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SWAPO's "Eastern" Connections, 1966 – 1989

The main Namibian liberation movement, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), received various forms of support, from a wide range of different sources, during its long struggle for Namibian independence. Assistance came from non-governmental organisations, such as the Namibia Support Committee and the Anti-Apartheid Movement in the UK; from governments of neutral and non-aligned countries in the Cold War, of which Sweden was the most important, providing SWAPO with financial and humanitarian aid amounting to 671 million Swedish Krona;¹ and from international organisations including the organs of the United Nations (UN) – the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretariat – the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and its Liberation Committee. Tanganyika, Zambia, and then Angola gave SWAPO essential support in exile, while help also came from other African countries and liberation movements, including South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), the main military camps of which were, like SWAPO's, in Angola in the late 1970s and 1980s.²

Forms of support ranged across a spectrum. At one end were, say, the campaigns that publicized SWAPO's struggle in Western countries that had governments that were unsympathetic to that struggle.³ At the other end, governments provided military hardware and trained SWAPO's cadres. SWAPO's founding president, Sam Nujoma, tried to keep open connections with all who would aid SWAPO's struggle, in whatever form, whether "West" or "East", Global North or Global South. In this chapter I use "Eastern" in a broad sense, to include the countries of the Soviet bloc in the Cold War as well as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the People's Republic of China (PRC).

1 T. Sellström, *Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa*, Vol. 2, Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2002, p. 393.

2 See, e.g., C. Saunders, "Activism in Britain for Namibia's Independence: the Namibia Support Committee", in: H. Sapire and C. Saunders (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles; New Local, Regional and Global Perspectives*, Cape Town: UCT Press, 2012; C. Saunders, "South Africa's War, and the Cuban Military, in Angola", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 40 (2014) 6, pp. 1363–1368; C. Saunders, "The Non-Aligned Movement, the Neutral European Countries and the Issue of Namibian independence", in: S. Bott et al. (eds.), *Neutrality and Neutralism in the Global Cold War*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 144–160.

3 See Saunders, "Activism", for the prime example of this.

(Cuba is in the Western hemisphere and its support to SWAPO was of a quite different kind; it was the only country outside Africa to send large numbers of combat troops to Angola.)⁴ I focus on the four “Eastern” countries – North Korea, China, the Soviet Union, and East Germany – of most importance to SWAPO. All four, as we shall see, fell on the military end of the spectrum of support.

In assessing the forms of support given by these four countries during the Cold War decades, and how they changed over time, there is a problem of evidence, for these were closed and highly secretive regimes. I am able to draw on much less primary material for these four countries than for others that supported SWAPO, and there is little relevant secondary literature. Fortunately, however, one can use the writing of three people who, having themselves been active in supporting SWAPO, have written scholarly works on aspects of that support: Vladimir Shubin for the Soviet Union and Hans-Georg and Ilona Schleicher in the case of the GDR. Their assessments, based on personal sources and some archival research, must of course be used critically. Besides their extensive writings, this topic has not attracted significant academic scholarship, and few Namibians have recalled in print their interactions with “Eastern” countries in the days of exile. While there is very little evidence for, say, the nature and amount of military aid provided SWAPO by North Korea, China and the Soviet Union,⁵ there is, as we shall see, fuller information about the aid given SWAPO by the GDR. That is why I give the GDR more detailed attention than the other three countries.

North Korea and China

Since Namibia’s independence in 1990, two “Eastern” countries have played important roles there: North Korea and the PRC. The single most important construction company responsible for official buildings in Namibia is the state-owned North Korean company Mansudae Overseas Project. This has built,

⁴ See esp. P. Gleijeses, *Visions of Freedom: Havana, Washington, Pretoria, and the Struggle for Southern Africa, 1976–1991*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. Cf. C. Hatzky, *Cubans in Angola: South-South Cooperation and Transfer of Knowledge, 1976–1991*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2015.

⁵ When she was looking for material on Russian support to the ANC in the Russian archives, Irina Filatova found two documents detailing the aid SWAPO sought from the Soviet Union: see below. For the Soviet Union there is not the detailed data that is available for the GDR, showing fluctuations over time. I am told that there is material in the Russian archives, recently declassified, on financial aid, military support, and numbers of people trained to 1975. This was not accessible in 2018 because the archive was being moved to a new building: Natalia Telepneva to the author, email, 5 April 2018.

among other things, Namibia's Heroes Acre, the Presidential Palace in Windhoek and, most recently, the Independence Memorial Museum in the centre of Namibia's capital.⁶ In 2017, Namibia was criticized by the United Nations for its continued ties with the DPRK despite the UN sanctions imposed on the DPRK because of its nuclear programme, but Namibian President Hage Geingob in March 2018 reiterated Namibia's friendship with North Korea.⁷ Though North Korea has also built monuments in other African countries, and notoriously assisted the Zimbabwean army suppress opposition in Matabeleland in Zimbabwe in the early 1980s, it has in recent years had closer relations with Namibia than with any other African country. This is undoubtedly in part a consequence of the ties between the two countries that began to be forged during the years of the Namibian liberation struggle. San Nujoma, SWAPO's founding President, mentions in his autobiography that North Korea trained some SWAPO guerrillas during the struggle decades, but goes into no detail.⁸ We know from other sources that Nujoma visited Pyongyang twice in the 1980s, one of them being a state visit, and that he requested military assistance from the North Korean government.⁹ Though there is evidence of North Korean military advisers being present in SWAPO's camps in Angola in the 1980s, it has not been possible to ascertain whether North Korea ever supplied SWAPO with any military hardware.¹⁰

More is known about SWAPO's connections with the PRC, the "Eastern" country that today has most connections to Namibia. (By contrast, Namibia's connections with Russia, which mainly concern minerals and energy, are

6 M.L.E. Kirkwood, "Postcolonial Architecture Through North Korean Modes: Namibian Commissions of the Mansudae Overseas Project", M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 2011, https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/10702/Kirkwood_ku_0099M_11463_DATA_1.pdf;sequence=1 (accessed 4 April 2019); T. van der Hoog, "North Korean Monuments in southern Africa: Legitimizing Party Rule Through the National Heroes' Acres in Zimbabwe and Namibia", M.A. thesis, Leiden University, <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/52194> (accessed 4 April 2019); T. van der Hoog, "In Search of Recognition: The Forgotten alliance between North Korea and Southern African Liberation Movements", unpublished paper presented to conference on Challenging the Liberal World Order, Leiden University, May 2018.

7 "We are friends with North Korea – Geingob", <https://www.newera.com.na/2018/03/28/video-we-are-friends-with-north-korea-geingob/> (accessed 4 April 2019).

8 S. Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, London: Panaf Books, 2001.

9 G. Kornes, "The Mansudae Enigma", *Insight Namibia*, April 2016, pp. 12–14, and cf. B.R. Young, "Guerrilla Internationalism: North Korea's Relations with the Third World, 1957–89", Ph.D. thesis, George Washington University, 2018, pp. 257–258.

10 Based on interviews he conducted with Namibians, Kornes writes that North Korean advisers were "a common sight" in SWAPO's exile camps in the 1980s: "Mansudae Enigma", p. 13.

much less significant.)¹¹ Considerable numbers of Chinese – thought to number up to 40,000 at the peak a decade or so ago – have arrived in Namibia to work on Chinese projects and to set up businesses, leading to talk of a “Chinese invasion”. In recent decades China has been the largest foreign investor in Namibia.¹² In March 2018 President Geingob made a high-profile visit to China, during which he received an honorary doctorate from a Beijing university. The official website of the Chinese embassy in Namibia claims that the origins of today’s ties between the two countries lie in the support given by the PRC to SWAPO during the liberation struggle.¹³ It is implied that that support was considerable, and important to the success of SWAPO’s struggle. In reality, support from China, like that from North Korea, was much less important than that provided by the other two “Eastern” countries I shall consider, the Soviet Union and the GDR.¹⁴

After Nujoma visited Beijing in 1964, seven SWAPO men were sent to the PRC for military training. When they returned to SWAPO’s first military camp at Kongwa in Tanzania these seven were collectively known as the “Chinamen” and they remained a discrete group, which in 1968 protested openly against the way in which the exiled SWAPO was operating. They wanted to be sent back to Namibia to fight. Instead they were detained, in very harsh conditions, at Dar es Salaam.¹⁵

11 In October 2018 Russia was in the news in Windhoek because a Russian billionaire had been granted four farms to lease: see S. Immanuel, “Russian Buys Four Farms”, *Namibian*, 18 October 2018: <https://www.namibian.com.na/182402/archive-read/Russian-buys-four-farms> (accessed 14 March 2019).

12 F. Xoagub, “Namibia: Chinese ‘Invasion’ Gets Mixed Reaction”, *New Era*, 17 February 2011. For a report that there were as many as 40,000 Chinese in Namibia see *Namibian*, 21 November 2006. Cf. also e.g. V.P. de Ruiter, “China in Africa? The Namibian Example”; I. Taylor, “China and Swapo: The role of the People’s Republic in Namibia’s Liberation and Post-independence relations”, *South African Journal of International Affairs* 5 (1997) 1, pp. 110–122; G. Dobler, “China and Namibia, 1990 to 2015: How a new actor changes the dynamics of political economy”, *Review of African Political Economy* 44 (2017) 153.

13 “A Briefing on Sino-Namibian Relations”, Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Namibia, na.china-embassy.org/eng/zngx/t144075.htm (accessed 4 April 2019).

14 J. Friedman, “Soviet Policy in the Developing World and the Chinese Challenge in the 1960s”, *Cold War History* 10 (2010) 2, pp. 247–272; J. Friedman, *Shadow Cold War. The Sino-Soviet Competition for the Third World*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. On Chinese sources see C. Kraus, “Researching the History of the People’s Republic of China”, Working Paper, Cold War International History Project (2016) 79, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/pub-lication/researching-the-history-the-peoples-republic-china> (accessed 4 April 2019).

15 C.A. Williams, *National Liberation in Post-Colonial Southern Africa. A Historical Ethnography of SWAPO’s Exile Camps*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 67, note 3. The Chinamen eventually escaped to Kenya. Cf. E. Torreguitar, *National Liberation Movements in Office: Forging Democracy with African Adjectives in Namibia*, Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009, pp. 25–26.

With the SWAPO leadership probably associating their training in China with their opposition, no further guerrillas appear to have been sent to the PRC for military training. Yet at its conference held at Tanga in Tanzania in 1969, SWAPO thanked China for moral and material support, and renamed its army the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), taking the name from the Chinese People's Liberation Army.¹⁶

For a decade from 1966 China was convulsed by the Cultural Revolution, but before it came to an end Nujoma had begun a series of further visits – seven in all – to Beijing.¹⁷ SWAPO tried to maintain good relations with both sides after the Sino-Soviet split, despite being asked to “make a stand”. When Nujoma visited in July 1973 he was reported as saying “The Chinese believe that we are pro-Soviet, we don't know why. We told them that we want to have friendly relations with both China and the USSR [...]”, and when a Chinese ambassador told a leading SWAPO official that SWAPO should side with China, the official replied: “We're not a communist party, so we have no right to comment on the battle between Chinese communism and Russian communism. We're only [sic] fighting for our liberation.”¹⁸

Nujoma's visits to China continued from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s,¹⁹ despite China's support for the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) at the time of the South African invasion of Angola in late 1975. Though SWAPO itself had close relations with UNITA before 1975, it was the rival, pro-Moscow Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) that came to power in Angola and allowed SWAPO to have bases on its territory. The PRC's support for UNITA damaged its credibility in most of Africa and meant the MPLA government in Angola would not allow the Chinese to visit SWAPO's camps in Angola.²⁰

Meanwhile, by the early 1970s what had in the 1960s been a rival to SWAPO, the South West Africa National Union (SWANU), had suffered from various splits and personality clashes that rendered it ineffectual, while its refusal to endorse

16 A. du Pisani, “Namibia and China: Profile and Appraisal of a Relationship”, in: A. Bosl et al. (eds.), *Namibia's Foreign Relations*, Windhoek: Macmillan Education, 2012, pp. 111–134, at 115.

17 Ibid.

18 V. Shubin, *The Hot “Cold War”. The USSR in Southern Africa*, London: Pluto Press, 2008, p. 209, and “Soviet Union”, in: A. Temu and J. das Neves Tembe (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles. Contemporaneous Documents 1960–1994, Vol. 8*, Dar es Salaam: Mkuki Na Nyota, 2014, pp. 41–112, at 94; S. Armstrong, *In Search of Freedom. The Andreas Shipanga Story as Told to Sue Armstrong*, Gibraltar: Ashanti Publishing, 1989, p. 82.

19 He led a large delegation in 1975: I. Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise*, London: Routledge, 2007, p. 123.

20 Taylor, “China and Swapo”, p. 112.

the idea of armed struggle had led the OAU and its influential Liberation Committee to recognize SWAPO as “the sole representative of the Namibian people”.²¹ With the UN General Assembly in 1976 recognizing SWAPO as the “sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people”, there was no alternative nationalist movement for China to support, unlike in the cases of the Angolan and Zimbabwean movements. While the PRC gave SWAPO diplomatic support at the UN, both in the General Assembly and in the Security Council,²² it retained a certain wariness of SWAPO because of its close ties with the Soviet Union.²³ As with North Korea, there is no evidence that China supplied SWAPO with significant military hardware.²⁴ Taylor is right to say that China “remained on the periphery of the liberation struggle in Namibia, though its presence on the Security Council meant that China was able to punch far above its weight on issues such as Namibian independence [...]”.²⁵

The Soviet Union and the GDR

Turning to the two most important “Eastern” countries in providing aid to SWAPO during its liberation struggle, for both of which we have more information than for North Korea and China, let us first consider the Soviet Union. SWANU, not SWAPO, was the first Namibian nationalist organisation to establish ties with the Soviet Union. SWANU became a member of the Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), in which the Soviet Union’s Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee (AASC) played an important role as a semi-official foreign policy organ, working closely with the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In the early 1960s SWAPO had closer ties

21 C. Saunders, “SWAPO and the Organisation of African Unity’s Liberation Committee”, *South African Historical Journal*, March 2018, pp. 152–167.

22 As Taylor says, “China always remained on the periphery of the liberation struggle in Namibia, though its presence on the Security Council meant that China was able to punch far above its weight on issues such as Namibian independence or the anti-apartheid struggle.” Taylor, “China and Swapo”, p. 112.

23 At an Extraordinary Plenary Meeting of the UN Council for Namibia in Tanzania in 1982, Beijing joined other delegates in offering full support for SWAPO and its armed struggle but added that “the Soviet Union is attempting to penetrate Southern Africa under the pretext of ‘supporting the national-liberation movement’ through its ‘military aid.’” Taylor, “China and Swapo”, p. 114, quoting from the *Beijing Review*.

24 “Throughout the liberation period [...] the PRC provided material assistance in the form of military hardware and political support” is inaccurate: Du Pisani, “Namibia and China”, p. 115.

25 Taylor, “China and Swapo”, p. 112.

with the Pan-Africanist Congress of South Africa than with the ANC, in part because of the ANC's links to the South African Communist Party and to the Soviet Union.²⁶ After a leading SWAPO official tried to establish contacts with Moscow in the early 1960s, he came under suspicion for disloyalty and was expelled from the organisation in 1964.²⁷ Though the AASC allocated academic scholarships to both SWANU and SWAPO from 1963, by the mid-1960s SWANU in exile had begun to fall apart, and the year after SWAPO began its armed struggle, against the backdrop of the competition between China and the Soviet Union for influence in the Third World, SWANU was expelled from an AAPSO congress that was boycotted by the PRC. SWAPO was admitted in its place, with Soviet support. From then, ties between SWAPO and the Soviet Union grew much closer.²⁸

The AASC provided food, clothes and vehicles, received Namibians in need of medical treatment, arranged for them to stay at Soviet hospitals, and coordinated activities for South African students in the Soviet Union. When Nujoma led a delegation to Moscow in October 1969, he told the Russians that the OAU's Liberation Committee had failed to provide the supplies SWAPO wanted, adding: "We can't rely on African countries."²⁹ Soon after his visit the Solidarity Committee recommended to the CPSU's Central Committee that funds be allocated to SWAPO. Nujoma and other SWAPO officials then made frequent visits to the Soviet Union, and large sums were donated to SWAPO, in particular for the armed struggle it had launched in 1966.

In the 1970s and 1980s the Soviet Union was the main supplier of military assistance to SWAPO for its armed struggle. Though the Soviet Union did not send combat troops to Angola, as Cuba did, it did send a few thousand military advisers, some of whom helped train SWAPO's armed wing, PLAN. Some of the Soviet advisers were caught up in fighting, especially in the battle at Cuito Cuanavale in 1987–1988.³⁰ On his frequent visits to Moscow, Nujoma reiterated

26 In a book she published in 1963, the activist Ruth First saw SWANU as more radical than SWAPO: R. First, *South West Africa*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.

27 Fortune wrote to Moscow in 1961 asking if he could visit to discuss military training. Two years later he requested arms and ammunition. With the SWAPO Vice-President, Louis Nelengani, he went to Moscow to take courses in the Central Komsomol School. Shubin, "Soviet Union", pp. 91–92. There is a notice of Fortune's expulsion in the archive of the Zambian United National Independence Party: British Library, Endangered Archives Project, file EAP121/2/5/4/24.

28 Shubin, *Hot "Cold War"*, "Soviet Union", cf. V. Shubin, "Unsung Heroes: The Soviet Military and the Liberation of Southern Africa", *Cold War History* 7 (2007) 2, pp. 251–262.

29 Shubin, *Hot "Cold War"*, pp. 198–206.

30 G. Shubin et al. (eds.), *Cuito Cuanavale: Frontline Accounts by Soviet Soldiers*, Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2014.

that because the OAU was failing to supply arms, SWAPO looked to the Soviet Union to do so. Two of many SWAPO requests for aid have been found among the declassified materials in the Russian archives. In one dated 1979, SWAPO asked Moscow to supply a range of goods, including over 5,000 AK-47s, 2,000 carbines, and uniforms and other equipment for 10,000 men. The other, dated July 1985 and called an additional [sic] request, is a 80-page document, asking, inter alia, for ten tanks, trucks, amphibious armoured personnel carriers, 2,800 AK-47s and a vast array of civilian goods, from underwear and other clothes to watches, sports equipment and shower cabins.³¹

Not all the military hardware that SWAPO asked for was provided,³² and what was given was insufficient for SWAPO to fight a conventional war against the South African army. Soviet military aid was nevertheless crucial to SWAPO's armed struggle and made it possible for SWAPO to continue engaging the South African forces. (Soviet-made weaponry supplied to the Cubans for use in Angola was also key, along with, say, the Soviet-made MIG-23s that Cuban pilots flew in Southern Angola in early 1988, winning air superiority there over the South African Airforce.)³³ In late 1988 the Soviets supported the agreement, made under United States mediation, to implement UN Security Council Resolution 435, and by then the Chinese too had come to favour a negotiated transition to independence for Namibia. China and the Soviet Union then both disappointed SWAPO in early 1989 by joining the Western countries on the UN Security Council in approving a reduction in the size of the UN mission sent to Namibia to supervise the country's first democratic election.³⁴

The Soviets supplied SWAPO with much else besides military hardware, from education for its cadres to funds that allowed the leadership to travel extensively to international conferences, but it was the extensive military aid that it supplied that was crucial to SWAPO's success, for without it SWAPO could not have pursued its armed struggle.

In the 1960s those who supplied SWAPO with weaponry included Yugoslavia: Nujoma was invited to visit Belgrade in 1961 and established good relations with President Tito, who immediately offered scholarships for Namibians and to provide small arms.³⁵ But Yugoslav assistance fell away by the 1970s and though

31 I. Filatova and A. Davidson, *The Hidden Thread*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2013, pp. 332. These documents are in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Moscow.

32 Information to the author from V. Shubin.

33 On this see e.g. L. Scholtz, *The SADF in the Border War*, Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2015.

34 See esp. C.J. Tsokodayi, *Namibia's Independence Struggle: The Role of the United Nations*, n.p.: Xlibris, 2015.

35 Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered*, p. 115.

Nujoma subsequently also visited and requested assistance from a number of other countries in the Soviet Bloc, including Romania, none gave the substantial support to SWAPO that the GDR did from the mid-1970s.³⁶ The GDR was second only to the Soviet Union in supplying military hardware and training to SWAPO in the late 1970s and the 1980s.³⁷

From the mid-1960s the GDR's Solidarity Committee began to provide some humanitarian aid to SWAPO and to offer scholarships, with funds drawn mainly from private and civil sources.³⁸ After the Soweto Uprising of 1976, the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED) took on a co-ordination role, which included establishing direct party relations with liberation movements,³⁹ while the Ministry of State Security (MfS) began to offer training to intelligence and military personnel from those movements, including SWAPO.⁴⁰ At the UN and in other international fora the GDR supported SWAPO as the "sole and authentic representative of the Namibian people", and in 1977 the GDR joined other socialist and Third World countries in criticizing the attempt by the so-called Western Contact Group to weaken the effect of the relevant UN Security Council Resolution on the way in which Namibia should move to independence.⁴¹

36 No support for SWAPO is mentioned in, e.g., P. Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945–1968*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. Bulgaria and Hungary provided training of various kinds to a few SWAPO cadres: one who went from Angola to both countries was Oiva Angula: see O. Angula, *SWAPO Captive. A Comrade's Experience of Betrayal and Torture*, Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2018, pp. 64–65, 80–82.

37 For some of what follows on the GDR cf. C. Saunders, "The GDR, SWAPO, and Namibia: Economic and other interactions in the 1970s and 1980s", in: A. Calori et al. (eds.), *The Other Globalisation. Spaces of Interaction between the Socialist Camp and the "global South" in the Cold War Economy*, Leipzig, 2019, forthcoming.

38 U. van der Heyden, *GDR Development Policy Involvement. Doctrine and Strategies Between Illusions and Reality 1960–1990*, Berlin: LIT, 2013, p. 73; I. Schleicher and H.-G. Schleicher, *Die DDR im Südlichen Afrika: Solidarität und Kalter Krieg*, Hamburg: Institut für Afrikakunde, 2006, p. 53.

39 H.-G. Schleicher, "GDR Solidarity: The German Democratic Republic and the South African Liberation Struggle", in: SADET (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: International Solidarity, Vol. 3*, Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2008, pp. 1069–1154, at 1092.

40 H.-G. Schleicher and U. Engel, "A Classified Affair: GDR policy on Africa and the MfS", *Außenpolitik, Zeitschrift für Internationale Fragen* 47 (1996) 4, (I thank Ulf Engel for sending me this). Similar support for the ANC followed the Soweto Uprising of 1976.

41 E.g. the joint communique issued by SED and SWAPO in 1977 which condemned "the intrigues and manoeuvres engineered by international imperialism and its new strategy", quoted H.-G. Schleicher. "The German Democratic Republic in the Liberation Struggle of Southern Africa", in: Temu and Tembe (eds.), *Southern African Liberation Struggles, Vol. 8*, p. 523. How individual decision-making took place in both the GDR and in SWAPO remains difficult to trace from the accessible documentation. The SWAPO archive in Windhoek remains closed. For references to

Following a visit by Nujoma in December 1977, the GDR began to supply SWAPO with light arms and ammunition; in 1978 SWAPO received 135 tons of military hardware.⁴² After Nujoma met Erich Honecker in February 1979 the GDR supplied vehicles, which SWAPO used both to transport supplies to refugee camps and soldiers to the front-lines and uniforms for 10,000 SWAPO guerrillas.⁴³ The value of the GDR's material assistance to SWAPO increased from one million East German marks (DDM) in 1975 to over six million in 1979.⁴⁴ Nujoma made 13 visits to East Berlin between 1975 and 1988,⁴⁵ and he and other SWAPO officials met the few leading GDR politicians who visited Southern Africa.⁴⁶ Some GDR teachers and health workers worked in SWAPO's camps in Angola. SWAPO opened an office, funded by the Solidarity Committee, at Schoenholzerweg 20 in East Berlin in October 1978. SWAPO publications, most notably the monthly *Namibia Today*, which called itself SWAPO's "official organ", were printed in Erfurt for worldwide distribution. The rebellion in SWAPO that led some of the dissidents in the organisation to form a separate SWAPO-D party in 1978 did not weaken the close ties that had developed by then between the SWAPO leadership under Nujoma and the GDR.⁴⁷

After South African troops perpetrated the massacre of Namibians at SWAPO's Cassinga camp in Southern Angola in May 1978, 80 Namibian refugee children were flown to the GDR and provided with education in Mecklenburg.⁴⁸

the relevant Bundesarchiv material see T. Kern, "West Germany and Namibia's Path to Independence, 1969–1990: Foreign Policy and Rivalry with East Germany", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 2016.

42 In that year the value of this weaponry was 1.15 million East German marks. Cf. B.H. Schulz, *Development Policy in the Cold War era: The Two Germanies and Sub-Saharan Africa, 1960–1985*, Muenster: LIT, 1995.

43 Schleicher, "The GDR", p. 526.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 527.

45 Nujoma first visited the GDR in January 1962 to talk to officials in the Solidarity Committee. He visited again in 1966 and then in May 1975. He made 13 official visits to GDR between 1975 and 1988: *Southern African Liberation Struggles*, Vol. 3, p. 183.

46 Nujoma met Werner Lamberz, the SED Secretary for Agitation, at a FRELIMO congress in Maputo and then in Luanda in 1977: G. Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 91–92, 101; Schleicher, "The GDR", p. 524. He met Erich Honecker in Luanda in February 1979. *Ibid.*, p. 526.

47 This even though the leader of the rebellion, Andreas Shipanga, had visited the GDR not long beforehand.

48 C. Kenna (ed.), *Homecoming: The GDR Kids of Namibia*, Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1999; K. Berndt, "Shared Paradoxes in Namibian and German history", in: E. Bekers, S. Helff and D. Merolla (eds.), *Transcultural Modernities: Narrating Africa in Europe*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.

Other Namibians were given technical training, or granted scholarships at universities in the GDR, while places at the SED party school in Rostock were allocated to SWAPO cadres. Members of PLAN wounded in the course of the war received medical treatment at hospitals in the GDR, and medical supplies were sent from the GDR to Angola.⁴⁹ SWAPO personnel received specialist training in security and intelligence from the MfS, especially after a visit to the GDR by Peter Nanyemba, SWAPO's Secretary of Defence, in April 1979.⁵⁰ The Nationale Volksarmee (NVA) trained SWAPO cadres at a number of its military academies.⁵¹

Most of the connections that had developed between the GDR and SWAPO by 1980 continued in the 1980s. Though the GDR backed the wrong party in Zimbabwe before that country became independent in 1980, it soon abandoned its ties to the Zimbabwe African People's Union and developed close ties instead with the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front. In the Namibian struggle, there was from the 1970s, as we have noted, no serious rival to SWAPO, and the GDR continued to give the SWAPO leadership under Nujoma its full support, ignoring the internal feuds within SWAPO which both in the mid-1970s and then again in the early 1980s threatened to weaken its capacity to wage effective military campaigns.⁵²

Despite the GDR's increasing economic difficulties, the value of the material aid it supplied to SWAPO remained relatively steady through the 1980s.⁵³ In 1981 Nujoma asked East Berlin to provide further food aid and weapons urgently, and to take in further refugee children. Although the GDR's economy was struggling, Honecker personally ensured that SWAPO received increased aid. The GDR, for

⁴⁹ Van der Heyden, *GDR Development Policy*, pp. 174–175; Schleicher and Schleicher, *Special Flights*.

⁵⁰ In: Temu and das Neves Tembe, *Southern African Liberation Struggles*, Vol. 3, p. 183. While Markus Wolf, the head of the foreign intelligence service of the MfS, does not mention such training, he does describe the similar training given ANC men. M. Wolf, *Man Without a Face: The Autobiography of Communism's Greatest Spymaster*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1997, pp. 280–281.

⁵¹ This despite the lack of international tolerance for German military activities after the Second World War. See, for example, Winrow, *Foreign Policy*, pp. 121–150; Van der Heyden, *GDR International Development*, pp. 121–148; Schleicher, "GDR Solidarity", pp. 1104, 1130–1132. See also S. Lorenzini, "East-South relations in the 1970s and the GDR involvement in Africa", in: M. Guderzo and B. Bagnato (eds.), *The Globalization of the Cold War: Diplomacy and Local Confrontation, 1975–85*, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 111.

⁵² On SWAPO's treatment of its own members, including detentions and executions, see esp. Williams, *National Liberation*.

⁵³ It fluctuated, reaching a peak of 10.5 million marks in 1982 but never falling below the 1977 level; in 1989 it was over 9 million marks. This did not include military supplies and assistance from churches.

example, helped fund and build a nursery school in the main SWAPO refugee camp at Kwanza Sul in central Angola that was opened in 1985. Each year SWAPO sent about 30 of its members on political education courses in the GDR, which ran other courses on economic and financial policy for SWAPO officials. Hifikepunye Pohamba, who was to succeed Nujoma as President of Namibia, attended a two-month course on economic policy in 1983, which, he remembers, was “tailored to correspond to prospective conditions in an independent Namibia”.⁵⁴ More Namibian children were flown to the GDR to receive primary education in the 1980s, 340 in all.⁵⁵ And in the first half of that decade the quantity and sophistication of the weaponry that the GDR supplied to SWAPO significantly increased. Though the population of Namibia was minute compared to that of South Africa, which was a much more important country economically, SWAPO received between one and three million DDM annually in military aid in the early 1980s, more than the ANC received for its struggle against apartheid in South Africa.⁵⁶

Though the Soviet Union and the GDR maintained their military assistance into the second half of the 1980s, the advent of Mikhail Gorbachev to the leadership in the Soviet Union and the beginning of the winding down of the Cold War, led to major changes in the connections between both countries and SWAPO.⁵⁷ Both countries were keen to reduce their spending in Southern Africa, and supported the diplomatic activity that led to the agreements of 1988 signed between South Africa, Angola, and Cuba, providing for the implementation of the UN plan for the transition to Namibia’s independence.⁵⁸ GDR officials now began covertly to explore the possibility of supplying goods to the apartheid regime in South Africa, despite its continued occupation of Namibia.⁵⁹ From 1986 the

54 Schleicher, “The GDR”, pp. 528–529. Pohamba was also one of those Namibians who received military training in the Soviet Union.

55 They were housed at Bellin Castle. Some Namibian trade unionists were trained at the Free German Trade Union Federation school.

56 Van der Heyden, *GDR Development Policy*, pp. 174–175.

57 For the Cold War background see C. Saunders and S. Onslow, “The Cold War and southern Africa, 1976–1990”, in: M.P. Leffler and O.A. Westad (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Vol. 3, Endings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 222–243.

58 For the close involvement of the Soviets in that process see especially A. Adamishin, *White Sun of Angola*, Moscow: Vagrius, 2014, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-white-sun-angola> (accessed 4 April 2019).

59 For the claim that the GDR state firm Robotron sold embargoed computer technology to South Africa via a Harare-based company, ZCT, see H. van Vuuren, *Apartheid, Guns and Money*, Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2017, and Open Secrets, “Declassified: Apartheid Profits – Behind the Iron Curtain”, *Daily Maverick*, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/>

GDR stationed an advisor to SWAPO in the GDR embassy in Luanda “to prepare”, in his words, “the GDR’s relation with Namibia for the times after the achievement of independence, so that the GDR would be politically present, on an equal footing with the Federal Republic of Germany” (FRG).⁶⁰ He told the SWAPO leadership “that SWAPO ought to develop its own ideas and should not blindly copy the GDR, since a socialist development for Namibia after independence was out of the question under the prevailing circumstances [...]”.⁶¹ In 1988 a large group from PLAN received training in the GDR as bodyguards in preparation for SWAPO’s return to Namibia. From mid-1989 they helped guard the SWAPO officials who arrived back in the country, in an operation the details of which were worked out, in part, with GDR officials.⁶² Immediately after he had paid a longer than usual visit to the GDR, Nujoma himself returned to Namibia, in September 1989. That year the GDR’s Solidarity Committee organized special flights to repatriate Namibians from East Germany, at a cost of 1.2 million Mark.⁶³

In 1989 the GDR for the first time became involved directly in Namibia itself when it joined the UN Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) mission to the territory. By the time the UN sought personnel for that mission, the GDR’s ideological rivalry with the FRG had dissipated and the GDR leadership had accepted the idea of co-operating with the FRG if it seemed to be in its interests. The GDR therefore agreed to supply UNTAG with monitors as part of a joint team. It did this, according to the GDR Foreign Ministry, “to counter attempts by imperialist quarters to gain influence through broad involvement of their nations in the military and civil components [of UNTAG]”.⁶⁴ Thirty GDR police monitors went first, and they were followed by twenty-five election monitors. Even in 1989 the GDR was concerned to try to enhance its international status, and participation in the joint mission was a way to do that, while still competing economically with the FRG, for both sought access to Namibia’s rich mineral and fishing resources. In late 1989 it remained unclear whether, when SWAPO

2017-09-26-declassified-apartheid-profits-behind-the-iron-curtain/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Picks%20of%20the%20week&utm_content=Picks%20of%20the%20week+CID_54452358402bcc4a499faf9d05aa88f2&utm_source=TouchBasePro&utm_term=Declassified%20Apartheid%20Profits%20%20Behind%20the%20Iron%20Curtain#.WdAEX5Og-GQ (accessed 4 April 2019). For the suggestion that the GDR continued to trade with South Africa into the early 1980s see van der Heyden, *Zwischen Solidaritaet*, pp. 108–109.

⁶⁰ Professor Johannes Pilz, the GDR advisor, quoted in Schleicher, “The GDR”, p. 528.

⁶¹ Schleicher, “The GDR”, quoting interviews with Namibians, 1996.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 530.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 531–532, citing *Neues Deutschland*, 19 and 25 July 1989.

⁶⁴ Quoted Schleicher, “The GDR”, pp. 529–530. D. Lange, “The GDR’s UNTAG involvement 1989/90”, *Journal of Namibian Studies* 12 (2012), pp. 47–70.

came to power in Namibia, the GDR's history of unwavering solidarity with SWAPO would count for more than the FRG's economic power. The end of the GDR and then the unification of Germany rendered this question moot.

Both the Soviet Union and the GDR sent officials to Namibia on the eve of the election of November 1989. The GDR appointed an ambassador to run a GDR embassy in Windhoek as soon as Namibia became independent, and the embassy opened its doors, the last ever established by the GDR.⁶⁵ The ambassador, however, the last such appointee the GDR made, was never officially accredited, for as SWAPO came to power in an independent Namibia, the old GDR leadership was swept away and soon the country itself disappeared. Further special flights were organized later in 1990 to take over 400 of those who would be called, in Namibia, "GDR Kids", from East Germany to Namibia.⁶⁶ Eduard Shevardnadze, the Soviet minister of foreign affairs, was a high-profile guest at Namibia's independence celebrations. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Soviet embassy in Windhoek was transformed into a Russian one.

The increased interactions between the GDR and the Soviet Union and SWAPO from the late 1970 followed SWAPO's adoption in 1976 of a political programme that talked of "scientific socialism" as the goal of the struggle, but that mainly reflected SWAPO's new relationship with the ruling party in Angola, which called itself Marxist-Leninist. There was no major ideological shift in SWAPO itself.⁶⁷ Despite the many visits and the fraternal relations that developed between the SWAPO leadership and both the Soviet Union and the GDR, that leadership was little influenced ideologically by Marxism-Leninism. The Soviet Union and the GDR came to accept that SWAPO was above all a nationalist movement seeking Namibia's independence, and was not concerned primarily with social transformation. While they hoped that the political education provided to Namibians would help shape their thinking and feed into SWAPO's policies, there is little evidence that this happened to any significant extent.

Because South Africa refused until 1988 to allow Resolution 435 to be implemented, those trained in the Soviet Union and the GDR before then returned to Southern Africa either to engage in military struggle or to some other exile existence. How they used the training they received when back in Southern Africa is difficult to establish. SWAPO personnel trained by the Stasi learned how to run an efficient operation and then employed harsh interrogation methods in the

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 530.

⁶⁶ Schleicher and Schleicher, *Special Flights*.

⁶⁷ L. Dobell, *Swapo's Struggle for Namibia*, Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishers, 1998.

SWAPO camps in Angola from 1979.⁶⁸ When those trained and educated in the Soviet Union and GDR were eventually able to return to Namibia in 1989/90, the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe were collapsing, and the political education they had received does not seem to have influenced Namibia's post-independence policies in any significant way.⁶⁹ Some of the Namibian children taken from Angola to the GDR for education, whom the GDR saw as potential future leaders of Namibia, were critical of the GDR for keeping them separate from the local population and restricting their movements, and complained of experiencing racism.⁷⁰ There was at least some awareness among them that they were being fed propaganda,⁷¹ and after they settled in Namibia, where they continued to cohere as a group and remembered their upbringing in the GDR with some nostalgia, they were not noticeably committed to socialist ideas.⁷²

68 These methods included torture. See esp. Williams, *National Liberation*. Stephen Ellis looked at Stasi files in Berlin for evidence of such influences on the ANC in Angola. S. Ellis, *External Mission. The ANC in Exile*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2012, chapter 5.

69 Much more significant was the UN Institute for Namibia (UNIN) founded in Lusaka, Zambia, in 1976 to train Namibians and plan for independence, and headed by a man educated in the United States (the present Namibian President, Hage Geingob). UNIN produced the major plan for Namibia's future. UNIN, *Namibia. Perspectives for National Reconstruction and Development*, Lusaka: UNIN, 1986.

70 J. Owens and M. Nambulela, "Can't Namibia's ex-GDR kids be called adults", in: C. Limpricht and M. Biesele (eds.), *Heritage and Culture in Modern Namibia*, Goettingen: Klaus Hess, 2008; Berndt, "Shared Paradoxes", pp. 347–361; M.D. Witte, K. Klein-Zimmer and C. Schmitt, "Growing Up Transnationally between SWAPO and GDR – A Biographical Ethnographic Study on Namibian Refugee Children", *Transnational Social Review* 3 (2013) 2, pp. M-28–M-33; C. Schmitt, M.D. Witte and S. Polat, "International solidarity in the GDR and transnationality: an analysis of primary school materials for Namibian child refugees", *Transnational Social Review* 4 (2014) 2–3, pp. 242–258; S. Pugach, "African Students and the Politics of Race and Gender in the German Democratic Republic", in: Q. Slobodian (ed.), *Comrades of Colour: East Germany in the Cold War*, New York: Berghahn, 2015; C. Schmitt and M.D. Witte, "'You are special': othering in biographies of 'GDR children from Namibia'", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41 (2018) 7, pp. 1352–1369. The daughter of SWAPO's Secretary of Labour, John Ya-Otto, recalled that "[m]ost of the time, life took place away from the wider GDR population. Outings with SWAPO parents, who were also educated in the GDR, and older students in general did not involve the wider GDR population, only the relevant government officials." Kern interview with Winnie Ya-Otto, Berlin, 15 January 2015.

71 Berndt, "Shared Paradoxes", pp. 359–360.

72 Speaking at the launch of J. Krause and B. Kaplan, *Children in Exile. A Pictorial Record*, Windhoek: Kuiseb Publishers, 2017, one of the GDR children, Iipumbu Sakaria, said he remembered "how it was instilled in us, and expected of us, to be the next generation of Plan combatants", *The Namibian*, 30 June 2017. Cf. "Boek oor GDR kinders bekend gestel", *Die Republikein*, 29 June 2017. Nujoma, giving the book his imprimatur, recalled how Honecker had welcomed the children in the GDR.

For the socialist countries, solidarity with Southern African liberation movements in struggles against imperialism and racism, seen as part of a world-wide proletarian struggle against capitalist exploitation, aided their self-perception that they were “on the right side of history” in the Cold War.⁷³ There were particular reasons for the GDR to develop ties with SWAPO besides its concern to break out of international isolation. Despite the contradiction between support for national independence and self-determination elsewhere and dictatorial rule at home, and, though there was no grass-roots solidarity movement of the kind that emerged in some Western countries, people in the GDR, more than in the Soviet Union, did identify with the state’s solidarity with Southern African liberation struggles, in part for ideological reasons, but also because the rival FRG maintained close relations with the apartheid regime.⁷⁴ GDR support for SWAPO must also be seen in the context of Namibia having been a former colony of Germany. The GDR was keen to distance itself both from the 30,000 Germans who remained in Namibia and from the German role in colonizing Namibia,⁷⁵ and to challenge the role that West Germany played vis a vis Namibia, but that German remained one of the main languages of Namibia, spoken by some in SWAPO, meant there were cultural ties, despite the negative legacy of German rule of Namibia and the influence that the German-speaking minority still had in the territory. And West Germany’s improving diplomatic relations with SWAPO from 1977, when the FRG became a member of the Western Contact Group, were seen as a threat to the GDR’s relationship with SWAPO. The GDR sought to try to counter this by increasing its own links with SWAPO.⁷⁶ By the late 1980s, however, the GDR had come to accept that Western interests would

73 T. Weiss, “Shaping the Discourse on Africa. The Concept of ‘Solidarity’ in East German Relations with SWAPO”, M.A. thesis, University of Oxford, 2008, pp. 36–40, and “The Concept of ‘Solidarity’ in East German Relations with SWAPO”, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37 (2011) 2, 2011, pp. 351–367; German Propaganda Archive, Calvin College, Honecker speech: “Party and Revolutionary Young Guard Firmly Allied (1984)”, Calvin College, German Propaganda Archive, <http://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/fdj.htm> (accessed 4 April 2019). B.H. Schulz, “The politics of East-South relations: The GDR and Southern Africa”, in: T.A. Baylis et al. (eds.), *East Germany in Comparative Perspective*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp. 158–160. See also Schleicher, “GDR Solidarity”, pp. 1083–1084. The 1974 GDR constitution referred to support for those fighting against imperialism, neo-colonialism and racism.

74 Cf. e.g. Schleicher, “GDR Solidarity”, pp. 1097–1102.

75 While the GDR prided itself on its anti-fascist legacy and anti-colonialism, some Namibian Germans retained affection for Hitler’s Reich.

76 The SPD-led government began to seek improved relations with SWAPO even before the FRG became a member of the Western Contact Group, which engaged in negotiations with SWAPO from 1977.

remain strong in an independent Namibia and by then it was prepared to work together with the FRG on the UNTAG mission, which it hoped would strengthen its position within the UN.

SWAPO was ready to accept aid from anyone to achieve its goal of Namibian independence. Though SWAPO officials sometimes used militant Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, especially when negotiations stalled and Namibia's independence seemed unattainable, their prime goal was always the liberation of the Namibian people from foreign rule. SWAPO believed, correctly in the event, that it could maintain its friendship with the socialist countries and gain important benefits from the relationship with them without becoming overly committed to them. Whereas in, say, independent Mozambique advisers could hope to exert influence on state policy, the most the socialist countries could do in respect of Namibia was to try to influence its future leaders, whether the Namibian children the GDR educated or the SWAPO officials who took courses in the Soviet Union, or through supplying military and other aid.⁷⁷ When Namibia did eventually become independent, the Washington consensus was dominant and the knowledge then transferred was technical, not the Marxist socialism that the Soviet Union and the GDR had tried to inculcate in the SWAPO cadres who spent time in those countries.⁷⁸ Though the socialist countries wanted their visitors to return to Southern Africa as soldiers or leading members of society who would, hopefully share their ideals and have a strong affinity with Marxism-Leninism,⁷⁹ both the GDR and Soviet Union came to accept that those it supported in southern Africa would engage economically with the West. By the time Namibia became independent, the Berlin Wall had fallen.

In Conclusion

SWAPO's "Eastern" connections varied from country to country, and over time, but there were similarities. All four countries had relatively closed political systems and connections were mainly at the official level, with relatively few personnel involved and little involvement from civil society. There were never

⁷⁷ Wolf writes that though "some basic instruction on the principles of Marxism-Leninism was included [...] our student guests politely made it plain that this was not what they had come for" and that the GDR learnt "that it was unwise to force our worldview on our partners". Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, p. 281. Schleicher claims that cadres of liberation movements were eager to study the ideological theories of Marxism-Leninism.

⁷⁸ Cf. Schleicher, "GDR Solidarity", p. 1087.

⁷⁹ Thorsten Kern interviews with "GDR kids" Ndamona Ya-Otto and Selma Kamati, Berlin, 18 January 2015, and with H.-G. Schleicher, Berlin, 20 February 2016.

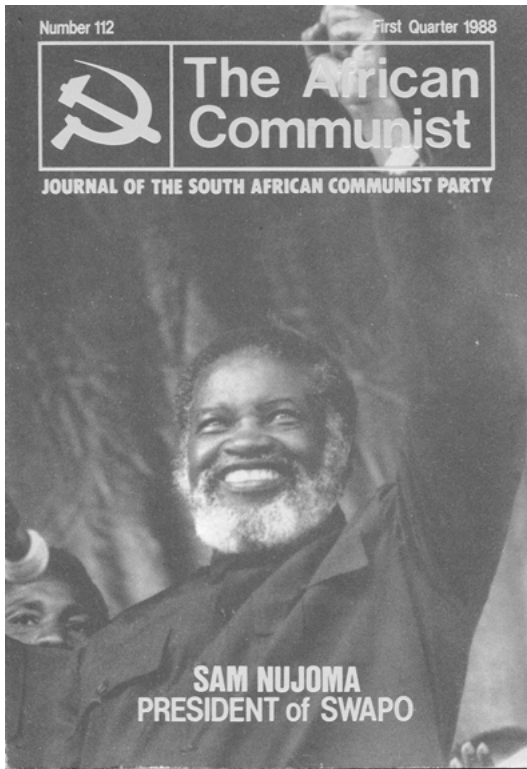


Fig. 3: Cover of “The African Communist. Journal of the South African Communist Party” printed in Leipzig [published in: South African Communist Party (eds.), *The African Communist. Journal of the South African Communist Party* (first quarter 1988) 112, Lusaka; source: Ulrich van der Heyden, private archive]

more than a few hundred Namibians in the GDR or the Soviet Union at any one time, or Soviet or GDR personnel working in Angola with SWAPO. While both countries provided a wide range of support, from scholarships to financial and humanitarian aid to military hardware, the Soviet Union was the main supplier of such hardware and the GDR did not send large numbers of military advisers to SWAPO in Angola, as the Soviets did. As we have noted, neither country sent combat troops, as Cuba did, to fight alongside SWAPO units in Angola.

The ideological instruction provided by the Soviet Union and the GDR appears not to have left lasting or dominant influences on those who received it, while the technical expertise that Namibians gained was mainly used in exile, because it took so long for independence to be achieved. In 1989, for the first time, a few Soviet and GDR personnel visited Namibia, but the GDR and then

the Soviet Union collapsed, meaning that the social capital built through the decades of the evolving relationship between the two countries largely disappeared.

Both the PRC and North Korea were able to maintain links with SWAPO during the decades of the liberation struggle, despite the much more important ties that existed between SWAPO and the Soviet Union. Not only was SWAPO able to benefit from the way in which competing countries sought ties with it, but the links forged during the decades of struggle fed into post-independence ties. In the North Korean case, this meant that country being asked by the government of independent Namibia to construct major monuments and buildings.

For much of the Cold War Western countries believed that the Soviet Union had geopolitical ambitions in Southern Africa – to gain control over the strategically important Cape sea-route and the region's natural resources and raw materials – and that it, and the GDR, which was viewed as a Soviet puppet, provided support to SWAPO in furtherance of this objective.⁸⁰ Soviet support to Southern African liberation movements was not as purely altruistic as Shubin suggests, and must be seen in terms of Cold War competition with the United States. With the United States supporting apartheid South Africa in the Cold War era, the Soviet Union could see a potential SWAPO government as a Cold War ally. On the other hand, the Soviet Union and the GDR believed in the rightness of SWAPO's cause, and saw its liberation struggle as part of a wider campaign to bring apartheid in South Africa to an end.⁸¹ Among other, less important reasons for providing such extensive support was a concern to establish the basis for future co-operation with an independent Namibia and perhaps gain privileged access to natural resources. It was assumed that Namibian independence was inevitable and anticipated that it would come much sooner than it did. As we have noted, the GDR had its own reasons: it sought to advance its international standing as a sovereign state and equal member of the community of nations, and its position within the Eastern bloc countries and against the FRG. While the GDR saw itself as acting in parallel with the Soviet Union, its patron, it acted independently, hoping that it would benefit, economically and otherwise, when the liberation movements it supported came to power.⁸² And while

⁸⁰ Cf. e.g. the Denton hearings on "The Role of the Soviet Union, Cuba and East Germany in Fomenting Terrorism in Southern Africa" (Sub-committee on Security and Terrorism, United States Senate, March 1982).

⁸¹ Though the chief of the foreign intelligence service of the MfS did not think the ANC would come to power in South Africa: Wolf, *Man Without a Face*, p. 279.

⁸² V. Shubin to this author, email, 8 August 2017. The GDR needed the Kremlin's support on the German question and remained dependent on its economic relations with the Soviet Union, but

military support from the Soviet Union and the GDR continued, a significant change occurred from the mid-1980s, as the Cold War began to thaw. By 1988 both China and the Soviet Union were in favour of the negotiations that began that year under the mediation of Chester Crocker, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

A broad church ideologically, SWAPO welcomed support for its goal of independence from anyone. It was not willing to alienate potential supporters by committing to any one ideological line. When Namibia became independent, with a liberal democratic constitution, it sought Western foreign investment and few of the ideas propagated by the Soviets and the GDR found resonance. Today few legacies remain from the connections forged with the Soviet Union and the GDR in the decades of the liberation struggle, despite the importance of those ties for assisting SWAPO to reach its goal of independence. There are no streets in Windhoek named after GDR figures, no monument to the GDR in Namibia, and in 2018 relations between Namibia and Germany are dominated by the issue of whether Germany should pay reparations for the genocide of the Herero and Nama in the early twentieth century. Similarly, the role of the Soviet Union in the liberation struggle is largely forgotten, though, speaking in Windhoek in June 2018 on Russia's national day, the Russian ambassador did say that Russia was "proud of its ties with Namibia that date back decades to the time of Namibi's struggle for independence".⁸³ The irony is that the support given by the two "Eastern" countries that aided SWAPO most (besides Cuba, not considered here), the GDR and Soviet Union, is now little remembered in Namibia, whereas the much more limited support given by North Korea and the PRC is often mentioned in the context of present-day relations.

did not take orders from its Big Brother, though in 1975 Honecker signed a "Treaty of Friendship" with the Soviet Union, underlining East Berlin's alignment with Moscow: Winrow, *Foreign Policy*, p. 121.

⁸³ K. Tjitemisa, "Russia, Namibia Enjoy Excellent Relations", *New Era*, 15 June 2018, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201606160565.html> (accessed 4 April 2019).