

Destructive Engagement: US Military Cooperation With Apartheid
New York: U.S. Peace Council (1988)

by Gordon Welty
Wright State University
Dayton, OH 45435 USA

Apartheid South Africa is now on the defensive. Virtually the entirety of world opinion is demanding the freedom of Nelson Mandela, the man who would be president of a free South Africa; recent military defeats in Angola and Namibia have compelled the racist regime to enter into negotiations to speed the withdrawal of its occupation troops; its proxy army in Mozambique -- RENAMO -- has been shown to humanity to be barbarians in the spirit of Hitler and Pol Pot, with the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the past year; the 1988 Olympic Games again throws into bold relief the pariah status of South Africa within the international community.

Yet the regime continues to invade, attack and destabilize its neighbors, the Frontline states of southern Africa. It continues and in fact has stepped up its oppression and repression of the vast majority of its people. It continues to avoid the penalty of complete diplomatic, economic and military sanctions from the world community of nations. It has been able to do so largely through the largesse of the US transnational corporations and the US government, acting in the name of "constructive engagement."

What follows is merely an outline of US-South African military and nuclear collaboration.

Some Background on Apartheid in South Africa

South Africa was colonized by the Dutch in the middle of the Seventeenth Century. In 1795 the British seized the Cape Colony; at that time its population was about 15 thousand colonizers who held about an equal number of slaves. Of course the African people in the territories not yet colonized were vastly more numerous.

The Dutch and British desired a way-station at the Cape as part of European colonial policy. This geopolitical interest was compounded when diamonds, gold and other minerals were discovered in South Africa in the late Nineteenth Century. Since World War II, a manufacturing sector has grown alongside the extractive and agricultural sectors, providing a basis for the penetration by many transnational corporations into the South African economy.

There is also a substantial South African monopoly capitalism. It has been estimated that by the Eighties, five South African conglomerates, headed by the giant Anglo-American Group, controlled over 50% of the total assets of corporations which were listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. But the South African economy is largely, and increasingly, a state-capitalist economy. Since the Sixties, more than one-half of the South African GNP has been produced by state-capitalist enterprises such as ISCOR

[Iron and Steel Corporation]. And the state-capitalist portion of the South African economy is growing every year.

South Africa has a population today of more than 32 million people. About 5 1/2 million of these [about 16%] are White. The other 27 million [about 84%], collectively called Black, are oppressed by the racist system of apartheid. Thereby the standard of living of Whites in South Africa is one of the highest in the world, and the infant mortality rate of rural Africans is also one of the highest in the world. There is one doctor for every 400 whites, and one for every 90 thousand blacks. 87% of the land in South Africa is reserved for Whites, and that is the best land. The other 13% is reserved for Africans.

Apartheid has repeatedly been condemned in the United Nations General Assembly, and trade and military aid embargoes have frequently been proposed. The government of the United States has repeatedly vetoed resolutions condemning apartheid in the United Nations Security Council, and has otherwise failed to oppose apartheid in United Nations deliberations. For example, during the Forty-Second Session of the UN General Assembly conducted in November 1987, the United States alone among all the nations of the world voted against every resolution which was adopted against apartheid. But United States support for the apartheid regime is much more substantial than mere gestures in world forums.

United States transnational corporations such as Mobil, Phelps Dodge, and Union Carbide continue to invest money and reap superprofits from the people of South Africa. Moreover, the United States is today South Africa's largest trading partner. Successive United States administrations have sought to justify their continuing support of the apartheid regime by citing the geopolitical location of South Africa on vital sea lanes, the wealth of strategic minerals, the extent of transnational investments in South Africa -- where the United States has about one-half its total invested in Africa -- the 'Christian' and European heritage of the apartheid rulers, and when all else fails, the specter of 'chaos' and 'Communism.'

Destabilizing the Frontline States

In the meantime, South Africa continues its bloodthirsty attacks on its neighbors. Without recounting all the South African attacks, it should be recalled that the South African Defense Forces [SADF] has made twelve major military incursions into independent Angola, including Operation Savannah in 1975, Operation Smokeshell in 1980, Operation Protea in August 1981, and Operation Askari in 1983, and still has troops in Angola in 1988; South Africa launched a bloody attack on Gabarone, Botswana in June 1985; attacked Maseru, Lesotho in December 1982 and again in December 1985, and finally overthrew the Lesothan government in January 1986; trained and supported the RENAMO [MNR] bandits in Mozambique since 1980, puppets who have killed an estimated 100-200 thousand Mozambicans in the past two years; organized a coup attempt against the Seychelles Islands in November 1981; coerced Swaziland into signing a secret security agreement in February 1982; attacked Livingstone, Zambia in April 1987; and supported ZPRA bandits in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe since 1980.

In conjunction with its genocidal policies towards its own African population, the apartheid regime surely stands out for all the world to see as a terrorist state. And all the while, South Africa has continued its illegal occupation of Namibia.

Namibia became the German colony known as South West Africa as late as the 1880's, and was occupied by South Africa during World War I. This mineral-rich land has three-fourths as much territory as South Africa. It has a population today of more than a million people. In 1966, the United Nations General Assembly called for an end to South Africa's illegal occupation of Namibia, and the International Court of Justice concurred in 1971. But South Africa persists in occupying Namibia and terrorizing the people there. When Catholic Archbishop Dennis Hurley of Durban protested his government's terrorist activities in Namibia, he was arrested and put on trial in South Africa.

Under the leadership of the South West African Peoples Organization [SWAPO], the Peoples Liberation Army of the Namibian people have been engaged in a war of survival and national liberation against the apartheid regime of South Africa. In 1978, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 435 calling for a ceasefire, UN-administered elections, and self-rule in Namibia. But South Africa has resisted this United Nations resolution and 'the struggle continues'.

Conventional Arms

How does the vastly outnumbered apartheid regime continue to cling to power? How does it continue to prey upon its neighbors? The answer seems deceptively simple: by Western support and by brute force. Through the Fifties, the South African federal budget tended to support the policing of apartheid rather than the military functions of the SADF. An interlinked set of events in the early Sixties changed that. The Sharpeville Massacre in March 1960, the arms embargo called for in August 1963 by UN Security Council Resolution 181 -- an embargo which, incidentally, the United States was obliged by U.S. law to enforce -- and the beginning of military operations by national liberation movements in Angola, Mozambique, Namibia, and Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe] brought the issue of militarization of South Africa to the fore.

South Africa revised its budget priorities in an attempt to maintain absolute military superiority throughout southern Africa. The South African defense budgets have risen from 44 million (current) Rands in 1960, to 250 million in 1970, 2 billion in 1980, and 8 billion Rands in 1988. The SADF has become the most powerful military force in Africa. By late 1987 it was South Africa's largest employer, with an estimated 375,000 soldiers.

The apartheid regime has sought to ensure the capacity to retain that superiority through the development of a self-sufficient arms industry. In 1964, the state-capitalist enterprise ARMSCOR was founded to achieve that goal. By the end of the decade, ARMSCOR was supplying SADF with a wide range of weapons, including rifles, the Panhard [Eland] armored vehicle, and the Impala jet aircraft. ARMSCOR was reported in April 1988 to have 23,000 employees and to have provided an additional 67,000 jobs through sub-contracts.

Throughout the Seventies, despite the 1963 embargo, South Africa continued to purchase vast quantities of weapons abroad. These have been both 'legal' and illegal sales. For example, during the early Seventies, two United States corporations, Winchester Group of Olin Corporation and Colt Industries, transshipped thousands of rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition through the Canary Islands to South Africa. As a result of violating United States law, an export manager for Colt Firearms was sentenced to a year in prison in 1976, and Olin was fined \$45,000 in 1978.

In early 1982, the sale of thousands of electric cattle-prods (for use against crowds) was approved by the Commerce Department. Indeed, under the Reagan Administration, the has been a vital source of military technology and equipment. In fiscal years 1981-83 the State Department authorized the sale of \$ 28.3 million worth of military-related equipment to South Africa, the highest level on record. More recently, several officers of Hercaire International, Inc. of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, were indicted in late 1987, charged with having made more than seventy shipments of military aircraft parts, worth several million dollars, to South Africa during the 1980's. All of this suggests that South Africa is far from achieving its goal of a self-sufficient arms industry.

Military superiority requires more than productive capacity of the arms industry, it requires extensive research and development. Neither SADF nor ARMSCOR has this capacity-building potential. Maintaining the military superiority of the SADF thus involves one of two processes. Either ARMSCOR will acquire licensing rights to manufacture demonstrably superior weapons developed by other nations, such as it did for the Israeli Uzi, the French Mirage III, the French Puma 830 helicopter gunship, etc. Or else the South Africans will acquire these weapons through military and industrial espionage, smuggling and contravention of the UN arms embargo.

This embargo became mandatory after the adoption of Security Council Resolution 418. Following the victory of the MPLA in the Angolan civil war, and the Soweto Uprising in 1976, there was a dramatic increase in the supply to South Africa weapons such as shotguns which were manufactured in the United States. There was a great increase in South African arms purchases around the world, especially from NATO countries. Thereupon the Security Council adopted the mandatory arms embargo in November 1977; perhaps surprisingly, the United States voted to adopt this resolution.

Who Violates the Arms Embargo?

This more stringent embargo has proven only somewhat more effective in limiting the flood of arms into South Africa. In late 1986, for instance, it was disclosed that plans were underway to airlift 38 tons of machine-guns from Bradley Field in Connecticut through San Pedro Sula airport in Honduras, and on to Johannesburg. The shipments out of the United States were apparently approved by the Commerce Department.

Of course it is not only the United States and its corporations which violate the 1977 arms embargo. The State Department is always ready to accuse NATO and other allies of violations of their own. For example, the state-capitalist Howaldswerke Deutsch Werft AG shipbuilding company of Kiel, owned by the West German government, has been

revealed to have been under contract since 1984 to construct Type 209 submarines for South Africa. A Bundestag investigation revealed that this deal was struck after Botha made a personal appeal to Chancellor Helmut Kohl. South Africa had already paid more than a million dollars and received the blueprints, smuggled in diplomatic pouches, when public outcry caused the deal to be cancelled.

Israel is said to have been the worst violator of the arms embargo. In late 1986 it was announced that Israel had provided the South African Air Force [SAAF] with several Boeing 707 tanker airplanes, equipped for inflight re-fueling of strike aircraft. After the Lavi jet aircraft program in Israel was cancelled in 1987, South Africa hired many Israeli technicians to work on ARMSCOR projects. Indeed, it was suggested that South Africa might undertake production of the Lavi -- under another, more 'South African' name. By April 1988, Israeli technicians were reported to be 'updating' the SAAF Cheetah jet aircraft, a fighter which is akin to the French Mirage -- and the Israeli Kfir. The SAAF now has the strike aircraft in the Cheetah, as well as the re-fueling capabilities, to enable it to attack any target in Africa south of the equator.

Another important example of clandestine arms acquisitions by South Africa is the sophisticated 155 mm howitzer which the Botha regime announced it had developed in April 1978. In fact, according to a subsequent United States Senate investigation, this weapon system had been developed by a United States enterprise called Space Research Corporation [SRC], based in Vermont, owned by Arthur D. Little Company. In fact, tens of thousands of 155 mm artillery shells for this weapon were manufactured by the US Army munitions factory in Scranton, Pennsylvania and were shipped to South Africa. As a result of the violation of United States law and the UN arms embargo, two SRC officials were jailed for a few months and the company received fines totaling not quite \$50,000.

This weapon system, which the South Africans have renamed the G-5, has proven very effective in the SADF's recurrent invasions of Angola. It has been reported that the G-5 has been fitted with a nuclear warhead developed by South Africa, as well as a warhead to carry nerve gas. The G-5 is also playing an important role in the shelling of civilian centers in the Iran-Iraq War.

The SADF has been using chemical weapons developed and used by the US in Vietnam and now banned by international convention. Napalm and defoliants have been used in Namibia and Angola. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organization charged that a paralyzing gas was used to incapacitate some of the Kassanga massacre victims before they were shot. Poison gases have also been used by the South African-backed RENAMO terrorists in Mozambique.

The UNITA Facade

In July 1985, Congress repealed the 1976 Clark Amendment which had prohibited United States support for any of the sides in the national liberation struggle in Angola. By late 1985, the Reagan Administration began shipping some \$15 million in military aid to the South African puppet Jonas Savimbi and his UNITA bandits in Cuando Cubango

province in southeastern Angola. Serious questions were immediately raised about the political wisdom and the morality of providing United States support for such a degenerate group as UNITA, a group condemned by the Organization of African Unity [OAU]. But there were other questions as well.

There are three routes by which these shipments -- which included Stinger anti-aircraft missiles -- could get to the landlocked areas where the UNITA operates. One is the politically implausible route through Zambia. Of the politically possible routes, one is through Zaire, the other is through South Africa and Namibia. Questions were raised in the latter case about the likelihood that such military aid would fall into SADF hands during transshipment, violating the UN arms embargo against South Africa. Misgivings aside, in March 1988 the Wall Street Journal reported arms dealers who planned on shipping arms to UNITA through South Africa.

Several times during 1986, the CIA flew arms into Kamina in Shaba province in southern Zaire, from where the weapons were flown to Jamba, Angola where UNITA had its headquarters. The US has had extensive experience airlifting military supplies into southern Zaire. In the mid-Sixties, the CIA had organized and coordinated the military opposition to Lumumbist forces operating in what was then the Congo. This involved both airlifts and US Special Forces activities. As recently as June 1978, the US Military Airlift Command [MAC] was flying troops and military equipment into Shaba province in its C-141 transport aircraft, in response to national liberation forces operating in the Kolwezi region.

Thus the United States knew the terrain and the airfields very well. By the middle of 1987, the NY Times reported as many as five flights a week, as the Reagan administration announced that it was sending an additional \$15 million in military aid to UNITA. This characteristically Reaganite facade was presumably intended to dispel questions about violations of the UN arms embargo. What was clearly at stake for the Reaganites was appearance, not legality. Because such arms transshipments obviously violated the Angolan-Zairean non-aggression pact signed in 1984.

In fact, the United States arms shipments to UNITA violated the embargo anyhow. There was no way that United States officials could -- even if they wanted to, which is clearly not the case -- control the disposition of arms which they supply to bandit war-lords such as Savimbi. In March 1987, it was reported that bandit groups in Zambia had obtained several Stinger missiles from the UNITA stockpiles. So the Stingers are 'circulating' anyhow. By November 11, the SADF acknowledged that it had been directly involved in conflict with the armed forces of the Angolan people [FAPLA]. The attacks which UNITA had been reported to have made against FAPLA and the Angolan populace were in fact planned and conducted by the SADF at all levels from command to the battlefield.

Later in November, and again in December 1987, the UN Security Council condemned South Africa's blatant invasion of Angola and demanded an immediate withdrawal of all SADF troops. Meanwhile, there can be no question that United States weapons such as

Stinger missiles have come into the hands of the SADF. The SADF has operational control over any weaponry which was purportedly in UNITA's hands.

United States complicity with the apartheid regime has become even more marked -- in late December 1987, the NY Times reported that small numbers of armed and uniformed American troops were operating in South African occupied portions of southeastern Angola.

As far as conventional arms are concerned, then, the Reaganite policy of 'constructive engagement' -- especially the form it takes in supporting the UNITA bandits and the facade they provide for SADF invasions of Angola -- can be understood as a willful scheme to subvert the UN arms embargo against South Africa, and to facilitate the destabilization of the Frontline States.

Nuclear Forces

South Africa's nuclear activities have been oriented towards military objectives since the beginning. In 1950, South Africa began supplying uranium to the US and Britain for military purposes. It has been reported that South Africa was supplying uranium to Israel in the late Fifties and Sixties, for use in the Israeli Dimona nuclear weapons factory.

The United States has been deeply involved in the development of South Africa's nuclear potential. Allis-Chalmers constructed the first nuclear reactor for South Africa which began operations in 1965. By 1970, many South African nuclear scientists had been educated by the United States.

The NATO and other allies of the United States have also advanced South Africa's nuclear potential. The Steinkohlen Elektrizitts corporation of the Federal Republic of Germany, owned in part by that government, assisted South Africa in developing a nuclear enrichment plant at Valindaba near Pretoria, which began operations in 1975. This plant is capable of producing weapon-grade nuclear material. South Africa has refused to allow international inspection of this plant on the grounds that the process is "revolutionary." (South Africa has also refused to sign the international nuclear non-proliferation treaty.) The United States in turn authorized the export of Foxboro Corporation process control computers for this plant in 1973, and concluded an expanded nuclear cooperation agreement in 1974, fully aware of the nuclear weapons potential of Valindaba.

Finally, pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus in the late Seventies led to the United States government's restriction on some sales and shipments of nuclear materials which would be useful for South African nuclear weaponry. But these restrictions were reversed under the Reaganites. According to a 1985 study by the Washington Office on Africa, South Africa became the third largest recipient of nuclear exports from the United States during the Reagan Administration. And the clients of the United States have assumed a larger role in the violations of the nuclear embargo as well. The Jerusalem Post reported in November 1987 that South African nuclear scientists were now doing

research at the Dimona nuclear weapons factory. So the transfer of nuclear technology to South Africa continues unabated.

These developments should be taken with the utmost seriousness. South Africa is the only country except the United States which has frankly declared it would have no compunction about using nuclear weapons if its back were to the wall. Deputy Defense Minister H.J. Coatee stated unequivocally in the Cape Times that "as a country with a nuclear capability, it would be very stupid not to use them, if nuclear weapons were needed as a last resort to defend oneself." And the apartheid regime clearly has its back against the wall.

Intelligence Sharing

South Africa dramatically expanded its military and political intelligence capacities after the mid-Seventies, including the use of sophisticated electronic equipment manufactured in the United States and other NATO countries. John Stockwell, former head of the CIA's Angola Task Force, has acknowledged that the CIA had fully come to coordinate its intelligence and other efforts "at all levels" with South Africa by the end of 1975. According to present and former United States officials interviewed by investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, the Carter Administration's ban on the sharing of any intelligence information with South Africa was reversed by the Reagan Administration as part of its policy of "constructive engagement" with South Africa.

In July 1986, Hersh published a report in the NY Times detailing United States intelligence support of the apartheid regime. He documented that the Reagan administration had begun providing extensive United States military and political intelligence to South Africa regarding the African National Congress, described in the paper as "the principal guerrilla group seeking ... the end of apartheid." Purportedly this intelligence was exchanged for South African information regarding shipping around the Cape, gathered at its Silvermine intelligence facility near Cape Town. But it should be pointed out that United States "spy-in-the-sky" satellites monitor shipping, hence the South African contribution could be bypassed by United States intelligence agencies. It is also evident that South Africa is unable to monitor its intelligence targets by itself. The apartheid regime was also described as receiving intelligence information from United States sources regarding the Frontline states of Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, and Zambia. South Africa depends upon the United States intelligence information; it is highly dubious that the United States has a reciprocal dependency.

What Can Be Done?

It is clear that the Reaganites have actively violated the military embargo, have winked at most corporate violators, and have slapped the most flagrant violators on the wrist. It is clear that these violations have permitted the apartheid regime to postpone its inevitable end, with resulting deaths of untold numbers of democrats, freedom fighters, and others in southern Africa. This must be ended, once and for all. Americans must ensure that no Reaganism -- with or without Reagan -- can in the future promote 'constructive engagement' with apartheid. What steps can the anti-apartheid forces in the United States

take to compel compliance with military, nuclear, and other sanctions against South Africa?

First and foremost, we must support comprehensive sanctions against South Africa. Partial sanctions are not enough -- they have provided too many loopholes for the Reaganites and the corporations to violate both the United Nations embargo and United States law. These sanctions must include complete disinvestment of all United States transnational corporations from South Africa and Namibia. All financing and credit agreements must be banned. All exports and imports between the United States and South Africa must be prohibited. Any form of cooperation between the two countries involving military and political intelligence -- this includes the exchange of military and naval attaches -- must be terminated. A single agency must be named responsible for implementing, coordinating, and enforcing all aspects of United States sanctions policy against South Africa.

Next, Israel, the most flagrant violator of the UN arms embargo, must be informed that there will be a 'linkage' of United States economic and military aid to its strict compliance with the UN arms embargo. This client state of the United States cannot be permitted to provide a loophole for support of the apartheid regime.

Finally, the United States must declare South Africa to be a terrorist state, and UNITA and MNR bandits to be terrorist groups, and take such appropriate diplomatic and other actions. This would include closing all United States consulates in South Africa, and all those of South Africa ('honorary' or official) in the United States. This would include mobilizing NATO and other multilateral support for the complete international isolation of the apartheid regime and its puppets. This would also include providing massive American aid -- both financial and material -- to the refugees and other victims of this apartheid terrorism.

Fortunately, weapon systems rapidly become obsolete. In the case of the apartheid regime, this can operate especially to the benefit of humanity. Once comprehensive sanctions have been instituted, the South Africa will become unable to continue its wanton attacks against its neighbors. The destabilization policy it currently practices against the Frontline States will be forced to end. And it will hasten the demise of the apartheid system as well.