At first, Prime Minister Vorster was reluctant to increase this involvement. However, as the Cubans started to support the MPLA, South Africa was willing to escalate its intervention. But this intervention was a secret. Fred Bridgeland’s story (Bridgeland, 1990:11) in the *Washington Post* of 22 November 1975 was first to carry this scoop. According to this version (still denied by South Africa), the SADF advanced rapidly to the south of Luanda the capital. It was at that point that the Cubans were invited to assist. This apparently stopped the South African advance.

There were, however, other motives as well. According to Barber & Barratt (1990), these were ensuring SA’s dominance in the Southern African region by turning Angola into a non-hostile, cooperative state. 1975 also saw the adoption of the Clark amendment by the USA, which stated that no more aid were to be given to the nationalist movements in Angola, presumably the FNLA, which was supported by the USA up to that point. South Africa’s presence was frowned upon internationally. Having faced an unexpected Cuban defence, SA

felt betrayed and decided that troops would begin to withdraw. The Cubans claimed the South Africans were defeated. The Clark amendment was replaced, however, by the Reagan doctrine (which was sympathetic towards UNITA) only months later in June 1976. This suited South Africa as it was the governments' viewpoint that SA would no longer fight alone on behalf of the free world.

The period between 1984 and 1988 saw the emergence of regional tensions once again and SA's regional policy became linked to domestic conflict and security concerns towards the ANC and SWAPO. With discreet American support Unita fought Angolan forces (Fapla). By 1985 Unita was weakened, prompting the SADF to return to Angola. During 1987 Angolan and Cuban attacks on UNITA increased at Mavinga and the Lomba River and SA's intervention was now deemed necessary to halt the Cuban/Russian offensives against UNITA. UNITA had been driven out of Huambo, and set up a new headquarters at Jamba, far to the east of Cuito Cuanavale and Mavinga. With UNITA almost destroyed in 1985 in areas to the west of Mavinga, SA believed that it would irrevocably lead to the destabilisation of the Southern African region (Barber & Barratt, 1990). However, FAPLA – the Angolan army, never succeeded in capturing UNITA's headquarters at Jamba or ended its control over Mavinga. This is crucial to an understanding of the significance of Cuito Cuanavale as it was situated on the route to Mavinga and Jamba. To the west of these sites was Menongue which came under Cuban control after Unita lost Huambo.

One has to keep in mind that the war in Angola became synonymous with Cold War rivalries and South Africa's resistance towards the ANC. In other words, Angola's anti-Portugal revolution (1960-1974) and the subsequent civil war became a proxy of the Cold War, which saw the United States, pitted against the communist Soviet Union and Cuba until the Cold War ended in 1989. Angola also became the place where the apartheid government clashed with SWAPO and the ANC (Hare, 2005). The entire Southern African region was thus seen as a region fighting against communist hegemony, while in truth there were numerous other reasons for each individual party's involvement.

It is in this context that the "what" of Cuito Cuanavale becomes relevant. As will become clearer later, the "Frontline View" (Patel's characterisation) paid very little attention to battle front details (eg, troop deployments, tactical considerations, casualties, etc), but may have used the political outcome (eg, Namibian independence and South African withdrawal) as *post facto* an explanation of what was, for this school of thinking, the only logical outcome of

1988, namely South Africa's defeat at Cuito Cuanavale. The "why" for this view, as well as explanations for the discrepancies about the outcome are much more ideological in nature. This is where perceptions and belief systems – even propaganda, also play roles. Chapter 2 will encapsulate this narrative.

At the so-called "war for Africa" in Angola (a term used by Bridgeland, 1990) Campbell (1990) believes that Angolans were not only defending their sovereignty but that they were also fighting for the self-determination of the African people. This was the "frontline view". This view emphasised the Angolan role. But there is also Fidel Castro's views which were quite critical of the Angolans who had suffered heavy defeats in 1975 and in late 1987, only for Castro to send in new troops that engaged the SADF in February 1988 for the first time since 1975 (Maier, 1996:26).

Fidel Castro maintains that Cuito Cuanavale was an overwhelming victory for the Cubans. He states that "the withering advance by the powerful front of Cuban troops in south-western Angola, put an end to outside military aggression against the country. The enemy had to swallow its usual arrogant bullying and sit down at the negotiating table" (Ankomah, 2008:10-17). But Minter (1994) argues that as South Africa's principal objective was to keep the MPLA from coming to power, ironically it was perhaps the government's decision to intervene militarily (in 1975) that made it possible for the MPLA with the support of Cuba to claim victories in the end. What is even more ironic is the fact that the two actors that South Africa wanted to destroy (SWAPO in South West Africa and the ANC in South Africa) eventually emerged as the two countries' ruling political parties. Had negotiations with the ANC taken place and South West Africa's independence been given earlier, we might have seen compromises and transitions taking place without a war in Angola. But this is conjecture. This study is about the longer-term political outcomes as well – the "why" of this research, and not necessarily the short-term military consequences – the "what", only. It is therefore also about why the stories have so many versions.

1.2) Objective and significance of study

The objective of this study is to describe South Africa's regional foreign policy that was adopted throughout the Southern African region during the first, and also the later, intervention in Angola in the 1970s and 1980s. In order to understand South Africa's initial involvement, it is important to look at the important events that happened in the international

community: the Cold War, Soviet and Cuban threats in Southern Africa as well as what happened to SWAPO and the ANC in the region. This is described against the backdrop of apartheid in South Africa and the advance of liberation movements in the region.

This study also aims at focusing on the difference of opinion that existed between SA's decision to intervene during the 1970s and again the 1980s. The international community's role again comes into play here. What were Cuba, the Soviet Union and even the USA's actual motives to support the nationalist movements (in the American case, first the FNLA and then Unita) and why did attitudes change toward support for these movements throughout the conflict?

During the last stages of the conflict (say, from 1985 onwards), several battles occurred between the SADF and/or Unita and the Angolan army and/or the Cubans always fighting with Soviet equipment. Before Cuito Cuanavale (1978-88), Unita suffered against Fapla, whilst Fapla suffered defeats against the SADF in 1987. What the exact outcome of this final battle was remains a much-contended topic to this day. Almost everybody claimed victory. But can one really claim victory (or defeat) in the absence of surrender?

This study will try and answer the questions of "who won/lost/ defeated/withdrew" and "who settled on whose terms" by describing the events of twenty years ago as objectively as possible. Care must be taken of the disparate sources available which often have conflicting assessments of the outcomes. It is also to be expected that very few of the earlier sources were neutral – either siding with the SADF (such as Jannie Geldenhuy's "Die wat gewen het") or with the Cuban/Angolan side (such as Horace Campbell and Hasu Patel's "frontline view"). The truth of what really happened may be implicit in all of these sources and finding the truth among a myriad of assessments is quite a challenge to post-conflict researchers.

The significance of this study is, therefore, to hopefully shed some light on the "what" and "why" of this conflict. For some, the SA regime won the war on the battlefield but lost around the negotiation table. For others, the Cubans won in 1975 and defended their positions in 1988. In such events, perceptions and even propaganda play significant roles.

Another significance of this study is that distinctions will be made between the short-term military outcomes (eg the battle, siege, loss of equipment and casualties etc) and the longer-

term political consequences for every party to the conflict. As the bigger picture was not at the disposal of researchers at the time when these events took place in southern Angola, these assessments lacked the benefits of hindsight. Now may be the best time to do this assessment.

Despite the Campbell and Patel writings on the one hand and the Bridgeland, Heitman and Crocker writings on the other, very few neutral assessments came to the fore. Seven years later the story began to change with Karl Maier's assessment of the confrontation (1996). Karl Maier was a journalist invited by Angolan government to observe the battle from the Angolan side in 1988. His assessments were more in line with Bridgeland (1990), Heitman (1990) and Crocker (1992), as they tell of the Fapla humiliations at the hands of the SADF at the Lomba River shortly before the battle of Cuito Cuanavale. The SADF then also attacked Menogue and Cuito in 1987 and early 1988. By then Castro committed more troops, especially to the defences inside the "Tumpo Triangle". The SADF could not seize these positions. Then came the stalemate at Cuito Cuanavale. Years later, Dosman (2008) tells the same story.

It was only until much later that scholars such as Breytenbach (1997), Scholtz (2006), Dosman in Baines & Vale (2008) conducted more comprehensive research that had the benefit of hindsight. In this study the first point of departure is that Cuito Cuanavale has to be understood in terms of ideological considerations at the time when the adversaries took to the battle field. This is to say that it is important to remember the time frame during which this confrontation took place. This was the time of the Cold War as well as at the height of the liberation wars in Southern Africa. Apartheid was under heavy attack. For all parties, the propaganda value of discourse about the conflict, should not be underestimated.

Then came the consequences of post-1988. Namibia became independent, Cuba withdrew from Angola, the Cold War ended, SA democratized and Jonas Savimbi was assassinated. The Angolan civil war only ended fourteen years later in 2002 long after South African withdrawal and Namibian independence. By that time the Soviet Union had collapsed and Washington normalized relations with Luanda. US companies became major beneficiaries of oil exploration in the Cabinda province of Angola.

1.3) Research methodology

This study takes the form of a purely qualitative study as it makes use of secondary material to firstly describe and analyse the issue of South Africa's regional policies towards its neighbouring states during the apartheid era. Secondary sources were reinterpreted as no empirical research was done. It uses existing materials, old and new, on how the confrontation unfolded. It tries to assess what had happened at Cuito Cuanavale and why the discrepancies about the event and its consequences.

Academic sources such as realist, liberalist and neo-Marxist approaches were used for the sake of a better balance. Although no war veterans were interviewed for the purpose of this thesis, the accounts of certain role-players and even former actors (mostly close to the SADF like Magnus Malan, Jannie Geldenhuys and Jan Breytenbach) were used. Crocker, Maier, Bridgeland, Heitman and Steenkamp were used. These resources were invaluable. The *New African's* version (April 2008) of Castro's role in Africa was fascinating, but offered very little additional information.

Finally, even though this study relies heavily on the use of secondary sources, the authenticity of research done on this topic since the end of the Angolan conflict, have been problematic due to the fact that South Africa initially denied that it was involved in the conflict. As implied above, the objectivity of sources is another problem that was encountered, as few if any of these observers or witnesses were present when the battle of Cuito Cuanavale took place. Cuban sources were published in Spanish, and generally not available in South Africa. Afrikaans sources (e.g. Jannie Geldenhuys' first book) were not accessible overseas. However, with the passage of time more authoritative research had been published, together with autobiographies of actual roleplayers against which earlier rival claims and/or denials could be compared. In the end, the final assessment is ours.

Chapter 2

2) South Africa's Regional Policies During the 1970s and 1980s

2.1) Protecting Western interests in sub-Saharan Africa

South Africa's regional policies seemed to have been mainly about tactics to protect white minority rule in Namibia and South Africa, while defending Western interests. During the 1980s, however, these policies became increasingly linked to internal problems. By the late 1970s, and P.W Botha as new Prime Minister, SA adopted a total strategy. Minter (1994) states that this total strategy was a framework of putting together a mix of reforms and repression in both the internal sphere and foreign policy. He states that after SA's first intervention in Angola, the country possessed an enormous military edge over neighbouring states by the 1980s. The implication was that only the Soviets or the Cubans would have the capacity to stand up to the SADF.

During the apartheid era, South Africa was deemed to be the most powerful military state in sub-Saharan Africa. This dominance was seen in view of the state's capacity to mobilize and deploy armed forces as well as the manufacturing of arms. Due to international sanctions and an arms embargo, South Africa became the only state in this region that boasted an indigenous arms industry. In addition, the government and bureaucratic efficacy to "confront perceived external threats and domestic insurgency has been significantly enhanced by the painstaking construction of a sophisticated National Security Management System" (Baynham, 1990:403). South Africa's security apparatus at that stage was founded on two major organizations, the South African Defence Force and the South African Police. Various factors were responsible for this situation. The first of these factors is the collapse of white-ruled buffer states to the north of SA, especially in Angola and Mozambique in 1974/75 and Zimbabwe in 1980. The second factor was the increased international pressure for an arms embargo on SA. The third was due to the increased internal security dilemma's following Sharpeville in 1960 and Soweto in 1976. The fourth was the escalation of violence and counter-insurgency in Namibia and Angola (Baynham, 1990:404).

The growth of defence-orientated research and the rise of the country's military-industrial complex served as evidence of SA's ever expanding military establishment. It could therefore play regional roles if it wished to do so. Since 1977, SA became self-sufficient in the production of weapons, which became a top priority for the government. SA had also developed an uranium enrichment facility, which gave the country the potential to produce

nuclear weapons. According to Baynham (1990), the “evolution, expansion and rationalization of the national security apparatus in the 1970s and 1980s undoubtedly enhanced not only the public profile but also the political influence of the armed services” (Baynham, 1990:405-406).

South Africa became a strong pariah (Geldenhuys, 1987). What made South Africa noticeably different from other pariah states of the time, such as Taiwan, Israel and Chile, is the fact that the country had a much larger and stronger segment of the population that favoured isolation. This isolation has made South Africa much more self-sufficient in the military area. Even though the South African local arms industry had reached a certain degree of sophistication during that time, the “manufacture of some vital modern armaments [still remained] beyond South Africa’s technological or financial capabilities” (Geldenhuys, 1987:35).

For a long period of time the SA government publicly refused to admit to the obvious link that existed between the country’s internal policies and its external isolation. Now, as Geldenhuys stated in 1987, the SA government apparently accepted that the only way to stop isolation was to encourage domestic political change. The growing mood of white South Africans was, as could have been expected, very defiant. With increasing international pressure, white South Africans were also increasingly resistant to foreign interference, given the “dubious motives of many of the foreign advocates of sanctions” (Geldenhuys, 1987:36).

According to Deon Geldenhuys (1989), during apartheid, white South Africans made no distinction between the struggle against this regime and an offensive against them as whites. As a result, white South Africans had the perception that a hostile external world in collaboration with the ANC seeks their destruction.

But Booth and Vale (1995) argue, that even though this state had all this regional power, the country’s ruling elite felt increasingly insecure. The authors argue that this insecurity was not as a result of a shortage of material power, but that it was due to apartheid. In addition, SA’s ruling whites increasingly saw their country to be an ‘embattled bastion of Western civilization’ within the Cold War narrative, which is why security became such an important factor. For Booth and Vale (1995), it was this myth that shaped and encouraged views, which led to SA’s military to become the pivotal actor in policy-making during the 1980s. They also contended that it was these security myths that led to SA’s strategy of ‘destabilization’. This was a policy determined to pressurize and even punish those African states sympathetic to

SWAPO and the ANC. These became the main challenges of the remaining white ruled governments in Southern Africa. What happened in Angola became pivotal for the maintenance of the status quo in the region. For South Africa this conflict lasted from 1974 to 1988.

The international background against which the conflicts of this period is set, is one where the USA is considered the leader in the West and the Soviet Union the leader in the East. According to McGowan & Nel (2002) this was an era of ideological, economic, political and diplomatic confrontation between the USA and its allies on the one side and the USSR and its allies on the other. Jannie Geldenhuys (2007) also states that during the 1960s and 1970s it was very popular for superpowers to take sides and become involved in regional- and local conflicts. Superpowers then also attracted their allies to become involved.

During the Cold War, Africa was of minor importance to the competing superpowers. But by the mid-1970s, the growth of the Soviet bloc's influence in Africa had become a major threat to the West. The USSR's influence in Africa grew due to the increasing number of independent states sympathetic to Moscow. Bipolarity meant that enemies were now directly engaged in all conflicts around the world. The USA became directly involved in the defence of Western interests in Africa and battled Soviet influence in, among other regions, the Congo (McGowan & Nel, 2002:200-201). The USSR however, were more interested in an African country's strategic importance than its socialist credentials, which meant that African states now had the power to play the superpowers off against one another.

From the mid-1970s onwards, Africa was drawn directly into this bipolar military competition as both the USSR and China's influence increased in strategically important regions. One of the areas where this conflict was most intense, was Southern Africa "where Western enthusiasm for political decolonisation stopped short of concerted efforts to bring democracy to countries under Portuguese colonial and white settler minority rule" (McGowan & Nel, 2002:202). As McGowan and Nel state, the sustained occupation of Angola and Mozambique by Portugal was deemed as being a safeguard against nationalist attacks on white minority rule in South Africa. South Africa was in turn seen as offering protection to Western investments. However, as Soviet support for certain liberation movements intensified, South Africa transformed itself into a 'bastion' against communism. This was notably the case after Ethiopia 'fell' to the Soviet Union in 1977 and Britain and the US acquired conservative governments in 1979 and 1980 under Thatcher and Reagan respectively.

Rich (1992) states that the southern African region in particular has never been on the USA's priority list until the advent of these strategic concerns. The increase in regional focus during the 1980s forced the USA to notice the role of the Frontline States in Southern Africa. The Frontline States was a 'defense alliance' driven by Tanzania and Zambia aimed at the ending of colonial and white rule in Portuguese territories as well as Rhodesia and South West Africa. In this context, South Africa was willing to defend the West.

Due to the Soviet Union's previous failures in post-colonial Africa, it was in dire need of a success story and Angola could possibly be the perfect opportunity (McGowan & Nel, 2002:202). In 1975 however, resulting from pressure by the OAU and its chairman president Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Angola's three nationalist leaders and Portugal signed the Alvor Agreement. This agreement recognised FNLA, the MPLA and UNITA as "the sole legitimate representatives of the people of Angola [and set] 11 November 1975 as independence day" (Barber & Barratt, 1990:187). This agreement, as well as another attempt at reconciliation, failed and the civil war erupted.

The policy of "constructive engagement" by the United States' Reagan administration during the early 1980s emphasized the maintenance of economic links with SA in order to encourage the government to "move towards progressive internal political reform" (Rich, 1992:53). For the USA, SA was still deemed as the bastion of anti-communism against the expansionist Soviet Union that was still interested in building on its influence it had already secured with the Marxist-inclined governments in Mozambique and Angola.

2.2) The collapse of the white cordon sanitaire after 1974

According to Sole (1994), South Africa's foreign policy has traditionally been formulated by the country's prime minister or president and the foreign minister. Parliament had no role in these foreign policy formulations and it was limited to a small number of individuals or elite. Occasionally, certain departments within the South African government such as defence and information "sought to conduct their own foreign policy independently of the foreign minister" (Sole, 1994:104). Sole argues that in each such case the consequences were disastrous. With the election success of D.F Malan's National Party in 1948, the party's primary objective was the consolidation and strengthening of Afrikaner dominance within the government. In order to achieve this, both domestic legislation and foreign policy

considerations were altered accordingly. The government's greatest fear was that the Afrikaner population might become 'swamped' and therefore immigration was curtailed and South West Africa became a *de facto* part of SA (Sole, 1994:106).

When Rhodesia declared its independence from Great Britain in 1965, Prime Minister Verwoerd decided that SA's stance towards this would be entirely neutral and that normal relations with all the parties concerned would still be retained. Verwoerd argued "as South Africa was itself threatened by sanctions, it could not be a party to sanctions imposed by others on a third country" (Sole, 1994:109). In 1966 B.J Vorster became prime minister and several changes were made to the country's foreign policy. One of the most significant policy changes was the assumption that SA's future could no longer be detached from the rest of Africa. The new assumption under Vorster implied that the concept of SA being a bastion of Western Christian civilization that is separate and different from the rest of Africa, would be abandoned, although it was never publicly admitted. In its place, came the idea of 'outward movement' which was and "attempt to establish good relations with the neighbouring black states in Southern Africa, making use of Pretoria's power and largesse to promote this relationship" (Sole, 1994:109). According to Sole (1994) these states consisted of an inner core, comprised of independent former High Commission Territories and the newly independent homelands. The outer core consisted of Malawi, Zambia, Rhodesia as well as Angola and Mozambique.

Dialogue between these states and SA extended to the UN and also led to negotiations on the South West Africa issue. However, negotiations and the hope to reach agreements failed due to numerous factors. During this time there was an upsurge of Black Nationalism in South West Africa. The strength of guerrilla fighters in Zimbabwe was on the increase. SA also experienced the re-emergence of Black Nationalism and fears of Soviet penetration in Africa were rising. In 1974 the final blow came in the form of the revolution in Lisbon, which brought the end of the Portuguese colonial empire in Africa.

SA's own security was now under threat and foreign policy from 1974 onwards focused mainly on the survival of white SA (Sole, 1994:110). Sole states that amidst these occurrences, Vorster still sought to promote a policy of *détente* mainly against the Marxist regime that had taken over power in Mozambique. In addition he also collaborated with US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in order to reach a settlement in Rhodesia. In principle, Vorster also accepted a constitutional conference in Geneva, which had as its goal Namibia's

independence by 31 December 1978. This proposal however, was rejected by both SWAPO and the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance.

One of the most important factors responsible in ruining these efforts was the situation in Angola and SA's involvement therein. In 1975, then minister of defence P.W Botha pressurized the prime minister to send troops to Angola in aid of Jonas Savimbi's UNITA movement. But SA's armoured column "was halted 200 kilometres from Luanda and was forced to withdraw as a result of massive Cuban reinforcements and the termination of US support for UNITA" (Sole, 1994:110). From 1975 onwards, SA's biggest concern was the possibility of Cuban forces crossing the border into Namibia and heading towards Windhoek in order to liberate the country from SA oppression. Sole argues that this was the moment that the concept of a 'total onslaught' began emerging and that the military now began to play a much more prominent role in determining foreign policy. The military's position was strengthened by the Soweto riots in 1976 as well as the UN arms embargo against the country in 1977 (Sole, 1994:111) .

Pacheco (1989) argues that with the fall of the Caetano regime in Portugal in 1974, SA was rid of both an ally and buffer when independence came for Mozambique and Angola. With these new states' independence came two black-ruled states within close proximity of SA. At this time, SA was engaged in a détente initiative brought on by Prime Minister Vorster. This new diplomatic/political initiative's objective was rather vaguely defined. According to Davies & O'Meara, the intention was to draw "the states of Southern Africa [into] a constellation of completely independent states which would form a strong bloc and present a united front against common enemies" (Davies & O'Meara, 1985:188).

On 23 October 1974 Prime Minister Vorster delivered his benchmark speech to the Senate in which he stated that SA was standing at a crossroad in this point in time between peace on the one side and an escalation of discord on the other. He stated that there was an alternative to the oncoming chaos through the means of the "normalizing of relations, the way of sound understanding and normal association". Three days later, on 26 October 1974, President Kaunda of Zambia was the first to react positively on the possibility of détente in Southern Africa. According to President Kaunda, a black victory in Rhodesia was inevitable. He also stated that there was no external threat to South African security and therefore there is no basis for the South African government to choose the option of conflict. The Prime Minister's crossroads speech, President Kaunda's positive reaction towards it, and Ian Smith's

willingness to cooperate eventually made détente in Southern Africa possible. The détente initiative crumbled however due to the collapse of the joint South African-Zambian settlement initiative for Rhodesia as well as SA's first intervention in Angola in 1975-76. In 1976 the Soweto riots also took place, refocusing international and African attention on South Africa's internal policies.

Pacheco (1989) states that there was little doubt that SA was facing a dramatic increase of conflict both internally and at its borders, which led to an intense program of weapons development. SA's military ascendancy was underpinned firstly by what came to be known as 'a total strategy' and then the well-known 'Total National Strategy' during Prime Minister P.W Botha's time in office. Regional policies during this time underwent numerous restructurings. Firstly, Vorster's vague notion of a constellation of states became substantially developed "and was now defined as the ultimate objective of regional strategy" (Davies & O'Meara, 1985:189). The urge to bring about such a constellation was now stronger than ever, due to the deteriorating situation for SA's apartheid government as well as the country's worsening relations with major Western Powers. As a result, SA deemed it necessary to generate a counter ideology to that of Marxism in the Southern African region. The SA Defence Force, rather than the Department of Foreign Affairs, became the major role-player in the foreign policy decision-making process, especially on Africa. This was initially not well coordinated.

This lack of coordination was evident during SA's first intervention in Angola in 1975-1976. Prior to the intervention, SA's security mechanism was characterised by several ad hoc decisions, intense competition between the different security levels as well as disagreements among ministers about whether or not SA had to get involved beyond their border. This intervention took place in secrecy. A foreign journalist, Fred Bridgeland, scooped this news. After the Soweto uprising of 1976, increasing numbers of scholars and students joined the liberation struggle and it became apparent that SA had no other choice than to get involved in a long tiresome war against insurgents from across the border. Thus, the development of a national security plan was seen as a very important priority.

In 1977 SA's Department of Defence published a white paper, which stated that SA faced a total onslaught on practically every front, and that revolutionary threats could only be stopped by the adoption of a total strategy. Due to the presence of Cuban troops and Soviet advisors in Angola, SA's security situation in that region of Africa deteriorated rapidly.

During the 1960s and 1970s however, SA was a low priority to the Soviet Union and it only extended its influence into Africa when it didn't hurt strategic goals at home. Angola became independent after the Portuguese withdrawal from Africa in 1974. Power was to be held by the former liberation movements, but by which one was uncertain. Hence, the Cold War rivalry as to who will get the power. The USSR and Cuba supported the MPLA with the USA and South Africa supporting the FNLA and UNITA.

Pacheco (1989) states that by 1977, SA's military objectives, policies and strategic doctrines were more readily defined than ever before. Military objectives were designed to include military and security arrangements with black homelands and neighbouring states under moderate leadership. These strategic doctrines would coincide with military policies and emphasis was put on defence posture, deterrence, counterinsurgency and assistance to civil authorities.

But South Africa's strategy of establishing a buffer zone ran into trouble due to the country's disastrous first intervention in Angola in 1975-1976. Guelke (1980:657) argues that Angola specifically posed a serious problem to SA, as it was not economically dependent on SA, "yet it occupied a strategically important position on the border with South West Africa". Evidently, SA was in need of a forthcoming government in Angola, as it would ease the transition problems in South West Africa.

These interventions came either in the form of destabilization by the South African government or due to the Frontline States' support for liberation movements. With the signing of the 1984 Nkomati Accord between SA and Mozambique, attention was immediately shifted towards SA's regional policy objectives and strategies (Davies and O'Meara, 1985). This had regional as well as international implications. SA viewed linkages with its neighbours as the only way to break loose of international isolation.

Davies and O'Meara (1985) argue that two major approaches described SA's regional policies during the 1980s. The first one is that of "destabilizing" policies or the country's "destabilizing strategies" towards the region. This approach contends that SA's entire regional policy was based on the infliction of maximum material damage to regional states' economies. This was seen as being a prelude to undermine the political system and eventually overthrowing their governments. According to the authors, this approach failed to recognize

that this strategy was designed to create networks of regional economic and social relationships with the neighbouring states since 1978. This was done in order to make these states realize that it would be in their best interests to collaborate with SA.

The other approach discusses SA's regional policies in terms of the conflicts that existed between the hawks within the government and the more diplomatic tactics that was favoured by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Flowing out of these two arguments is the view that the Nkomati Accord was a defeat for the militarists on the one hand, and a defeat for SA's so-called "destabilizing strategy" on the other. Although Davies and O'Meara (1985) also deem SA as being a very prominent and even an aggressor within the region since 1975, "the various military, economic and other disincentives commonly labelled 'destabilization', can in no sense be elevated to the status of either objectives or a strategy" (Davies & O'Meara, 1985:184). The authors stress the fact that, together with other measures, these have to be viewed as specific tactical options within a much broader strategy. They argue that "destabilization" has never been a first option for SA, as the adoption of a particular tactic has depended on various factors. One of the most important factors has been the "rhythm of struggles at the regional level and the pattern of internal relations within the target state(s)" (Davies & O'Meara, 1985:185).

Thus, as Davies and O'Meara (1985) argued, one of SA's most enduring objectives with regards to their regional policies, has been to ensure that these subordinate countries continue to serve SA's capitalism in this way.

2.3) The Frontline States and South Africa's total national strategy

According to W.J. Breytenbach (1995) the two driving forces that led to the establishment of competing alliances in southern Africa, was colonialism and apartheid. The two sets of competing alliances were deemed a 'black bloc' and a 'white bloc'. The 'white bloc' consisted of SA, Portugal and Rhodesia, which acted as allies in international relations prior to 1974. This bloc's initiatives were however, regularly opposed by the UN, the OAU, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth as well as individual states such as the USSR, mainland China, Cuba and India. The OAU had power over a Liberation Committee, but apart from this "the coordination of the anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles in the region lacked institutional capacity for the purposes needed by this 'liberation alliance'" (Breytenbach, 1995:1).

The Frontline States' struggle was protected by the OAU's Dar es Salaam Declaration in 1975. From that point on the frontline states were recognised as an ad-hoc committee of the OAU, which acted as a 'defence alliance' against external aggression. There was much rhetoric in both the white and black blocs, but the 'white bloc's' actions went further as it found "its strongest normative expression in Prime Minister P.W Botha's concept of a 'constellation of states', as a part of his 'total national strategy'" (Breytenbach, 1995:2).

Breytenbach stated that the independence of Zimbabwe as well as the "success of the liberation movements in Zimbabwe's first elections, [heralded] the high point in the history of the FLS" (Breytenbach, 1995:2). One outcome was that the independence of Namibia in 1990 took place within the context of the war in Angola. On this matter, Namibia's independence was settled by mechanisms in which the FLS played no major persuasive or activist role. In Angola, Vale (1991) argues SA used its custodianship over Namibia to support UNITA in a civil war against the MPLA government, which was supported by Cuba. In 1988 however, Vale argues that the balance of power on the subcontinent slipped out of SA's military reach after the setback at the battle for Cuito Cuanavale. Due to Cuban air superiority and sounder military tactics, the SA troops eventually retreated while their general role in the region was beginning to be increasingly questioned back in SA.

2.4) Angola – where it all came together

Bender (1983) argues that with Angola's independence in 1975, the right to self-determination became one step closer to Namibia while it became increasingly unsure for South Africa. He states that the civil war that broke out immediately after independence was more than just an internal affair as it attracted extensive intervention from numerous sources during the Cold War, in addition to marking a decisive turning point in relations between the West and East. The newly independent Angola continued to be a "focus of East-West strategic manoeuvring and a vital link in the struggle for and negotiations over the independence of neighbouring Namibia" (Bender, 1983:4).

During the Angolan civil war after 1974, the South African government needed control in strategic countries like South West Africa to neutralize the ANC, which had training camps in countries all over Southern Africa as well as to prevent the introduction of Communist regimes in Angola and Namibia. These training camps were the basis from which the ANC

trained their members to fight the Apartheid regime from outside the country with the help of Cuba, the Soviet Union, etc (Minter, 1994).

SA's strategy towards Angola incorporated attacks on SWAPO camps in southern Angola, assisting UNITA financially and logistically (as an alternative to the Soviet-supported MPLA), sabotaging economic targets and the bombing, invasion and occupation of strategic parts of southern Angola (Bender, 1983:10). Many scholars held the belief that a continued South African presence in Angola would have postponed Namibian independence as well as Angolan rapprochement.

Even though the Cold War ended in 1989, the Angolan civil war lasted until Jonas Savimbi's death in 2002. Namibia eventually gained independence in 1990, but it was the battle of Cuito Cuanavale in 1987/88 that proved to be the defining moment in the war in Angola. According to Barber & Barratt (1990), SA's goal of turning Angola into a non-hostile, cooperative state had nothing but devastating effects on both the country and the region as such. As (Hare, 2005) states, it resulted in Angola becoming the place where the apartheid government clashed with SWAPO and the ANC as the entire Southern African region was seen as fighting against communist hegemony.

Baynham (1990) states that an important factor to remember is the fact that as SA rationalized the expansion of its national security apparatus during the 1970s and 1980s, so too did the political influence of the armed services. This period was also characterized by cleavages existing between the Department of Foreign Affairs and the SADF, but particularly the Army. Due to the fact that SA's ruling whites increasingly saw their country to be an 'embattled bastion of Western civilization', security now became a major factor in determining foreign relations. This myth, as Booth & Vale (1995) state, is what shaped and encouraged views which led to SA's military to become the pivotal actor in policy-making during the 1980s.

That all came together in Angola: the near capture of Luanda by the SADF in 1975; the resistance of Cubans; the humiliation of Fapla forces by the SADF in 1987; the thwarted SADF attacks on Menogue and Cuito and the "Tumpo triangle" in 1988. Then the sudden withdrawal to the southwest at Kunene.

Chapter 3

3) The South African Interventions in Angola

3.1) The first intervention in 1975/76

3.1.1) Cuba and South Africa: the first clashes

SA's first intervention of Angola seems to have resulted from the need to secure and protect its own interests. The government was severely anti-communist at this time, as the notion of the 'total national strategy' against the 'total onslaught' of communism became the all-encompassing factor that determined foreign policy. SA's détente politics toward Africa at this time was pursued rather successfully prior to the Angolan intervention in order to establish buffer zones, which would hopefully protect SA from the increasing communist threat. In addition, SA was becoming increasingly worried about this possible threat as the USSR and Cuba were enlarging their support to the MPLA after the coup in Portugal in 1974. The concentration of SWAPO insurgents on the southern Angola border furthermore endangered SA's interests in SWA, as SWAPO was one of the MPLA's biggest African allies. Both the MPLA and SWAPO were seen as Soviet proxies during the Cold War.

South Africa was however, not the only African state concerned about the escalating communist threat in Angola. States such as Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Zambia and Zaire were all very much concerned that if the MPLA government came to power in Angola, it would endanger them as well. In addition, SA was pressured by some in the international community to get involved in Angola for the first time. The USA, like SA, was also strongly anti-communist and supported SA's initial involvement to some extent. France also had concerns. SA also saw its limited initial involvement as an opportunity to establish a less hostile government in Angola, than what was already established in Mozambique. The FNLA, UNITA and several African and international actors such as Zaire and even Zambia made similar requests. South Africa decided that it would be in its own as well as the region's best interest to intervene in the Angolan conflict.

On 1 April 1973 the protection of the border area in northern SWA was taken over by the SA Army from a small anti-terrorist unit of the SA police. This arrangement came after increasing tension that was created due to SWAPO attacks on the Angolan/SWA border. Magnus Malan (2006) points out that after the coup in 1974, the three liberation movements in Angola had no aspiration of working together and that an interim government of national unity did not seem likely. South Africa thus became entangled in the political events of

Angola due to its geographic proximity and its mandate to defend over SWA. In January 1975, after only a few months in office as the President of the new Portuguese Republic, General Antonio de Spínola was succeeded by Gen. Francisco da Costa Gomes, who arranged for the MPLA, FNLA and UNITA to meet with the Portuguese government in Alvor. This meeting's goal was to sign an agreement which stipulated that these three liberation movements would be the only legal representatives of the Angolan people and that independence would be on 11 November 1975. The agreement also indicated that the Portuguese forces would begin to withdraw on 1 October 1975. The Alvor agreement hoped to put an end to the ongoing struggle between Portugal and these three Angolan factions, but in reality a civil war broke out and the interim coalition government fragmented (Malan, 2006:111-112).

Magnus Malan states that he himself knew that the SA government would have to do something at that time as instability at the border areas, as well as hostile attacks on the border, were increasing. He states that for foreign powers Angola became a very attractive area, due to its oilfields and diamond fields, in which to become involved in. The MPLA was supported by the USSR, Cuba as well as numerous other Eastern-bloc and communist countries, while at that stage the FNLA and UNITA received only sympathy and hardly any support from Western powers.

There are still discrepancies about the exact time Cuba became involved in Angola, but Malan states that the Portuguese Admiral Antonio Rosa Coutinho met Castro in Havana in 1974 during a secret mission to Cuba. During his visit to Castro it is reported that Coutinho encouraged Cuba to become involved in Angola and provide the MPLA with Cuban troops. This happened with "Operation Carlotta" in October 1975. The first clashes took place at the Kwanza River, south of Luanda, when 36 000 Cuban troops defended the MPLA. The American Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs seemed to have been of the same mind and stated that large-scale communist aid to Angola started in 1974 already. In February 1975 the first Russian personnel arrived in Angola, followed by Cuban forces in August of the same year (Malan, 2006:113), and then the first clashes in October.

South Africa's military involvement, therefore, as Magnus Malan states, followed Soviet-Cuban involvement in the area. South Africa became involuntarily involved in Angolan matters due to increased tension on the SWA/Angolan border. This tension was due to the fact that some of the Angolan liberation movements tried to force Ovambos, living on either side of the border, in joining them and this led to SA's interest at the Calueque dam, on the

Kunene River, becoming endangered. Angolans were increasingly harassing and intimidating Calueque workers, which made some of them flee their posts. They would only return to their posts if the SADF could guarantee their safety. The SA government realized that a crisis was approaching and therefore its decision to protect its interests at Calueque was in no way unexpected or unanticipated (Malan, 2006:114-115).

However, as this hydroelectric scheme was a joint venture between SA and Portugal, Portugal requested that SA take over complete control of the mission to protect Calueque until they could do it themselves. Magnus Malan states that this take-over from the Portuguese never happened and that they informed SA that, due to its coming withdrawal from Angola on 11 November 1975, Portugal could not contribute to protecting Calueque whatsoever. In the meantime, the MPLA's communist support was expanding and the fear of a communist take-over in Angola increased. The concern of anti-communist orientated African states, such as Gabon, the Ivory Coast, Kenya, Zambia and Zaire, was increasing as well. Thus, in order to aid internal stability in Angola, SA made contact with UNITA and FNLA by means of the SADF and the Bureau for State Security (Malan, 2006:116-117). Then the first intervention and clashes with Cubans took place.

According to Hallett (1978) SA's first intervention into Angola in 1975-76 was tainted by vagueness, censorship and deliberate governmental denials. For the first time in its history, the South African army had to fight in an African war. Political discussions during the period between October 1975 and March 1976 were dominated by the debate about SA's policy in Angola. Angola was of strategic importance to SA according to Hallett, as it possessed oil, diamonds, coffee plantations and other mineral and agricultural resources. For SA, a friendly and affluent Angola would be an advantage. In addition, and perhaps most important, was Angola's border with South West Africa, SA's most vulnerable domain. More specific reasons for SA's interest in Angola were the engineering scheme established by the SA and Portuguese governments in order to harness the waters of the Cunene River. This engineering scheme would make it possible to greatly increase the "supply of electricity through the construction of a hydro-electric generating station" (Hallett, 1978:350).

Apart from African countries, there were several 'free world' powers that were interested in putting checks on the MPLA. The USA seems an obvious actor, but France was by this time becoming more and more involved as well. France developed an interest in Cabinda and dispatched arms and mercenaries in aid of FNLA and UNITA. South Africa, which had suffered diplomatic isolation for some time by now, found itself in the unusual position "as

pursuing the same objectives as at least two...African states, the United States and France” (Hallett, 1978:363). But this alone does not suffice to explain SA’s final decision to intervene in Angola. The SA Nationalist government’s heavy stance against communism acts as one explanation. For SA, as for Cuba, the decision to become involved in the Angolan civil war was the result of a slowly escalating process. This transition of this process from one stage to another, which can become very difficult for an outsider to mark and date, include advisors being sent out to train combatants, advisors taking on a combat role themselves, the establishment of small specialized support units and eventually larger units of the regular army establishing a presence (Hallett, 1978:365).

SA’s decision to become more deeply involved in Angola was thus not without risks as it ran counter to Vorster’s policy of *détente*, which was successfully pursued two years prior. Hallett states that SA’s first Angolan intervention passed through several stages between July and October 1975. First, SA pursued hot pursuit operations against SWAPO, which was followed by efforts to protect the hydro-electric scheme at Ruacana and Calueque. In September 1975 military advisors were dispatched, followed by armoured cars to assist UNITA. Then, in mid-October hot pursuit operations were reported again and “the decision was taken to launch a newly formed striking force” (Hallett, 1978:367-368). The SA government succeeded in preventing reports of involvement reaching the public by invoking the Defence Act, as was the case with the secret meetings between the Prime Minister and his closest confidants when the initial decision for deeper involvement were undertaken. In addition to the public being kept in the dark about this initial decision, so too was the Cabinet, Caucus and Parliament (Hallett, 1978:366-370).

After the port city of Lobito came under SADF control, combat group ‘Zulu’ waited for four days “in anticipation of possible orders...to retreat” (Hallett, 1978:370). It appears as if SA’s initial plans were to withdraw their troops immediately after independence on 11 November, but according to reports Savimbi flew to Pretoria on 10 November 1975 to meet with Vorster and implored him to keep the South African troops in Angola until December. This was to be the date for the summit meeting of the OAU in Addis Ababa. According to Savimbi, moderate African leaders were all in favour of the anti-Soviet forces maintaining their presence in the field at least until a vote had been taken on Angola by the OAU at that meeting. This was in fact the case, as the liaison maintained between the Bureau of State Security and black African leaders “was producing appeals for the South Africans to hang on in Angola” (Hallett, 1978:370). In addition, the USA was also encouraging SA’s continued effort in Angola.

By late 1975, the SADF made great advances to the north of Angola and the MPLA came under huge pressure from both this advancement from the south as well as FNLA, which had occupied several positions to the north-east of Luanda. In November however, the MPLA received much needed aid in the form of very large numbers of Cuban soldiers. This was the Cuban “Operation Carlotta” of October 1975 when, first, 480 Cuban instructors arrived, followed by 36 000 troops (Ankomah, 2008:15). According to Maier (1996:16), Carlotta stopped Savannah, the SADF Operation at that time. It was also suggested that the reason for increased Soviet and Cuban aid was in response to the South African invasion (Hallett, 1978:371). Some scholars however, would suggest the exact opposite. Media reports at that stage stated that if the SADF were to launch an attack on the capital city of Luanda, the war could be dragged out into a bloody siege. Savimbi too was aware of the dangers involving an attack on Luanda and reportedly had no desire to capture the city. Hallett, however, states that due to their previous successes and the fact that they were moving north without any obstruction, the SADF’s “temptation to strike for the capital seems to have been very great” (Hallett, 1978:372).

According to Van Wyk, SA got involved in Angola with limited goals or intentions. The first intention was to protect the SA-Portuguese hydroelectric project at the Ruacana/Caleque dam, which provided water to the Ovambo region. The second intention was to aid FNLA and UNITA in preparing them to take power in an independent Angola. He states that SA’s goal was never to conquer or occupy Angola or even a part of the country. By November 1975 France and the USA became fearful of the MPLA’s unilateral declaration of an independent Angola and therefore they both asked SA to ‘achieve success in Luanda’. This request by France and the USA made it look as if SA wanted to occupy Luanda. Consequently, France delivered arms and military vehicles in Kinshasa. The support from developed countries however dried up in January 1976 as French, British and Belgian governments requested that the international involvement in Angola to stop. As a result, US monetary aid came to an end and that together with the worldwide condemnation of the SADF led to the SADF turning around and withdrawing troops shortly before they were to reach Luanda (Van Wyk, 2008:26-27). The question still lingers: were the SADF winning against the Cubans, stopped, or defeated?

These assertions by Van Wyk and Hallett are problematical as the then Minister of Defence, P.W Botha, stated that the “South Africans could have gone on to Luanda, but that the US government had ‘pleaded’ with Pretoria not to do so” in his address to parliament on 6 May 1976 (Hallett, 1978:372). According to the SA government, South Africa was not

willing to fight alone on behalf of the free world in order to eradicate communism from Southern Africa and Botha himself stated that he would like the free world to show more direct interest in this common goal. However, even though SA could not count on effective Western support at this stage, the Nationalist government was confident. It has to be noted too that the nature of the conflict in Angola was undergoing a rapid change as well. No longer could it be viewed as a bush war, as it was becoming “a sort of conventional war of rapidly moving vehicle columns, artillery and projectiles [which required] know-how, leadership and planning” (Hallett, 1978:373). This was needed on a level, which was not readily available among the black populations of Angola.

FNLA’s leader Holden Roberto however, had an ambitious plan to attack Luanda on 9 November 1975 and independently asked the SA government to help in achieving this. Magnus Malan states that even though the SA Army rejected this request, the government approved it. FNLA’s initial plan for attacking Luanda from the north showed many military errors as this position gave the attackers no cover from counter-attacks, while those defending Luanda would enjoy a much more covered area. The SA Army warned Roberto of this crucial miscalculation and offered to be of assistance, but all this came to no avail. As a result, the FAPLA/Cuban forces defeated FNLA convincingly in 1975. Then the SADF entered in a big way. This event made headlines and stated that the SADF was so close to Luanda that ‘they could see the city lights’, but that Pretoria had ordered them to withdraw. Magnus Malan wants to correct this statement and says that even though it is true that the forces that aided FNLA in the north were in fact very close to Luanda, this incident did not involve any of the other task forces from the south. Task force Zulu never had any orders to move that far north. Therefore the incident on 9 November 1975 should be viewed as an isolated incident and that it was never part of the SADF’s goals in Angola (Malan, 2006:127-129).

Earlier in August 1975 it became apparent that the MPLA desired to rule Angola alone, as clashes between the MPLA’s military wing FAPLA and FNLA in Luanda intensified. The MPLA’s strategy was to control Angola’s ports and airports in order to cut off FNLA and UNITA from the outside world. States in central Africa, like Zambia and Zaire who relied heavily on the Benguela railway line that linked the port of Lobito to the Zambian copper belt, began fearing that the MPLA and SWAPO would obstruct goods being transported along this line and turned to SA in order to prevent this from happening (Malan, 2006:117). For SA to make any decision about military involvement in Angola, they had to take SWAPO’s attack from within Angola as well as the Cubans move south into consideration. FNLA and UNITA’s main requirements were that of weaponry and training the handling thereof. This

made SA become much deeper involved as aid was given by means of training, logistics as well as in the provision of key leadership fundamentals to the liberation movements (Malan, 2006:118).

However, as FAPLA and its Cuban supporters continued moving south, the possibility of a hostile state on the northern border of SWA looked very real. SA knew that if this were to happen SWAPO would gain immense support and momentum. It was at this stage, that Malan states that the USA urged SA to become involved in a anti-communist offensive in Angola. Zambia and Zaire supported this initiative, as they became increasingly aware of SA's stance against communism and the danger this ideology held for Africa as a whole. It was expected by many that the OAU's summit in December 1975 would deliver an acceptable solution to the Angolan situation. As no agreement could be reached on Angola at the summit, the SADF's top leadership realized that something had to be done in order to stop the rapid communist threat. The SADF could however not take this decision alone and waited on the SA government to make the decision (Malan, 2006:119).

What is Malan's position? According to Magnus Malan, Operation Savannah was launched due to the following: firstly, the SADF intervened in Angola only to protect SA's interests as increased external intervention in Angola have endangered those interests, secondly, the SADF had to support FNLA and UNITA in such a way as to not hamper SA's détente-politics in any way. Malan, as the Head of the SA Army at that stage, was informed by the Head of the SADF that SA was in no way interested in territorial expansion at all. The SA Army's task force Zulu entered Angola on 14 October 1975 and Operation Savannah officially began, then the clashes with Cuban troops took place. Malan makes it very clear and reiterates time and time again that this task force was not an occupying force, as it neither received any orders to occupy any part of the country nor to head to Luanda (Malan, 2006:121-123).

Steenkamp (1989) however states that Operation Savannah was not, as many people thought at the time, a carefully planned military decision. At this time Prime Minister Vorster was heavily influenced by Lieutenant-General Hendrik van den Berg, Head of the Bureau for State Security, who tried to convince Vorster that deeper SADF involvement into Angola was not necessary. On the other end of the spectrum there was Defence Minister PW Botha, who was very supportive of a decision to deploy the SADF beyond the borders in order to contain the insurgency (Steenkamp, 1989:43).

Influenced by numerous international incidents that were taking place at the time, South Africa eventually decided to withdraw from Angola in late 1975. The USA was in the middle of dealing with the Watergate scandal. President Nixon's credibility dwindled, as did American support for anti-communist countries and groups in Africa. With Nixon's resignation, the US Senate adopted the Clark amendment on 19 December 1975, which stipulated that from 19 January 1976 no further covert aid would be supplied by the CIA to support FNLA and UNITA. With the end of US support, the international media began to criticize SA's Angolan presence. Whether stopped by Operation Carlotta, or not, for Prime Minister Vorster, withdrawal was now the only option and the SA government agreed to stay on in Angola only until after the second OAU summit in Addis Ababa in January 1976 (Malan, 2006:134), which endorsed the MPLA's position. With this result, SA's cabinet made a final decision to withdraw from Angola on 14 January 1976, with the exception of the Calueque-region. The USA was informed about SA's decision and the OAU speedily recognized the MPLA as Angola's legitimate government and the movement became a OAU member soon after. Needless to say, SA felt betrayed by the USA, as they were encouraged to get involved at first and later left in the lurch when they needed aid to tie up and conclude their Angolan intervention (Malan, 2006:135). Within three weeks of the South African withdrawal from Angola in 1976 all of central and southern Angola's main towns fell to the Cuban and MPLA forces. The FNLA and Unita were thus quickly defeated. In March, Luanda informed and assured Pretoria that their interest at Ruacana/Calueque were safe from any interference. Only now, with this assurance from Luanda was the SA government confident enough to order its troops to withdraw completely into South West African territory (Hallett, 1978:384). At that stage South Africa had much fewer troops in Angola than Cuba.

On 27 March 1976, the SADF's first convoys started to arrive at the Kunene River at Ruacana. Malan recalls how on that day he realized that the SADF and Armscor faced huge challenges in the future as SA's weaponry and vehicles didn't live up to expectations several times during Operation Savannah (Malan, 2006:136). With SA's withdrawal from Angola, the MPLA and its allies speedily filled the vacuum by launching several attacks on the south. SWAPO now also benefited from this new situation as the communist aid that was now flowing into Angola, the MPLA would surely aid its South West African ally who was now in a much better position militarily than ever before (Malan, 2006:140-141). Operation Savannah did however buy FNLA and UNITA enough time to prepare for the renewed communist attacks, according to Malan. These renewed attacks took place during a

heightened communist era and if FAPLA/Cuba/the Soviet Union achieved success in Angola it would have benefited their campaign immensely (Malan, 2006:142). South Africa however, was still their main target as many government officials led the public to believe.

However, Van Wyk states that SA underestimated the power of the neighboring countries' liberation movements. During the early stages of Operation Savannah in 1975, the belief was that the liberation movements could be completely crushed with or without any aid from other actors. This however, was not the case as the war was dragged out for more than two decades, albeit with Cuban support. Thus, SA's involvement escalated from only the provision of arms to military training of troops and own combat. Initially the troops trained by SA lagged behind those of the USSR and Cuba who were much better equipped and trained. It was only after the rest of the world decided not to sponsor SA with sufficient arms that SA decided to produce its own arms and weaponry (Van Wyk, 2008:28).

Hallett (1978) states that even though they won most of their engagements against the Cubans in Angola, SA's first intervention in 1975-1976 was indeed a failure. It failed to prevent an MPLA takeover. He goes on by saying that even if the South Africans did not intervene, the MPLA would still have received sufficient support in order to survive. He states that SA's intervention led to a situation "in which the Cubans and the Russians were forced to build up a really massive presence" (Hallett, 1978:384). In addition, he states that SA also failed to stop the threat presented by SWAPO. During SA's intervention SWAPO suffered from regular attacks by SA, but at the same time it now received much greater international support than before SA's intervention.

Although the "failure" was more political than military, the intervention did prove to be a psychological shock to SA's white public, while it gave renewed hope and encouragement to the country's black youth. One can thus clearly see the parallels that existed between the Angolan intervention and the Soweto uprising in 1976. The Nationalist government cannot however, be accused of acting impulsively by deciding to intervene in Angola as it in part acted on the numerous external powers' requests to get involved. The limited number of troops deployed into Angola also goes to show that it was never SA's intention to occupy Angola. South Africa did however fail due to their assumption and strong belief in the commitment of Western powers. Kissinger's failure to persuade the US Senate to continue the deliverance of aid to Angola, as well as the misjudgment of FNLA and UNITA's strength all led to SA becoming unnecessarily deeper involved in the Angolan conflict (Hallett, 1978:385-386). In time to come the Cubans would boast that they had won.

3.1.2) Unita and South Africa: the new alliance

Both the MPLA and UNITA were regarded as being sympathetic towards SWAPO. FNLA however, did not seem interested in supporting SWAPO. SA had already begun to establish links with FNLA by July 1975. Much later however, ex-FNLA fighters formed the backbone of Col. Jan Breytenbach's 32 Battalion. At the same time rifts started to appear within the transitional government, especially between FNLA and the MPLA who were at this time already receiving aid from opposite external actors. Hallett states that in reality, the liberation movements have been receiving outside aid for nearly a decade from the USSR and the USA. Even though this aid appeared to have been very modest and not without interruptions at first, the USSR supported the MPLA while the USA supported FNLA. Hallett suggested that the increase in Russian arm shipments to the MPLA in 1974 was in response to an increasing Chinese presence in the Third World. In January 1975 the USA provided the CIA with \$300 000 which was to be covertly distributed to FNLA (Hallett, 1978:354-355).

Increased FNLA activity now led to rumours in Luanda about the CIA's increased support for the movement. The Clark Amendment was crucial. At the same time, FNLA troops aided by units of the Zairian army also began attacking MPLA units across the northern border. Deeper Russian involvement now came in the form of notable increases in the shipment of arms. Evidently, with the MPLA receiving considerable military support from the USSR, Cuba and Eastern Europe, and the USA's decision to counter the Russian threat by supporting FNLA and UNITA together with the ever-increasing tension on the border of South West Africa and Angola becomes the background against which SA's first Angolan intervention must be viewed. In February 1976 the SADF withdrew. Unita also suffered setbacks against FAPLA/Cuban forces.

After the resistance offered by the Cubans in Operation Carlotta, and the Americans having passed the Clark Amendment in 1976, South Africa needed new allies for the war against Swapo and the MPLA. An alliance with Unita would suit South African and American interests under Ronald Reagan. By that time the war in Angola was, for most South Africans, a secret war. The government and the defence force communicated little, if anything, about the war. Foreign correspondents wrote what they knew.

In such circumstances, big casualties would be disastrous from a public opinion perspective. Windrich (2008:195) writes that an alliance with Unita would keep losses to the SADF to a

minimum. During those times Unita was still a guerrilla force. But American and South African training and equipment turned it into a conventional army with tanks and missiles by 1979. In central Angola, Unita did most of the fighting against FAPLA and the Cubans who got the upperhand. By 1985 it was beaten. Unita then retreated to Mavingo and Cuito Cuanavale while it established Jamba in southeast Angola as new headquarters. After 1976, South African forces concentrated on Swapo insurgents in northern Namibia, but with Unita under stress, South Africa came to its rescue after 1985. Hence the dual strategy of fighting Swapo on the ground while pursuing deeper cross-border operations into southern Angola. Unita and South Africa were once again allies. This culminated in Cuito Cuanavale in 1988.

3.2) The second interventions since the late 1970s

3.2.1) Operations in northern Namibia (1976-1985)

According to Leopold Scholtz South Africa's border war in northern Namibia became a household name from the sixties to late eighties as "hundreds of thousands of young white men were called up for military service" (Scholtz, 2006:19). They were told that they were fighting to keep the communist threat and SWAPO from spreading to Namibia as well as South Africa. The SADF applied the counter insurgency doctrines of J.J McCuen and Pop Fraser. These doctrines proposed five strategic principles of which the most important in the case of South Africa was to win the "hearts and minds" of the locals, and to get outside support. This principle suggested that SA had to obtain the "political and moral support of neighbouring states [which was] necessary [in order] to counter the external maneuvers of the revolutionaries" (Scholtz, 2006:24). Initially, South Africa did enjoy support from several African states, but its most important and significant support came in the form of the USA as a backer of Unita. As mentioned above, SA and Unita became allies once again. But Unita's weaknesses against FAPLA with its outside support, forced SA to re-engage its adversaries on Angolan soil. Hence many more operations followed, many against SWAPO.

After the coup of 24 April 1974, SWAPO moved its headquarters from Lusaka to Luanda. SA acted on requests to intervene by the USA, Zambia, the Ivory Coast and UNITA. This led to operation Savannah, opposed by the Cubans. When the US withdrew its support, SA decided to withdraw. The withdrawal now led to SWAPO switching its focus from the Caprivi to southern Angola and Ovamboland in 1976. The SADF quickly realized that it was in big trouble, as conscripts at that time were not as well trained as the guerrilla fighters. In addition, Major-General Constand Viljoen's strategy of a "big sweeping operation to clear out SWAPO elements" failed as not one guerrilla was caught (Scholtz, 2006:30).

Swapo insurgency had begun 1966. From 1966 to 1977 the SADF's "kill ratio" was only 4:1 and by the end of 1977 the situation looked bad for the SADF indeed. In January 1976 Major-General Jannie Geldenhuys became Head of the SADF. In his five-year command period several measures were implemented which turned the war into the SADF's favour. Many black battalions were formed by the SADF, including Lieutenant-Colonel Jan Breytenbach's 32 Battalion (Scholtz, 2006:32). SWAPO's rhetoric however, remained Marxist-Leninist and its goal was to convert Namibia into a Marxist one-party state. This, according to Scholtz (2006), was what enabled SA to present the conflict to the liberal outside world as that of a struggle between communist dictatorship and liberal multiparty democracy.

After Operation Savannah from October 1975 to March 1976, several other Operations followed. According to Jannie Geldenhuys (2007), then the Head of the SADF, Operation Savannah was disrupted by Holden Roberto's failed plan to attack Luanda. Others say the setback was Operation Carlotta. On 11 November 1975 Angola celebrated its independence "precisely ten years after Rhodesia's unilateral declaration of independence" (Geldenhuys, 2007:43). The withdrawal of the SADF after this operation came after the US Senate adopted the Clark amendment. No more US aid would be provided to FNLA and UNITA and South Africa decided that they were not going to defend the West's interests alone. Therefore, by the end of March 1976 the last of the SADF's troops involved in Operation Savannah withdrew into SWA. Geldenhuys states that in hindsight it became clear that the picture in Angola might have been very different after this Operation had Roberto not decided to attack Luanda and the USA continued to provide support to FNLA and UNITA. Nothing is mentioned about the Cubans. Leopold Scholtz (2006) states that after the SADF's withdrawal from Angola in 1976, clandestine cross-border attacks on SWAPO bases in southern Angola commenced.

On 27 March 1978 large-scale violence broke out after the assassination of Chief Clemens Kapuuo. He was chief of the Herero tribe, the chairman of the multi-racial Democratic Turnhalle Alliance and a SWAPO enemy. The SADF retaliated through Operation Reindeer, launched on May 4, "envisaged a drop by two hundred and fifty-seven paratroopers on the former iron-mining town of Cassinga...with simultaneous land attacks on targets around Chetequera and ... confirmed and as suspected SWAPO bases some distance to the east of Chetequera" (Steenkamp, 1989:74). In June 1978 the SADF received intelligence that SWAPO was planning retaliation. They called their plan Operation Revenge and was planning to attack Katima Mulilo (Stiff, 2004:43).

The subsequent SADF attack on Cassinga led to widespread outcry as SWAPO alleged that the base housed seven hundred thousand innocent women and children. Recent research has however shown that even though the base did house refugees, the majority were in fact SWAPO cadres. The reason for the SADF attack on Cassinga was that they believed it to be the PLAN command headquarters. Brown states that even though it was true that PLAN's commander and some troops were based there and the fact that it combined a military base with that of a refugee center, a SADF attack 250km into Angola seemed farfetched and unthinkable at the time. In answer to this event PLAN fighters who were based in Zambia "mortared and rocketed the Caprivan town of Katima Mulilo" (Brown, 1995:30). This was however, not the turning point of the war as the SADF scored big successes against SWAPO in years from 1980 to 1984. The SADF launched several successive operations during this time. In addition to several smaller operations, Operations Sceptic and Klipkop (1980), Protea and Daisy (1981), Super and Meebos (1982) and Askari (1983-1984) were just some of the SADF's well-known operations (Scholtz, 2006:37).

In March 1979 Operation Rekstok/Saffraan was launched as one big operation taking place simultaneously in Angola (Rekstok) and Zambia (Saffraan). An attack on a SWAPO camp at Novo Catengue (Benguela) was carried out. In September of the same year the SADF bombed Lubango, which killed Angolan factory workers. In June 1980 Operation Sceptic/Smokeshell was launched. Some important incidents occurred in the run-up to this operation. In September 1979 the MPLA's leader, Agostinho Neto, flew to Moscow where he died under, what was reported as, somewhat suspicious circumstances. In October 1979 after another round of negotiations the UN handed SA a newly revised plan for SWA's independence, which included the concept of a Demilitarized Zone along the Angolan Border. However, as political incidents dragged on security occurrences continued (Geldenhuis, 2007:94). This operation involved a three-week raid against SWAPO bases at Chifufa, during which three hundred and sixty SWAPO and seventeen SADF members were killed. This was also the first time the SADF clashed with FAPLA forces (George, 2005:300-301).

In July of the same year (1979) Operation Klipkop was launched and the SADF attacked a SWAPO base at Chitado (Cunene). It led to the death of twenty-seven SWAPO/FAPLA members (George, 2005:300-301). Operation Protea was launched in August 1981 and involved a full-scale invasion of Cunene. Geldenhuis (2007) states that this operation was the SA Army's biggest mechanized operation since the end of the Second World War. The SADF had set up two garrisons at N'Giva and Xangongo. In clashes between the SADF and SWAPO/FAPLA one thousand of the latter group was killed, while only ten SADF members

were killed and many more wounded (George, 2005:300-301). Operation Protea proved to be the SADF's largest external operation up to that time. This operation was "designed to gain military control of southern Angola and halt FAPLA's ongoing logistical support for SWAPO" (Stiff, 2004:106). Its aims were to bomb the PLAN headquarters at Xangongo as well as to destroy the Angolans' massive warfare equipment and heavy weapons at Ongiva (Steenkamp, 1989:98). In addition to defeating FAPLA on home soil during Operation Protea, this was also the first time that the SADF came face to face with Angolans interfering in their anti-SWAPO operations. At the time, the SADF's main focus was SWAPO, while a rejuvenated Unita fought against the MPLA.

August 1981 also saw the launch of Operation Carnation during which another two hundred and twenty five SWAPO members were killed (George, 2005:300-301). Operation Daisy was launched in November of the same year and the SADF attacks SWAPO bases at Bambi and Chetequera (Cunene). Operation Daisy proved to be the SADF's deepest external raid since that of Operation Savannah (Steenkamp, 1989:99). According to Jannie Geldenhuys (2007) operations Protea and Carnation witnessed the second clash between FAPLA and the SADF as clashes intensified heavily by mid 1981. He adds that this was one of the SADF's less successful operations as most of the enemy cadres already vacated their bases when the SADF reached them (Geldenhuys, 2007:120).

In March 1982 SWAPO decided to follow a new infiltration route "running from southwestern Angola into the desolate and almost uninhabited Kaokoland area, then swinging eastwards into Ovamboland" (Steenkamp, 1989:101). Operation Super was launched after South African intelligence got wind of this new route. Operation Super involved an attack on a SWAPO assembly area near Iona (Namibe) and two hundred SWAPO members are killed. This operation was launched in response to reports that PLAN was ready to move to a new front in the Kaokoland region (Geldenhuys, 2007:115). In July and August of the same year the SADF launched several air and ground attacks on SWAPO command and control structures near Mupa (Cunene) during Operation Meebos. During these attacks on the enemies' command systems, three hundred and fifty SWAPO members and twenty-nine SADF members were killed (George, 2005:300-301).

3.2.2) Cross-border operations in southern Angola (1983-1988)

This phase preceded the “Battle for Africa” at Cuito Cuanavale. The main events of 1987/8 will be described in Chapter 4.

Despite huge losses during the early 1980s PLAN fighters waged wave after wave of insurgency and eventually succeeded in getting through to northern Namibia. After 1980 the scene also changed diplomatically with the election of a conservative government in the USA. Chester Crocker, the author of the constructive engagement policy argued in 1981 that the West should support UNITA “until such time that the MPLA is prepared to negotiate and expel the communist forces from Angola” (Brown, 1995:32-33). Consequently the term ‘linkage’ came into being. Linkage referred to the linking of Cuban withdrawal from Angola with that of the withdrawal of SADF forces and the reaching of a Namibian settlement.

In February 1983 Operation Phoenix was a two-month long operation in order to disrupt an infiltration of a one thousand seven hundred strong SWAPO column into Namibia. Apart from the two hundred and nine SWAPO and twenty-seven SADF deaths, thirty-three civilians were also killed (George, 2005:300-301). By the end of 1983 a full-scale invasion of Cunene, dubbed Operation Askari began. Jannie Geldenhuys (2007) states that it was clear by the end of 1983 that PLAN was planning a large-scale insurgency for early 1984. This operation’s main goal was to disrupt PLAN’s logistical infrastructure. One of the biggest alleged SADF/Cuban/ FAPLA clashes occurred when two Cuban battalions rushed to aid FAPLA in defending its headquarters at Cuvelai. It is uncertain, however, to what extent the Cubans were involved, as Maier claims that after 1975, Cubans only became directly involved in 1987/8.

According to Stiff (2004) it had become clear by late 1983 that the successes the SADF achieved during Operation Protea in 1981 to clear Xangongo and Ondjiva of SWAPO had become eroded. SWAPO now planned to move south from Cubango or Jamba, through Cassinga and then to Cuvelai from where they could infiltrate Namibia (Stiff, 2004:190). One of the SADF’s aims during Operation Askari was to occupy Cuvalai. After Cuvalai was captured by the SADF, they would be in control of the Cunene Province.

Brown states that after 1978 the SADF nearly annually launched one large-scale external operation and that its dominance of the skies until the mid-1980s gave it a major advantage. Operation Sceptic involved air attacks and artillery bombardments, which lasted three weeks. Operation Protea proved to be the SADF’s most elaborate external operation as it attacked

and occupied PLAN bases around Ongiva. Operation Askari was launched on a much larger scale than previous operations and eventually resulted in talks between the MPLA and South African representatives. The Lusaka Accord which came out of these talks created the South African-Angolan Joint Monitoring Commission (JMC) “which in theory would monitor the removal of foreign troops (South African, Cuban and SWAPO) from most of southern Angola” (Brown, 1995:33-34).

This Operation is deemed important as it led to the MPLA government to begin talks with SA as FAPLA and PLAN were involved in increased clashes. Accordingly, talks around the Lusaka Accord began in order to stop the hostilities and “keep SWAPO out of the border area” (Scholtz, 2006:38). The SADF now had a commanding lead over SWAPO militarily. Operation Askari changed the course of the war as PLAN was “reduced in military strength and from then onwards no longer posed a major threat” (Scholtz, 2006:38). The 1984 Lusaka Accord between SA and the MPLA did not include SWAPO as a member. Therefore SWAPO never considered itself bound by it and started moving south and infiltrating Ovamboland once again. Even so, SWAPO was losing the war with a “kill ratio” of 15,8:1. Operation Askari continued after the USSR informed SA “SA’s continued occupation of Angolan soil and support for UNITA was unacceptable to Moscow” (Steenkamp, 1989:112). Even though the Russians ensured SA that this was not meant as a threat, SA replied that the government saw this message in a very negative light. It was claimed that during this operation the SADF increasingly came into contact with aggressive Cuban/Fapla forces and not PLAN fighters. Steenkamp (1989) states that by this time it became clear that a major confrontation was indeed looming.

In May 1985 the SADF raided SWAPO installations at Calombo (Cabinda) and two SADF members were captured. Operation Boswilger was launched in the same year and included a twenty-five mile sweep inside Angola over two weeks against SWAPO. This operation lasted only 48 hours as the SADF managed to follow the FAPLA cadres to their bases situated in three different areas in Angola. During the first day forty-three FAPLA members were killed and one was taken hostage after twenty-three contacts with the SADF. On the second day fourteen PLAN members were killed and four were captured after thirteen contacts. After this the SADF withdrew back to the border (Geldenhuys, 2007:128). By the mid 1980s the Angolan campaign was fought by mainly Unita forces along conventional lines against FAPLA forces with Cubans in the background. In September 1985 the MPLA launched its biggest offensive against UNITA. The goal was to occupy the area in southeastern Angola, which had been under UNITA control since the 1970s. At this time, Genl. Jannie Geldenhuys

took over as Head of the SADF from Genl. Constant Viljoen. In September 1985 Operations Magneto and Wallpaper were launched, during which the SADF provided UNITA with artillery advisors and medics (George, 2005:300-301). Unita then moved its headquarters to Jamba, while trying to occupy Mavinga and Cuito Cuanavale.

The SA Navy Special Forces raided a Namibe harbour, destroying two fuel storage tanks, sinking the Habano and damaging two other Eastern bloc ships, in June 1986. Jannie Geldenhuys (2007) states that the brewing war clouds in the southern African region finally erupted on a massive scale in Angola between 1987 and 1988. This would give the process of negotiations over Cuban withdrawal from Angola and the implementation of Resolution 435 in Namibia great momentum (Geldenhuys, 2007:161-162). The turning point in the Angolan war came in 1987-1988. In June 1987 the SADF provided UNITA with MRL's and anti-tank teams to assist them in Operação Chuva. On 4 August 1987 a 700-man force invaded Angola to support UNITA in defending Mavinga. This was the launching of Operation Modular. The SADF/UNITA forces clashed with FAPLA during the "Battle of the Lomba River" and successfully pushed back the FAPLA forces towards Cuito Cuanavale (George, 2005:300-301). At this stage the Cubans re-entered the war as will be described in the next chapter.

3.3) Evaluation: South Africa's intentions

Angola, unlike other African states, was not dependent on SA "yet occupied a strategically important position on the border with SWA" (Guelke, 1980:657). For some observers SA's first intervention in Angola was an effort to establish a friendly government in Angola that would ease the transition in SWA. Nevertheless, the Soviet and Cuban support for the MPLA increased so rapidly and surpassed the South Africans expectations completely. Granted SA's own interest were one of the main reasons for getting involved in Angola in 1975, one should not forget that international pressure also had a huge influence on this decision. The strong anti-communist stance of the West's superpower, the USA, made South African involvement inevitable as it was prepared to support SA's intervention regardless of the fact that SA's domestic policies were seriously frowned upon internationally. This is not to say that SA would not have intervened in Angola were it not for the USA's initial support, but that this support did make it reasonably easier for SA to justify its reasons for intervention.

After withdrawing from the conflict in 1976, due to numerous factors such as the US Senate's decision to stop aiding FNLA and UNITA as well as Operation Carlotta's alleged success, and mounting international pressure on SA to withdraw, SA felt betrayed by the West. Operation Carlotta also signalled Cuba's military intentions in the region. The security

situation however, could not be ignored and once again SA decided to become deeper involved in Angola – this time to stop SWAPO, in order to secure its interests. By the 1980s SA was dealing with international sanctions, while its justification for involvement, which was to protect SA from communism, were no longer deemed virtuous by the international community. Internationally SA's domestic policy of apartheid, and the need to uphold it, was now deemed as the selfish reason for SA's involvement. Even though the West and in particular the USA were still strongly anti-communist orientated, a conscience developed and they could no longer openly support a state with racist domestic policies such as SA.

By the mid 1980s South Africa was totally isolated in diplomatic, political and economic terms. SA had no one to turn to for support and its interests in SWA's northern border were coming under increased danger from SWAPO and its allies in Angola. The Soviet and Cuban forces in Angola were interfering in southern Africa on a large scale, by supporting the MPLA, in order to crush UNITA for once and for all. Jannie Geldenhuys (2007) stated that if the enemy succeeded in taking control of southern Angola the war would once again extend from Kaokoland in the west to the Caprivi in the east. Most importantly, Geldenhuys stated that if this was to happen, the effort that had been put in by SA as well as the lives that had been lost would all have been in vain and "the peace that South Africa had been trying to keep would become seriously threatened" (Geldenhuys, 2007:166-167).

Furthermore, it was known at that time that MK camps were operating in northern Angola. South Africa feared that if the MPLA/Cuban forces were to take control of southeastern Angola, these MK camps would be moved into this area from where they would be in immediate contact with the neighbouring states of Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana. Access to these countries meant that insurgents had a direct route into SA (Geldenhuys, 2007:167). South African accounts about the reasons for SA's involvement in Angola report nothing about the country's interest in interfering in Angola due to its mineral resources, as can be expected. Be that as it may, according to these scholars SA only wanted to protect its borders from the communist threat and keep Windhoek under Pretoria's control.

At that time it was in fact true, and most scholars agree, that insurgency across the SWA borders were becoming a real threat for SA as well as other democratic and moderate African states. What was even more worrying for the SA Nationalist government however was that the policy of apartheid was coming under increased threat as well. The Nationalist government tried to keep the policy secure and in place for as long as possible, but the pressures for change from both inside and outside the country eventually became too strong.

This is not to say the reason for the SADF's mission into Angola was exclusively to uphold and maintain the apartheid regime, but simply that one cannot ignore the fact that the Nationalist government greatly feared for the future of white minority rule, as it viewed SA to be one of the last bastions of Western ideals and beliefs in the southern African region.

Chapter 4

4) The “Battle for Africa”: Cuito Cuanavale

4.1) FAPLA’s failed annual attacks on Mavinga and Jamba

Scholtz (1998:17) states that the battles fought by the SADF between September 1987 and July 1988 were some of the most intense battles ever fought since the Second World War in 1945. This was the South African campaign in Angola against Angolan and Cuban forces, which led to a series of initial victories for the SADF on the banks of the Lomba River. This campaign he admits however, later ended in stalemate at Cuito Cuanavale where the SADF allegedly lost and was forced to negotiate, withdraw from Angola and grant Namibia its independence.

One has to remember that since the battle took place the broader political situation had changed fundamentally as Namibia was now independent, Angola’s civil war had ended, the Cubans had left Angola, power in South Africa had changed through the means of a democratic election and the Cold War had ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall (Scholtz, 1998:18).

South Africa’s first intervention in Angola during the 1970s was primarily against SWAPO even though the SADF did encounter occasional and incidental contacts with FAPLA, especially when the SADF was close to capturing Luanda. The Cubans then intervened, and pushed the South Africans back. But they re-entered in 1976, joining with UNITA. Throughout the 1980s SA was slowly but surely once again becoming more and more involved in the civil war. In 1981, 1982 and 1983 FAPLA launched some badly organized offensives against UNITA in the southwest of Angola. The US, under Ronald Reagan, began to assist UNITA in 1981. Scholtz argues that each of these offensives lacked operational insight on the side of FAPLA as every attack usually followed the same predictable route. In the mid-eighties, UNITA relocated to Jamba. FAPLA then wanted to capture Jamba. Each time however, their offensive was successfully halted. In 1985 and 1986 FAPLA launched yet more attacks, but this time with increased troops and weaponry (Scholtz, 1998:21). These offensives were also successfully stopped by an SADF air raid on a FAPLA convoy at the Lomba River (Heitman, 1990:Ch 3-8, Bridgeland, 1990:71-83, Dosman, 2008:210). But more was to come, as the Cubans were to increase their pressure.

Before the Cubans re-entered in 1988, the SA Army's Intelligence received information about a renewed FAPLA offensive. The SADF had become involved in Angola on the grounds of cross-border operations against SWAPO as well as limited involvement with UNITA in the delivering of weaponry and supplies. This time however, SA's involvement would be very different and would lead to different outcomes. The SADF's 1975-'76 campaign, twelve years earlier, was accompanied with negative political results, which made the SA government hesitant to become involved in Angola once again. During the 1980s the SADF's cross-border operations were mainly targeted at SWAPO and any contact with FAPLA was to be avoided even though some skirmishes did occur. South African involvement had to be understood in terms of national interests, and that was that SA was not at war with Angola but with SWAPO. It's most important interest was the assurance of UNITA's future existence. For South Africa there were two interdependent factors that justified its involvement at that time. This was the Cuban presence in Angola and the possibility of a SWAPO government in Namibia by means of a military victory. The Cuban presence in Angola had always been the biggest worrying factor for the SA and American governments as the US linked Namibian independence to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola (Crocker, 1992:449-464).

4.2) South Africa and UNITA: Blocking the 1987 offensives at Tumpo and the Lomba River

By July 1987 the SADF's biggest concern was still SWAPO. During the early 1980s the SADF had successfully limited SWAPO's insurgency to Ovambo in Namibia. At this time UNITA occupied southeastern Angola, which made SWAPO infiltration through this region more difficult. However, UNITA was less active in the region north of Ovambo and the threat of SWAPO using this route increased. Scholtz (1998) states that General Jannie Geldenhuys asserts that if the MPLA succeeded in occupying the south-east of Angola, the SADF's war against PLAN would once again stretch over a vast area from the Cunene River in the west to the Mpalela Island in the east of the Caprivi. In such a case, SA's successful results of the past fourteen years would become undone (Scholtz, 1998:27). Therefore, SA could neither afford an MPLA victory in the southeast of Angola nor lose UNITA as a military and political ally.

To stop the MPLA's advance from Menongue to Jamba via Mavinga, the MPLA had to secure Cuito Cuanavale first. The SADF dubbed this Operation Modular. FAPLA was stopped at the Lomba River in November 1987. Heitman agrees, "while there was little positive effect to be achieved by a decision to intervene in support of UNITA, the potential

outcome of not interfering, was so negative that it outweighed the risks of intervention” (Heitman, 1990:25).

4.3) Cuito Cuanavale, 1987/88

4.3.1) Its strategic significance

Karl Maier, an independent journalist, stated that the incidents in and around the town of Cuito Cuanavale had been in the news since late November 1987 “after crack South African troops had smashed an offensive by the FAPLA army outside the UNITA-held town of Mavinga at the River Lomba” (Maier, 1996:25). The attack on Mavinga, in the hopes of capturing it, cost over \$1 billion in Soviet weaponry and was part of an effort to eventually strike at UNITA’s headquarters at Jamba. Since capturing Mavinga in 1980 by the SADF and UNITA, the town had become crucial, as it was the point of delivery of South African supplies. To many of the Cuban officials in southern Africa, an attack on Jamba would be reckless. But the MPLA government still dreamt of wiping out UNITA since taking control in 1975. As Maier states, it turned out the Cubans were right after all as government forces suffered thousands of casualties and lost “hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of equipment” as well as having to retreat with the SADF on their track.

Savimbi still claimed victory for UNITA at this point as the South African government still denied that its army had in fact a very prominent role in the battle. This time however, Savimbi’s claim that UNITA as solely responsible for the victories against the FAPLA/Cuban forces coincided with the South African Defence Minister, Magnus Malan’s admission that SA was in fact intervening in Angola in order to “stop Russian expansion and to save UNITA from annihilation” (Maier, 1996:25). Maier states that by the middle of November 1987, the Angolans were in full retreat (from Mavinga) and the town of Cuito Cuanavale looked set to fall to the South Africans.

With FAPLA’s 47th Brigade annihilated, President Dos Santos made a personal appeal to Castro for Cuban support in early January 1988 (Dosman, 2007:18). It was at this point that the Castro decided to step up his military aid to the Angolans and an extra 15 000 troops were dispatched. Cuban troops in Angola now stood at 40 000 in total. The extra 15 000 troops included the elite 50th Division which succeeded in 1975 to turn “back the South African invasion force...as it was closing in on Luanda on the eve of independence” (Maier, 1996:26). In February 1988, Cuban forces were deployed around Cuito Cuanavale and within two weeks, they would engage in battle with the SADF for the first time during the late eighties.

As Maier (1996:26) stated the Angolans were in full retreat by November 1987 and the town of Cuito Cuanavale looked set to fall to the South Africans. However, he continues by stating that taking the town of Cuito Cuanavale was never the South Africans intention. On February 14th 1988 Cuban and South African forces clashed for the first time since 1975.

The beginning of 1988 looked favourable for SA once again as the SADF succeeded in pushing back FAPLA from the Lomba River to Tumpo. Dosman (in Baines & Vale) states that the SADF received approval for four additional operations in 1988 to be carried out in the west. These would complete the FAPLA eviction in southern Angola, but they would also be a means to a broader military and political end for SA. For SA, a change in regime in Angola, “with UNITA replacing the MPLA, [would act] as a vital safeguard for its interests in southern Africa” (Baines & Vale, 2008:211).

SA’s strategic goals however, changed dramatically after Castro stated that Cuba wanted to join the negotiating process with regard to Angola and Namibia. This was the first time since the start of the conflict that there appeared to be a possibility of Cuba’s withdrawal from Angola. Castro did not support the FAPLA offensive against UNITA and according to Chester Crocker the Cuban forces had played “a distinctly secondary role” in the attacks. By November it was fair to say that the Cubans had a lead role in neither the diplomacy nor the war” (Crocker, 1992:363-365).

Fidel Castro admits that Angolan/FAPLA forces were convincingly defeated at the Lomba River as once again “the Angolans [did] not follow Cuba’s recommendations, and the offensive was hit hard by South Africa” (Ankomah, 2008:16). Even so, the SADF was informed that there were still large numbers of FAPLA troops deployed east of the Cuito River. In 2008 Castro stated that Cuba’s brilliant commanders along with the reassembling Angolan army “prepared a mortal trap for the powerful South African forces...a trap into which the racist army fell, and was overpowered” (Ankomah, 2008:16). According to Horace Campbell (1989) the SADF suffered a high casualty rate among white conscripts as they failed to take the town of Cuito Cuanavale. These statements, however, cannot be corroborated.

4.3.2) The siege at Cuito Cuanavale in March 1988

Before South African and Cuban military engagement in February 1988 much had happened. By the end of September 1987 the SADF and UNITA had been involved in many clashes with FAPLA along the Lomba River. On 3 October 1987 FAPLA was crushed after several failed attacks along the same line of attack on the UNITA/SADF forces. Even Castro admits that Angolan/FAPLA forces were convincingly defeated at the Lomba River. The campaign's goal, to stop FAPLA's advance toward Mavinga, was reached with the withdrawal of FAPLA forces back towards the north of Angola. Even so, the SADF was informed that there was still large numbers of FAPLA troops deployed east of the Cuito River. The SADF now had no other choice but to go into offensive mode as P.W. Botha "made it clear that the defeat should be so crushing, that FAPLA would not be able to launch a new offensive in 1988" (Heitman, 1990:72).

The SADF 20 Brigade was however only an ad hoc arrangement and reinforcements were needed for this big offensive. The SADF had to wait for these reinforcements during which time FAPLA had time to recover. Once again political considerations affected the way in which the offensive was launched against FAPLA. Bridgeland (1990:292) states that many of the SADF officers were frustrated, as "they wanted to launch an attack from the west as early as November 1987. Even in December we could have attacked the Menongue-Cuito Cuanavale road in strength and cut all their logistics. The war would have been over".

The reason the SA government chose a different strategy was due to Castro's apparent suggestion that Cuba also be included in the ongoing peace talks between the USA and the MPLA. In the meantime, Cuban diplomats also started talks with officials at the South African Embassy at the UN in New York. Their goal was, as Bridgeland (1990:228) states, "to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement of the Angolan conflict". South Africa gained optimism as this 'linkage' between the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola and SA's adherence to Resolution 435 had been the most important aim of the USA and SA for years. Therefore, the SA government decided that launching an attack from the west of the Cuito River could perhaps deter the Cubans from joining the peace talks. The SADF was thus ordered to position themselves east of the Cuito River in the hopes that FAPLA would retreat westwards over the river of its own accord (Scholtz, 1998:39).

It is clear to see that the SA government had encountered a dilemma as to which order was to be carried out by the SADF. Prior to Cuba's apparent suggestions to let it join the peace talks, the order from Pretoria to the SADF had been to hit FAPLA so hard that a renewed offensive in 1988 would be impossible. After Cuba's statement Pretoria apparently ordered the SADF not to hit FAPLA so hard so that it hinders the peace initiatives. This paradox in strategy led to the SADF and UNITA launching a series of frontal attacks on a withdrawing FAPLA force, but even though it did hurt FAPLA they would still retreat intact. At Tumpo, FAPLA was very well positioned and the SADF/UNITA forces found themselves launching no less than three attacks (Scholtz, 1998:41-42).

Scholtz (1998:45) states that it is an open question whether an SADF attack from the west of the Cuito River would have completely destroyed the peace talks or not. Even so, Scholtz argues that the three failed attacks at Tumpo didn't do much to enable the talks to produce some kind of peace either. FAPLA's failures at Tumpo also made it possible for Castro to gloat about the SADF's problems at Cuito Cuanavale later on. Nevertheless, Pretoria eventually approved a limited, clandestine operation by 32 Battalion to disrupt FAPLA's advancing line between Menongue and Cuito Cuanavale, in which they allegedly succeeded.

Scholtz (1998:28) states that General Jannie Geldenhuys affirms that there were limited goals with the launch of Operation Modular. The goals were to serve and protect SA's interests but not to interfere with the civil war. The latter was purely incidental and Jannie Geldenhuys states that it was the SA government's reasoning that it was in fact still an Angolan war. He admits that even though SA did have real interests in the conflict, it was the SADF's duty to only assist UNITA. It was Savimbi's war and the SADF was its ally, in other words the silent partner. For this reason SA kept its aid to UNITA limited and clandestine, as they did years prior.

SA's strategic goals however, changed dramatically after Castro stated that Cuba wanted to join the negotiating process with regard to Angola and Namibia. This was the first time since the start of the conflict that there appeared to be a possibility of Cuba's withdrawal from Angola. Castro did not support the FAPLA offensive against UNITA and according to Chester Crocker (1992:363-365) the Cuban forces had played "a distinctly secondary role" in the attacks. He continues by stating that the government in Havana disagreed with the Soviet plan and had done little to advance it. By November it was fair to say – according to Crocker, that the Cubans had a lead role in neither the diplomacy nor the war.

The first new assault on Cuito Cuanavale by the SADF (Operation Hooper) began on the morning of 13 January 1988, but was broken off at ten in the evening just as the SADF was on the point of success while UNITA announced that it had successfully captured the town. The Cubans then entered (*Operation XXXI Anniversary*) and clashed with the SADF in February 1988. On 23 March 1988 the SADF launched yet another attack on Cuito Cuanavale from the same northern route as the previous attack. The objective was to defeat FAPLA on the east bank, occupy the Tumpo Triangle and blow up the Cuito Bridge once and for all. This operation, called Operation Packer, faced much stronger FAPLA defences than before and it turned out to be a failure for the SADF and UNITA. It was a rainy day, with low cloud which hampered the SADF. Cuban defences were better and supplies from Menongue came through (Dosman, 2007:223).

According to Gleijeses (2007) Castro did not only intend to defend the town of Cuito Cuanavale by sending more troops and weapons to Angola, but that he wanted “to force the SADF out of Angola for once and for all”. With the aid of Cuban reinforcements Cuito Cuanavale did not fall to the SADF and in March 1988 the SADF launched one last major attack on the town. Gleijeses writes that even Colonel Jan Breytenbach stated “the South African assault was brought to a grinding and definite halt by the combined Cuban and Angolan forces” (Gleijeses, 2007). Even though most South African documents on this battle are still classified, Gleijeses states that the general perception is that the SADF gave ground. But Dosman (2007:223) is emphatic: By 16:00 on March 23rd 1988 Operation Packer was a failure. After the battle US intelligence clarified the SADF’s withdrawal by stating that “they were impressed by the suddenness and scale of the Cuban advance and [that] they believed a major battle involved serious risks” (Gleijeses, 2007).

Campbell (1990:25) claimed that the Angolan/Cuban radar defences reinforced by the Cuban air force had “blunted the South African attempt to take Cuito Cuanavale”. Campbell states that the SADF was very confident that they could capture Cuito Cuanavale and that UNITA even released press releases stating that UNITA had in fact captured Cuito Cuanavale. The siege then ended, and the battle switched to the southwest of Angola.

4.4) The switch to southwest Angola in 1988

After March 23rd, Cuba decided to switch to southwestern Angola. By April 1988 SWAPO's activities had increased under the protection of southwestern moving Cuban forces. Magnus Malan (2006:290-295) stated that certain Cuban units had begun to interfere with the SADF's cross-border operations against SWAPO in Angola and this eventually led to another SADF/Cuban clash fifty kilometers inside Angola. The South Africans were puzzled about this move by Cuba. On the one hand the SADF viewed this southwesterly march as an attempt to divide the SADF's attention between the southeastern front at Cuito (despite the problems of Operation Packer) and this southwestern front. Defending both fronts at the same time would have led to reduced troops on both fronts. On the other hand this southwestern movement could have been initiated in order to mislead the SADF and further weaken their presence at Cuito, while launching a renewed attempt to capture Mavinga and Jamba. But that did not happen. With these two sites still under SADF/UNITA control, South Africa was still considered undefeated at Cuito Cuanavale, but maybe losing politically against Cuba.

Intelligence received by the SADF led them to believe that the Cubans were indeed planning to move down all the way to the Namibian border and that a clash between Soviet/Cuban and SWAPO's PLAN forces could occur via Calueque. After defeating FAPLA at the Lomba River in November 1987, but before the siege at Cuito Cuanavale, the SADF decided to withdraw from Angola but also decided that Calueque would still be protected. Malan (2006:298-299) stated that the Cubans were decisively beaten during every subsequent battle. However, evidence does exist that contradicts this. The peace negotiations were well on their way and Malan states that Cuba now too began to realize that the settlement over the Angola/Namibia dispute was beginning to gain momentum. Cuba however, wanted one last chance to take revenge for the losses they had suffered on 26 June 1988 at Techipa. As a result the Cubans attacked the Calueque dam on 27 June 1988 by means of an air raid. Peace talks then became "serious and positive" (Dosman, 2007:224). South Africa thought it had won. Crocker (1992:360-372) also claimed South Africa won. But what did Castro say?

According to Castro, the battle of Cuito Cuanavale was the "last offensive against Savimbi's imaginary capital ...in southeast Angola" (Ankomah, 2008:16). As the SADF was advancing towards Cuito Cuanavale, the Angolan government pleaded with Cuba to send more troops as they had suffered losses during numerous previous encounters with the SADF, and the closest

Cuban unit was two hundred kilometers away. Cuba decided to send “a flood of units and combat equipment...across the Atlantic [which] disembarked on the southern coast of Angola in order to attack the enemy from the southwestern part of Angola, down towards Namibia” (Ankomah, 2008:16).

In his interview in 2008 in *New African*, Castro states that he does not wish to elaborate any further on what exactly happened leading up to the last battle at Cuito Cuanavale, but simply states that Cuba’s brilliant commanders along with the reassembling Angolan army “prepared a mortal trap for the powerful South African forces...a trap into which the racist army fell, and was overpowered” (Ankomah, 2008:16). This statement is however, meant to be more metaphorical than substantial. As a result, Castro continues, this victory over the SADF as well as the Cuban advance towards southwestern Angola finally put an end to outside military aggression against Angola. The SADF had, as he puts it, “to swallow its usual arrogant bullying and sit down at the negotiating table” (Ankomah, 2008:16).

4.5) Resolution 435 and negotiations in 1988

The year 1988 proved to be the breakthrough year for the US-brokered negotiations on the UN Resolution 435. This was due to the fact that, up until this time the participants had found it easier to simply increase military power than to make any political concessions. The ‘cosy little war’ in Angola now however became very dangerous as the size and intensity of the battles since late 1987 raised the stakes for all parties involved significantly. The war had now become costly in terms of lives as well as material and Crocker envisaged success only if “all sides [were] able to claim a victory in order to sell an agreement to their respective constituencies” (Bender, 1989:25-26). In addition, Craig (2008) states that by 1988 casualties mounted and the “SADF’s inability to achieve decisive victories at battles such as Cuito Cuanavale” made negotiations all the more attractive (Baines & Vale, 2008:67). Therefore, at the start of 1988, negotiations seemed more attractive to all the parties as the MPLA and Cuba had suffered their largest military loss of the war in late 1987 during the failed attempt at the Lomba River in order to capture Mavinga, while Operation Packer and the defence of the Calueque dam were problematical to the SADF.

The MPLA realized that a ‘final offensive’ against UNITA would be unsuccessful as long as the SADF committed its troops in aid of UNITA. For the MPLA a victory in either economic or political sphere was needed in order to restore the morale of their troops. Cuba too, wanted

a major victory before withdrawing its troops as its image in Angola had become tainted over the years. Bender (1989:26) states that Cuba “needed a major military victory in order to reclaim its position as the successful defender of African sovereignty against South African aggression”. South Africa however had decided to build on its success at Mavinga and attacked Cuito Cuanavale, which proved to be a fundamental error. Bender (1989:27) states that SA suffered huge losses in terms of troops and equipment during this abortive mission to capture the town, and when Defence Minister Magnus Malan received reports suggesting that taking the town would lead to the deaths of at least two hundred white soldiers, the mission was called off. According to Bender, SA was able to claim victory at Mavinga, but that it would be an illusion to think, “this battle signaled the possibility of a final military triumph”.

At the negotiating table SA asserted that it would only withdraw from Angola once Russia and its proxies did the same” (Gleijeses, 2007). This was the American position as well. In March 1988 SA offered to withdraw into Namibia, not stating that it had any intention of surrendering the territory, if the Cuban forces withdrew from Angola. This was Chester Crocker’s “linkage”. In response the head of the Cuban delegation, Jorge Risquet, warned SA that “the time for [its] military adventures, for the acts of aggression that [they] had pursued with impunity, for [its] massacres of refugees is over” (Gleijeses, 2007). Cuba viewed SA’s actions not as being a victorious army, but as a defeated aggressor. This is the politics of perception (Gleijeses, 2007).

In addition, in January 1988 – even before the siege at Cuito, two important events occurred which helped shape the outcome of the negotiations. Firstly, the SADF and UNITA attempts at driving the MPLA and Cuban forces out of the town of Cuito Cuanavale had failed several times. As Bender (1989) states, this turned out to be the Angolan government’s Stalingrad and a major military victory for the MPLA. This was the victory the government had been waiting for “in order to return to the negotiating table with renewed strength” (Bender, 1989:28). Secondly, a Cuban Politburo member Jorge Risquet, decided to join in at the negotiations in Luanda. This was significant as the Americans were wary of Cuban participation, as they feared they would obstruct any agreements that would be reached. Cuba however, participated in every negotiation sessions throughout 1988. They left Africa on the agreed date.

Despite having gained considerable respect during 1988, Cuba could still not claim any major military victory since 1976 and participants in the negotiations started to wonder whether it “would be possible for Cuba to withdraw from Angola with its tarnished legacy” (Bender,

1989:29). Consequently, the Cuban build-up in southwestern Angola threatened to derail the negotiations as SA became anxious about its interests at the Calueque Dam being endangered. Shortly after the Cairo round of negotiations in June 1988, Cuban and Angolan forces attacked the Calueque Dam and killed twelve SADF members. Bender (1989:29) states that SA was not in a “position to match the Angolan and Cuban weaponry, [and] Pretoria thought it wise to retreat into Namibia”. This is when peace talks became a serious option.

4.6) Claims, counter-claims and uncertain facts

International observers speculated whether SA would retaliate the attack on the Calueque Dam and the USA believed that SA did indeed have the capacity to defeat the Cuban/Angolan forces along the Namibian border. Pretoria however, was not prepared to endure large losses among its troops and President P.W. Botha argued it would be wiser to defend the area from the Namibian side of the border than from the Angolan side. Even though this move was a big gamble on the side of the Cubans and Angolans, “South Africa was effectively checkmated across the border” (Bender, 1989:29).

Magnus Malan (2006:3-1-302) claims however, that the earnestness, in which the negotiations between SA, Cuba, the MPLA and the USA took place in Cairo, had had a great impact on Cuba as it only wanted to negotiate about the phased withdrawal of its troops from Angola after the June 1988 attacks. At the following meeting in Genève a timeframe for withdrawal was agreed upon, which would be formally signed in New York on 22 December 1988 by SA, Cuba and Angola. This agreement determined the schedule for Cuban troops’ withdrawal to the north as well as the number of Cuban troops that had to have left Angola by a certain date. 1 April 1989 would be the date when UN Resolution 435 had to be implemented and by 1 July 1989 all the occupying troops had to be out of Angola.

On 1 April 1989 however, SWAPO forces crossed the border into Namibia breaking Resolution 435. A limited number of South African forces stationed in the region were asked to respond to this incident. After the incident signatories of the New York Accords were informed that SWAPO had neither been monitored correctly nor had it handed in all its weapons as had been agreed upon in the settlement. In addition PLAN forces did not enter Namibia through the points determined in Resolution 435 or the settlement and therefore was acting legitimately. The settlement was rectified and implemented once again on 19 May 1989 (Malan, 2006:304).

During the negotiations that took place between SA, Cuba and the USA, Castro alleged that Chester Crocker had been opposed to Cuban participation in the negotiations for years. Castro continues by stating that Washington was now trying to eliminate Cuba's involvement in Angola's independence, Namibia's independence as well as the defeat of the SADF by simply removing any evidence of Cuban involvement. In addition, he states that the USA was now also claiming that they had nothing to do with the war or the loss of thousands of Angolans lives during the war. In the interview Castro was asked whether he thinks that one of the main reasons that Cuba's involvement in Africa was being overlooked due to the USA becoming Angola's ally and one of Angola's biggest oil purchasers. In response Castro acknowledges this fact and states, "the ridiculous Yankee attempts to ignore the honourable role that Cuba played is an indignity to the African nations. It's due in part to the fact that the true history of those events has never been written" (Ankomah, 2008:17).

According to Mills & Williams (2006), Castro argued that "the South Africans, by exploiting their big victory over the Angolans in October 1987, created a crisis and forced [him] to act, and that his intervention had significantly changed the correlation of forces" (Mills & Williams, 2006:185). Crocker (1992) also stated that Castro's behavior during 1988 suggests that he had realized his country's limits and that he could not dominate SA's military. In addition, Heitman (1990), who had access to official SADF sources, stated that it was never the SADF's intention to capture Cuito Cuanavale as the new the political repercussions it would cause if the SADF were to hold on to a town in Angola. Moreover, Bridgeland (1990) states that the Cuban assertion of the SADF over-extending themselves and then becoming surrounded in Cuito led to them entering negotiations is total nonsense. The terrain in southeastern Angola is so vast that it is impossible to become surrounded as the Cubans claim.

SADF soldiers involved in the battle of Cuito Cuanavale agree that occupation of the town was neither a strategic nor tactical goal. They do however state that the only tactical reason for them to have taken the town "was to cut the Angolans brigades off that had retreated there and to then destroy them at leisure" (Mills & Williams, 2006:185). By the time the battle of Cuito Cuanavale took place SA already realized that they had to get out of Angola and Namibia. SA's military position was worsening and the quick changing international "geo-strategic landscape had persuaded the powers that be in Pretoria that the time was ripe for withdrawal" (Mills & Williams, 2006:185-186).

According to Von Clausewitz (cited by Scholtz, 1998:29) the more limited the goals of a war are, the more willing and able the leaders of both sides will become to make peace without the loss of too much prestige. There is however also a potential problem attached to limited goals. Von Clausewitz states that the greater the tension and violence within the war, the greater the chance of the war mirroring an absolute war. Thus, the more war-like the conflict becomes, the less political it appears to become. According to this view, it appears that in such cases governments tend to interfere with the military officers' strategic, operational and tactical decisions, something that definitely happened during SA's Angolan campaign from 1987 to 1988. According to Bridgeland (1990) there seemed to have been disagreements between the political officials in Pretoria and the military leaders in the field about whether to attack FAPLA from the west or the east of the Cuito River. The SA Cabinet turned down the suggestion of attacking Cuito Cuanavale from behind and then controlling the road from Menogue as SA feared the possibility of international uproar if SADF troops were fighting deep in Angola after stating that it only had limited goals (Scholtz, 1998:32).

Authors such as Fred Bridgeland, Steenkamp and Karl Maier were all war correspondents at the time of writing and therefore their accounts were written, one could say, as the different clashes unfolded. Steenkamp (1989) states that Operation Savannah was not, as many people thought at the time, a carefully planned military decision. At this time Prime Minister Vorster was heavily influenced by Lieutenant-General Hendrik van den Berg, Head of the Bureau for State Security, who tried to convince Vorster that deeper SADF involvement into Angola was not necessary. On the other end of the spectrum there was Defence Minister Botha, who was very supportive of a decision to deploy the SADF beyond the borders in order to contain the insurgency (Steenkamp, 1989:43).

The writings of authors such as Chester Crocker, Leopold Scholtz and Dosman accounts all came after the war had already ended. They are deemed to be from a more neutral perspective. Scholtz (1998) states that the clashes in Angola between September 1987 and July 1988 were some of the most intense battles ever fought since the Second World War. The South African campaign in Angola against Angolan and Cuban forces, led to a series of initial victories for the SADF on the banks of the Lomba River. This campaign he admits however, later ended in stalemate at Cuito Cuanavale where the SADF allegedly lost and was forced to negotiate and withdraw from Angola. Much have been written about the battle at Cuito Cuanavale in 1988, in the hopes of proving these statements wrong, even though South

Africa's new National Defence Force tried to do this internally. By 1998, however, no such publication had yet been presented (Scholtz, 1998:17).

Authors such as Horace Campbell, Davies & O'Meara and Fidel Castro all maintain that the SADF was defeated by Cuba. According to the more liberal authors such as Davies & O'Meara (1985), the South African government's adoption of the "total strategy" toward the southern African region in 1977 was mobilized in order to ensure South Africa's safety from nationalist movements' infiltration. As Vale (1991) concurs, for SA regional policy has always been an essential component of power within the region. These authors also state that this struggle, in which SA was engaged to assert its hegemony within the region, became even more intense during the 1980s.

The 1987 campaign however, consisted of an entire brigade, which made it impossible to keep it a secret and as could have been suspected rumours of the SADF's presence started to leak out. By November 1987 the news had leaked to British and American newspapers after which it appeared in the South African media as well. The South African Minister of Defence, Genl. Magnus Malan, had no other choice but to admit to the SADF's presence in Angola. The media immediately began posing questions as to the nature of the SADF's involvement as the lies of the failed SA campaign in 1975-'76 still haunted the country (Scholtz, 1998:33).

In order to determine the winner in a war when the outcome is disputed, it is just as important to look at perceptions as the facts. Castro's announcements on the war in Angola reached the international media first and therefore it became much easier for Cuba to claim victory over SA. Independent observers also played some role. One such observer was Karl Maier who visited the front at Menongue and Cuito Cuanavale on Castro's invitation. He reported (1996), however, that the Cubans suffered many setbacks.

SA on the other hand made no effort to invite independent journalists to their frontlines and as a result the SADF had already lost the war in terms of propaganda at a very early stage (Scholtz, 1998:53). By 1990, Bridgeman and Heitman had written, but that was two years after the events of 1988. According to Windrich (in Baines & Vale) it is impossible to state exactly who won the battle. Even though everybody claimed that they had won, all parties accepted to enter negotiations with their enemies who had not surrendered and therefore this was a war "without victors or vanquished" (Baines & Vale, 2008:205). Perhaps one could

argue that the SADF have merit in claiming that they had avenged their humiliating retreat of 1975, as they imposed their power on Angola and Namibia for another decade. However, “SA had been out-fought and out-thought in the final stage of the war, but not wanting to admit failure, they claimed it publicly as a victory” (Baines & Vale, 2008:205). Perhaps an exaggeration. But by then, the Cold War was almost over.

Maier (1996) states that the battle at Cuito Cuanavale “was a momentous [battle]... in which everyone claimed victory, but which, technically, no one really won” (Maier, 1996:32). According to him, the SADF got the better of the fighting, but lost the most psychologically. Cuito Cuanavale became the stuff of heroes as southern African armies consisting mostly of black soldiers “proved that the champions of apartheid were vulnerable” (Maier, 1996:32). Maier claims that resonance can be found among the numerous writers that praise the SADF’s performance in the fact that they all echo the military officers’ complaints of politicians preventing them from launching a full-scale attack on the Cubans and Angolans. These orders were given by the SA government in order to ensure white casualties in the border war were kept to an absolute minimum. For Castro, the battle of Cuito Cuanavale was to be his last chance “to shine as the defender of the downtrodden against the all-powerful imperialists” (Maier, 1996:32). Castro was able to bring his soldiers home with honour as SA agreed to pull out all its forces in Angola and grant Namibia its independence in 1990 providing the Cubans withdraw first. As the Cubans departed from Angola, so too did the pretext of a communist onslaught which the SA government had used as a shield against Western criticism for the longest time.

The “battle” of Cuito Cuanavale had undoubtedly forced SA to look inward and had set in motion the inevitable process of reform. Maier claims that the MPLA government considered itself lucky to have survived the battle after being significantly defeated at the Lomba River. To some degree, Maier states that UNITA could also claim victory as it had been saved from total destruction. Cuito Cuanavale therefore proved to all the parties involved that the Angolan civil war could not be resolved on the battlefield. This battle helped set the stage for peace negotiations between UNITA and the MPLA, which came three years later “after stop-go talks sponsored by the Portuguese, the USA and the USSR”. The Bicesse peace accords were signed on 31 May 1991 by President José Eduardo dos Santos and Jonas Savimbi in Portugal. This accord provided for a ceasefire, the demobilization of the two armies and general elections that were to be held in September 1992 (Maier, 1996:33). Savimbi and

UNITA lost the elections and resumed the war. In reality this war only ended 12 years later when UNITA's Savimbi was assassinated in 2002.

Shortly after the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, Fidel Castro claimed that Cuba's decisive victory over the SADF was a watershed moment for Africa and that a new phase of the continent's history had begun. This view is still maintained by many in SA and elsewhere today. According to Magnus Malan (2006) however, the SADF's military victory was an unprecedented victory in military history up to that point. He states that the SADF's troops never exceeded 3000 men and that they succeeded in crushing the Cuban/MPLA forces time after time with this limited number of troops. Scholtz (1998:50) however, argues that one has to look beyond this kind of propaganda and rather analyze the outcome from a military-strategic and national-strategic point of view. This is why political outcomes are as important – if not more so, than military victories.

The Soviet-Union and MPLA's military-strategic goal was to defeat UNITA, while their operational goal was to occupy Mavinga and Jamba. Both these objectives failed. For Cuba, the military-strategic goal was to find space through which it could withdraw itself from the Angolan swamps. Their successful operational goal was to bluff the SADF with its march southwards and to intimidate them at the same time. Initially, the SADF's military-strategic goal was to aid UNITA, while later this goal would be to ensure a peace agreement that would end Cuba's presence in Angola and bring independence to Namibia. The SADF's initial operational goal was to stop FAPLA's advance to Mavinga and drive them back over the Cuito River so as to hinder a renewed offensive in 1988. The SADF succeeded in their strategic goals, while their operational objectives were only partially achieved as FAPLA managed to build a bridge at Tumpo just east from the Cuito River (Scholtz, 1998:51).

Scholtz therefore concludes by stating that the Soviet-Union and FAPLA lost the war on military-strategic grounds, while the Cubans won. The SADF won in this regard against the Soviet-Union and the MPLA, while losing against Cuba. These losses and victories were not however achieved by means of a complete 'knock-out', but simply with, as Scholtz put it 'with points'. According to Scholtz' national-strategic goals, the Soviet-Union, Cuba and the MPLA's goal of establishing communism in Angola and Namibia failed miserably. South Africa's on the other hand, was to prevent a SWAPO victory in Namibia, which also failed.

In an article in which Namibia's founding president Sam Nujoma is interviewed, he thanks Cuba and Fidel Castro by saying "without [Cuban] support, we, in Namibia, would probably still be struggling to attain our freedom and independence, from under the yoke of the apartheid regime" (*New African*, 2008:26). When asked what the Cuban military victory meant for southern Africa, President Nujoma, as Castro, replied by saying that the "battle of Cuito Cuanavale was the last battle where apartheid South Africa was crushed" (*New African*, 2008:27). Even though there were several battles between the SADF and the FAPLA/Cuban forces along the Lomba River, Cuito Cuanavale marked the climax of the war. However, to claim that the SADF were "comprehensively defeated, and their jetfighters were totally wiped out" (*New African*, 2008:27), is an exaggeration.

Also after this defeat, according to then President Nujoma, the South Africans 'ran away' which led to the negotiations and eventually the signing of a ceasefire agreement and Namibia's independence. Nujoma asserts "even in defeat the apartheid racists did not like to sit down with us at the same table [so] negotiations took place between us through the UN while we sat in different venues" (*New African*, 2008:28). This is also an exaggeration

Looking back, scholars that belong to the "Defeat of SA" school, such as Campbell and Patel, SA's intentions in Angola was purely self-motivated. Authors from this school of thought never visited the battlefield and based their findings purely on what transpired from Luanda. At the battle of Cuito Cuanavale, Horace Campbell believes that the Angolans were not only fighting to protect themselves from the racist SA Government, but also for the self-determination of all Africans. Fidel Castro also maintains that this battle was a glorious victory for Cuba. Today we know this was not the case militarily, perhaps only politically.

On the contrary, the writings by military correspondents such as Bridgeland and Heitman and the American diplomat, Chester Crocker are similar to the versions of South African military leaders such as Geldenhuys, Jan Breytenbach and Malan. According to these authors SA's main objective was to stop the MPLA from coming to power in Angola. The story of Cuito Cuanavale therefore has so many different and contradictory versions that finding the truth from a myriad of sources is very difficult. One of the most important questions is also whether one can typify the battle of Cuito Cuanavale as a battle in which one party won and another lost, seeing as there was no party to the conflict that surrendered to another. Perhaps this was a siege, but one with huge political outcomes, not only for Namibia and Angola, but South Africa as well.

Chapter 5

5) Conclusion

This study is about the “what” and the “why” of South African intervention in Angola during the 1970s and the 1980s. This is the usual sequence of addressing research questions. In this study, however, it might be better to attend to the “why” before the “what”, as it might explain the controversies better. Williams (2008:125-6) explains that this “Border War” was never declared, that the SADF never wanted to capture territory, but it was always unpopular, fought largely in secret.

For the researcher this war in Angola creates special problems. Because it was a “secret” war, South African media could not cover news events. Once books became available after 1990, they were written in Afrikaans or English and seldom published abroad. They therefore did not always influence public opinion. The Cubans published on their 1975 and 1988 campaigns, but mostly in Spanish.

South African researchers only learned later that Operation Savannah was opposed by Operation Carlota, at the time of the 1975/6 war for Luanda. The same happened 13 years later when Operations Hooper and Packer were opposed by Operation Anniversary XXXI. In both cases the Cuban side was trumpeted by the Angolans while the South African side received a sceptic audience.

The outcome is still shielded in controversies – this is the “why” of this study; while “what” is less controversial because it is more descriptive.

5.1) Why the controversies?

According to Guimareas (1988) the outcome of the war could have been very different had SA decided not to send in its army. SA’s main political objective was to deny the MPLA from coming to power in Angola, an objective they failed to achieve. In 1975 SA did not have a cohesive policy towards Angola and as a result the implications of the first intervention were not suitably defined. Maintaining white superiority in SA was Pretoria’s biggest foreign policy priority and therefore the “defence of SA was inextricably linked to [the] domestic policies of maintaining white power” (Guimareas, 1988:122).

In choosing to support UNITA, it provided SA with a buffer between Namibia and the possibility of any hostile government that might emerge in Angola. In addition, when the USA also decided to side with UNITA in 1975/76, SA also came into line with the USA's Angolan policy. This dramatically improved SA's international political stance after years of being shunned by the West due to the policy of apartheid (Guimareas, 1988:132). External actors also played very important roles in the shaping of the conflict and there are several reasons that could explain the multitude of external actors becoming involved. Zaïre saw its involvement as an opportunity to emerge more powerfully in the region, as it linked FNLA's interests with those of the USA. SA believed that if it shared the USA's anti-communist objectives, the USA would align its interests with SA as well. SA's intervention, thus, was a clear result of the "interplay between its perceived strategic objectives and domestic policies" (Guimareas, 1988:199).

This took place at the height of the Cold War, implying foreign intervention other than South Africa's. For Cuba, intervention came as a result of both internal political and ideological concerns. Cuba had a long-standing relationship with the MPLA and this gave Cuba the opportunity to intervene and reinforce its internationalist posture and credibility. For the USA and the Soviet Union, intervention was the product of their global rivalry, and not the result of particular interest in Angola. Both these superpowers' interventions "resulted in part from the perception that it was important to the other" (Guimareas, 1988:199).

This led to "the accumulation of a number of layers of conflict on the foundations of the internal struggle for power" (Guimareas, 1988:199).

One of the questions this study tried to answer was what were Cuba, the Soviet Union and even the USA's actual motives to support the nationalist movements (in the American case, first the FNLA and then Unita) and why the attitudes changed toward support for these movements as the conflict continued.

Gleijeses (2007) argues that Cuba played a fundamental role in changing the course of southern African history. Many authors, including Magnus Malan, according to Gleijeses have tried to rewrite the history of this battle but he maintains that US and Cuban documents tell a different story to that of South African records. He continues by stating that the Cubans' "battlefield prowess and negotiating skills were instrumental in forcing South Africa to accept

Namibia's independence. Their successful defence of Cuito was the prelude for a campaign that forced the SADF out of Angola. This victory reverberated beyond Namibia" (Gleijeses, 2007). Whether this victorious defence was an SADF defeat is another question altogether.

5.2) The "what" of the outcome

Horace Campbell (1990) is a leading academic in the "South African defeat" school of thought. He stated that SA wanted to sustain its national army even though the country was not democratic; the black population were opposed to the state and the fact that the real cause for SA's involvement in Angola was not the threat of communism, but the threat to white power. SA faced the inevitable in 1988, as the country could no longer sustain or support its army from the narrow white population. By entering negotiations Campbell claims, SA hoped to salvage the humiliation they had faced at Cuito Cuanavale.

The opposite view is that the SADF had not lost. According to Heitman "the South Africans managed to bring about a total change in both the strategic and political situation in south-eastern Africa by the carefully controlled application of limited force. Operation Modular and the ensuing campaign are an excellent illustration of "war as an instrument of politics: the deployment of a small force operating under very close political control achieved the political end that had eluded the diplomats for years" (Heitman, 1990:347). Magnus Malan (2006) states that the Cuban and MPLA withdrawal from the Cuito River was accelerated by the SADF's successful battles on 9, 11, 13 and 17 November 1987. This according to him proved to be the war's turning point as the heavy Cuban/FAPLA losses during these battles reduced the enemy's appetite for conflict (other authors claimed that Cubans were not involved in 1987, only since February 1988). On 13 and 14 January and 25 February 1988 the war reached its final phase as the SADF/UNITA forces succeeded in driving the Cuban/FAPLA forces over the Cuito River as they failed to reach Mavinga on the way to Jamba. There was however, still a limited FAPLA presence on the river's eastern banks but on 23 March 1988 the last fight took place at Tumpo.

Malan claims that during these operations FAPLA launched a big propaganda campaign to make them appear to be the 'good guys' to the world by means of false information. FAPLA alleged at times that the SADF had deployed more than three thousand troops simultaneously in Angola or that the SADF had lost forty airplanes during some of their clashes with FAPLA. Moreover, Malan states that this propaganda tried to convince the world that one of the

SADF's main goal was to capture Cuito Cuanavale, but that this attempt had failed. Malan does not concede this point. But many others make the point that Cuba had launched Operation XXXI Anniversary bolstering the Cuban/FAPLA defences which also kept supply lines from Menongue open to its troops. On the day of the attack foul weather also handicapped the South Africans, and by 16:00 the "battle for Africa" stopped. Thereafter about all the parties to the conflict opted for peace, but not before the Cubans moved into the southwest as well.

Breytenbach (1997) considers the clash that took place at Cuito Cuanavale to be a siege rather than a battle seeing as it was the last instalment of a FAPLA campaign launched in the hopes of capturing Mavinga and Jamba. If FAPLA succeeded in capturing Mavinga air attacks could have been launched on UNITA's headquarters at Jamba. This however, never happened as the SADF aided UNITA in forcing the FAPLA forces to retreat to Cuito Cuanavale. The fact that the SADF/UNITA alliance won the battle for Jamba, at Mavinga, is one on which there exists consensus among scholars. By this time the Cubans had increased their troops to fifty thousand men in the hopes of 'out-escalating' the South Africans who were suffering under severe Western sanctions.

After another seven months of chronic warfare between the SADF and FAPLA/Cuban forces, both parties had realized the very high cost they would have to pay for victory. Both parties faced a mutual hurting stalemate and the chances of a negotiated settlement increased. As the Cubans were marching to the Namibian border in the southwest, negotiations became inevitable as the USA pursued the linkage of Cuban troop withdrawal with that of a peace process. For Chester Crocker – Ronald Reagan's minister for Africa, this was a success story because the "linkage policy" always aimed at Namibian independence, but Cuban withdrawal as well. There are many different ways in which one can analyze what exactly it was that led to parties agreeing on sitting down at the negotiating table. On the one hand the USA's policy of linkage or 'constructive engagement' can be seen as the deciding factor in the prelude to negotiations.

Another aim of this study was to distinguish between the short-term military outcomes (eg the battle, siege, loss of equipment and casualties etc) and the longer-term political consequences for every party to the conflict.

5.2.1) Short-term military outcomes

The short-term military outcomes, according to Breytenbach (1997), were the fact that the SADF had withdrawn from Angola as well as from its alliance with UNITA. According to the peace agreement, the Angolans also had to pressurize the ANC to shut down all its camps in Angola. After the Cuban withdrawal from Angola, Namibia finally became independent. With the implementation of the peace accords and Resolution 435 and after all the foreign troops had withdrawn from Angola, the “conventional war between the two opposing (Angolan) alliances quickly degenerated into a civil war between the MPLA and UNITA” (Breytenbach, 1997:60). After more than a decade of war, it seemed as if Angola was back to where it was in 1975. Peace, however, did come after Savimbi’s death in 2002.

Other short-term military outcome at that time was that although the Cuban/FAPLA alliance succeeding in defending Cuito in March 1988, the FAPLA component had lost shortly before against the UNITA/South African alliance at the Lomba River. It was this defeat that prompted the Angolan president to personally request Cuba’s assistance with Fidel Castro in December 1987.

These short-term military outcomes had now come to an end with the signing of the peace agreements in 1988, while the longer-term consequences for Angola as well as the rest of the parties involved now became apparent. As Scholtz (1998) also state, for SWAPO the end of the war led to victory through multi-party elections in Namibia, the Soviet Union collapsed and South Africa was given the opportunity to face its internal problems. The negotiations also offered Angola the chance to settle their civil war without any interference from outside forces. This goal however, still eluded Angola well into the 1990s. Thus, defining a clear winner and loser to the Angolan conflict is very problematic as one can view both Namibia (in terms of independence gained) as well as the USA (in terms of winning the Cold War) as winners. Williams (2008:125) rightly asks that if Cuba won, why did they call a halt?

5.2.2) The longer-term consequences

Likewise, one could view the ‘old’ South Africa as a loser in the political sense. According to Pacheco (1989) it is important for any outside observer to understand that South Africa’s total

national strategy was not envisaged by the South African government as simply a safeguard against anti-apartheid forces. The upholding of apartheid was therefore not, according to Pacheco, the primary motivation for the government to increase security measures along its borders. First and foremost, the South African government viewed itself as being “in a struggle against a determined Marxist opponent” (Pacheco, 1989:70). In such a case, where a states’ survival is deemed the primary objective, what it then perceives as being a hostile and reckless world and the way in which they perceive this threat becomes less important.

In Baines & Vale (2008) several authors discuss the fact that future analyses on the Angolan conflict need to bear in mind that “access to previously closed archives is necessary in order to [analyze and fill in the gaps] in the diplomatic and military history of southern Africa” (Baines & Vale, 2008:9). One of these authors, Elaine Windrich, asserts that as UNITA became increasingly dependent on the SADF it virtually sacrificed its own autonomy. UNITA only served as a mechanism that would minimize the loss of more white conscripts for the SADF. After Cuba committed more troops to aid the Angolans, the SADF suffered more and more white casualties and therefore might have decided to withdraw from Angola and Namibia. There was this perception that South Africa had lost air superiority when the Cubans re-entered in 1988.

In addition, former SADF generals still maintain that they were under pressure from the Department of Foreign Affairs “to allow the Cubans to find a face-saving way of withdrawing from the conflict” (Baines & Vale, 2008:9). General Jannie Geldenhuys and General Magnus Malan especially maintain these assertions. Edgar Dosman (in Baines & Vale, 2008) on the other hand, gives the SADF credit on the battlefield but also recognizes its failings. Access to Cuban sources enabled him to reveal how Cuba planned and exercised its military operations. Contrary to belief, Dosman does not portray the MPLA and FAPLA as Cuban proxies, but instead examines some of the tensions that existed between the Cubans, the Angolans as well as the Russians (Baines & Vale, 2008:9).

Writing about Soviet soldiers in the Angolan war, Shubin (2007, as reviewed by Ian Liebenberg) referred to Russian assessments of South African tactics. According to them, South Africa relied too heavily on artillery and rocket launchers, while neglecting the role of infantry and the air force. However, what we know today is that South Africa was always reluctant to use better trained white infantry soldiers and preferred black UNITA fighters instead. White casualties had to be kept at a minimum. The point made about the use of the air

force is understandable in terms of the arms sanctions against South Africa which meant that SA Airforce planes were becoming older and even obsolete. In light of these arguments, the SADF actually did well militarily during the Angolan war.

Steenkamp (1989) poses three very important questions regarding SA's involvement in the Angolan conflict. Firstly, he asks whether SA should have fought the insurgents threatening their borders. He states that once SA realized this conflict was not going to be resolved quickly they probably had no other choice. The SA public would have resented the government had no action been taken and after the failed 1976 intervention their fate was sealed. Secondly, he asks whether the war could have ended sooner than it eventually did. He argues that the war definitely could have ended much sooner and that the reason it dragged on was not, as is commonly believed, because the South Africans deliberately stonewalled the peace talks.

On the one hand he admits that SA was indeed inflexible at times, resisting to yield to compromises. On the other hand however, SWAPO was also guilty of stubbornness as it stonewalled the peace talks twice before the end of the war (Steenkamp, 1989:186). Thirdly, and most importantly, Steenkamp poses the question of who the actual winners were. According to him, the SADF won the armed struggle. At the time this source was written it was still unsure what the outcome of the general election in Namibia would be. The author however, stated that if the new Namibian government turned out to be neutral towards SA "the South Africans will have achieved their minimum political requirement as well" (Steenkamp, 1989:187).

In the end the year 1988 turned out to be a good one for Cuba – at least politically. The post-1988 era also turned out positively for Namibia, and for SWAPO that won the elections after being pinned down for so long in northern Namibia by the SADF. The other winners are the Americans who succeeded in forcing the Cubans out of Africa, whereafter US companies benefitted handsomely from oil exploration in Angola.

The biggest losers were UNITA who were abandoned internationally after 1988. This outcome, according to Scholtz might have been the best possible result for everyone. It certainly aided in preparing SA both intellectually and emotionally for the negotiations with the ANC that was to follow (Scholtz, 1998:52).

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