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**The Military Balance**  
**in Namibia** [Redacted]

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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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# The Military Balance in Namibia

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## An Intelligence Assessment

*Information available as of 20 February 1982  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office  
of African and Latin American Analysis. Comments  
and queries are welcome and may be addressed to  
the Chief, Southern Africa Division, ALA, on

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This paper has been coordinated with the National  
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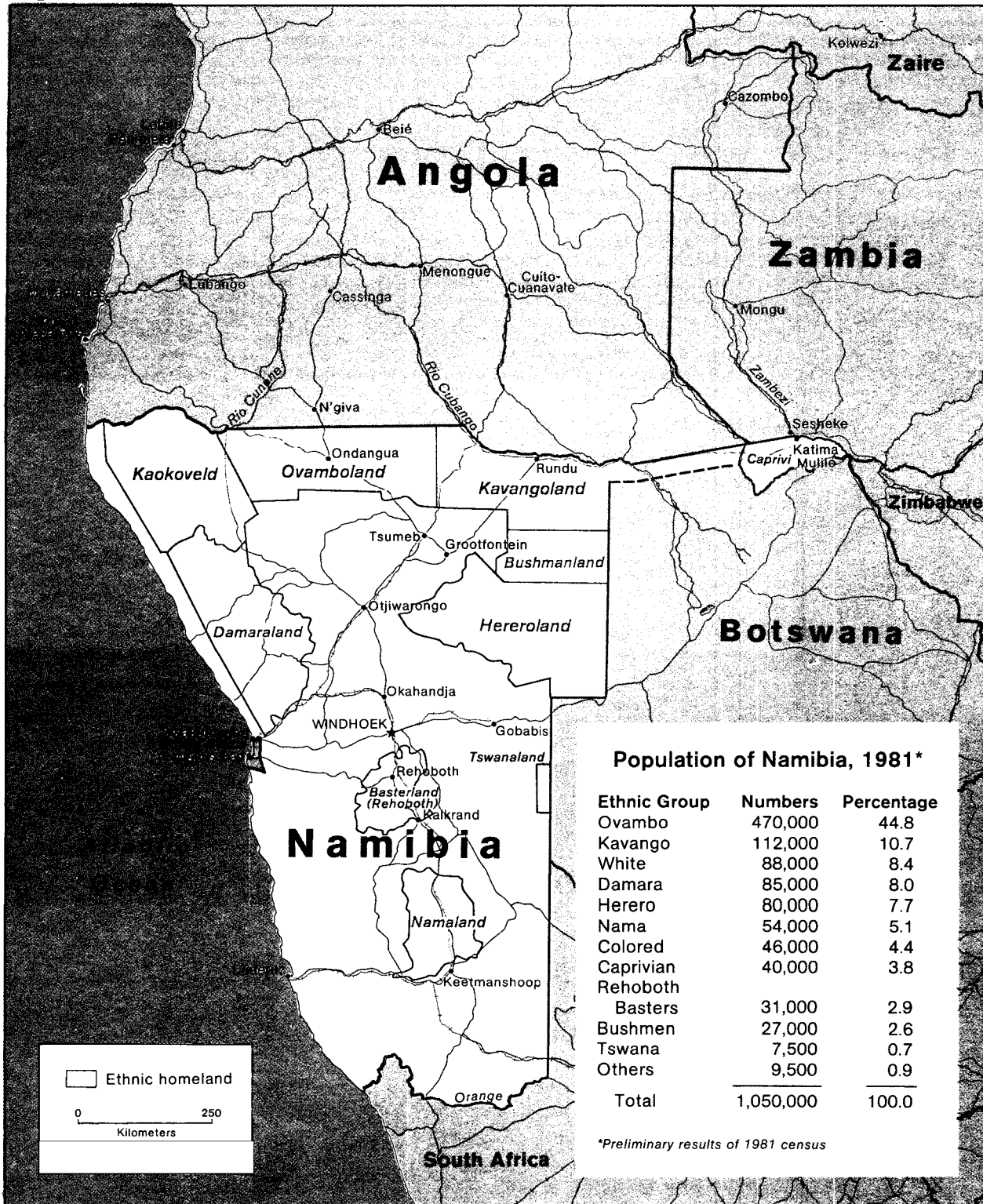
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Figure 1



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**The Military Balance  
in Namibia**

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**Key Judgments**

Six years after the insurgency in Namibia began in earnest, South African forces and the guerrillas of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) have reached a standoff. Despite increasingly aggressive South African military operations, SWAPO's guerrilla force—backed by the Cubans and the Soviets and operating from bases deep inside Angola—has prevented pacification of the border region in northern Namibia. The persistence of the guerrillas, the harshness of Pretoria's counterinsurgency effort, and the increased resentment of white minority rule inside Namibia have gained SWAPO such popular and international backing that it is likely to win an open election in the territory.

South Africa made a dramatic bid in the late summer and fall of 1981 to break the military stalemate and undercut SWAPO's political clout by launching its most substantial raids of the war into southern Angola. Pretoria hoped the attacks would make clear to SWAPO's Angolan and Communist backers that they would pay heavily for abetting the insurgency. But the South Africans also recognized that they ran the risk of scuttling Western-sponsored settlement negotiations and prompting massive new outside aid for SWAPO.

Neither South Africa's fears nor hopes have been realized. The Soviets and Cubans have not substantially increased support for SWAPO, the settlement talks have continued largely unaffected, and there are no signs of slippage in SWAPO's popular standing inside Namibia.

Pretoria will continue to pursue a twofold strategy of prolonging talks over an internationally supervised independence process for Namibia while chipping away militarily at SWAPO. This allows it to hold out for a favorable breakthrough in Western-sponsored negotiations while preparing for the possibility of a strictly internal settlement excluding SWAPO.

SWAPO, despite being on the defensive militarily, will remain in the driver's seat. The Namibia issue has become the cause of the moment for black Africa, and SWAPO is assured high international visibility merely by maintaining the insurgency at its current modest level:

- The Angolans are paying a high price for backing SWAPO, but they are unlikely to abandon the insurgents.
- The Soviets and Cubans, for their part, appear to see a continuation of the insurgency at its present level as their best means both of maintaining influence with SWAPO and the Angolans and of creating political problems for the West.

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The military balance in Namibia could be quickly altered by outside forces or events, particularly if Moscow or Havana substantially upgraded and expanded the air defense network in southern Angola or committed Cuban combat units to fight on SWAPO's behalf. To date, however, the Soviets and Cubans have been hesitant to incur the heightened tensions with the West that would result from such dramatic military measures. They have opted instead for a more subtle game of using propaganda and disinformation campaigns, bilateral discussions, and offers to expand existing military and economic aid programs as means to stiffen black African resistance to key aspects of the settlement package.

As a result, the military standoff in Namibia is likely to persist at least over the short term. This will provide a setting which, while conducive to a continuation of the Western-sponsored negotiations, will not motivate either side to make the concessions necessary for a definitive settlement.

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**The Military Balance  
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**The SWAPO Guerrilla Force**

Exiled since a South African crackdown in the mid-1960s on SWAPO political activities inside Namibia, the organization's leaders have relied primarily on their externally based guerrilla force—the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN)—in their bid to force Pretoria to cede control over Namibia. [redacted] SWAPO's "internal wing"—that is, those who stayed in Namibia—has remained aloof from the guerrillas, and the South Africans still count it as one of Namibia's more than 30 legal political parties. The internal wing has experienced such harassment by South African authorities and their Namibian proteges, however, that it has seldom attempted open political activity. [redacted]

The withdrawal of the Portuguese from Angola in 1975 and the emergence of an independent black government with Soviet and Cuban backing opened the way for a major buildup of the PLAN in southern Angola. Luanda agreed to facilitate the PLAN's staging operations, Moscow increased arms deliveries through Angola, and Cuban advisers in Angola assumed the leading role in training PLAN recruits.

[redacted] the total of trained and armed guerrillas increased from a few hundred in 1975 to at least 6,000 by 1979. [redacted]

The PLAN has seldom followed an aggressive strategy. The bulk of its forces have been held in reserve in Angola or Zambia. The small guerrilla bands inside Namibia usually have avoided contact with South African troops except for ambushes of patrols and infrequent mortar or rocket attacks on military bases. Most guerrilla attacks have been on black Namibians who have collaborated with the South Africans and, to a much lesser extent, Namibia's white residents. Their aim has been not only to intimidate civilians but to compel Pretoria to spread its limited military resources over an increasingly wide area. The strategy of prolonged

[redacted]

attrition also motivates the many incidents of small-scale sabotage, such as the mining of roads and rail lines or cutting telephone lines and water mains. [redacted]

In recent years this SWAPO strategy has been occasionally modified. In July 1978 when SWAPO leaders agreed in principal to the Western proposal that a UN task force monitor a truce and conduct a preindependence election, they stepped up guerrilla infiltrations in order to bolster their claims of territorial control and to prepare for increased political proselytizing. Later, in order to disrupt territorial elections held by South Africans in December 1978, SWAPO leaders sent sabotage teams into white urban areas to place bombs at several polling stations. When UN Secretary General Waldheim set a cease-fire target date of February 1979, infiltration was again increased. [redacted]

Since mid-1979 the South African military command in Namibia has claimed that its troops have killed more guerrillas than were being recruited and trained. Although the South Africans probably have exaggerated PLAN losses, guerrilla strength may have leveled off or declined slightly since 1979. The frequent kidnaping efforts by guerrilla bands in Ovamboland dwindled since 1975 and 1976, when thousands of Ovambo youths fled across the border in the wake of the Portuguese withdrawal from Angola. The South Africans claim that guerrillas recently killed or captured appear younger than those captured a year ago. Moreover, the morale and ability of the PLAN to recruit has been sapped by chronic food shortages aggravated by the severe drought in southern Angola and northern Namibia since 1979. [redacted]

Nonetheless, the guerrillas encountered by South African troops inside Namibia in recent years have been increasingly well equipped. Last May, South African military officers in Ovamboland told visiting

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diplomats that most of the guerrillas carried Soviet-made AK-47 rifles, many of the small units had 60-mm or 82-mm mortars, and some units had 122-mm rockets. Many of the recently detected Soviet landmines have been newly manufactured. Moreover, the large stocks of arms and ammunition that South African troops have found during their raids on PLAN's bases in Angola indicate that since 1978 PLAN has had sufficient supplies to support many more guerrillas than have been active inside Namibia.

**Limited Extent of Guerrilla Activity**

For the most part, the insurgency has been restricted to the four ethnic homelands—Kaokoland, Ovamboland, Kavango, and Caprivi—that make up northern Namibia. Ovamboland has been the prime area of guerrilla activity since 1976, when SWAPO gained access to the adjacent sector of Angola for staging purposes. The PLAN has seldom had more than a few hundred active guerrillas inside Ovamboland, although a peak of some 1,000 was attained in early 1979, when implementation of the UN truce plan appeared imminent. There is no solid evidence that even the all-out effort in 1979 to establish an effective presence resulted in the guerrillas holding any fixed bases in Ovamboland—or anywhere else inside Namibia.

Nevertheless, guerrilla incidents reported by the South African authorities increased in frequency from only nine in August 1977 to 93 in April 1979. During the same period, guerrilla action spread from the immediate border area throughout most of Ovamboland. South African statistics indicate that assassinations of "collaborators"—from village headmen to policemen, schoolteachers, and senior officials of the autonomous Ovambo government—may have peaked in 1979 (see table).

South African officials claim that civilian casualties inflicted by landmines are a critical reason for the purported disillusionment with SWAPO among the Ovambos. The South Africans also assert that the substantial social services provided by their military personnel stationed in Ovamboland have increased popular tolerance for the South African presence.

**Namibia: Deaths Resulting From the SWAPO Insurgency <sup>a</sup>**

	1978	1979	1980	1981
Security forces	30	31	87	56
SWAPO guerrillas	900	1,000	1,470	1,500 <sup>b</sup>
Local inhabitants	90	157	99	94
Assassinated	24	102	21	30
Landmine explosions	66	55	78	64

<sup>a</sup> Based on announcements by South African military spokesmen.

<sup>b</sup> Excludes SADF's rough estimate of 500 guerrillas killed in the course of "Operation Protea."

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Ovambo clergymen and European missionaries maintain, however, that resentment of SWAPO violence is more than offset by brutal behavior on the part of the South African-recruited Ovambo troops and occasionally harsh treatment from the South Africans themselves.

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Beyond dispute, however, is the fact that the South African administration has failed to provide basic physical security—except for the tiny elite group of Ovambo officials who reside in the conspicuously fortified areas of the principal towns. The majority of the Ovambos are continually harassed by both security forces and guerrillas. Significantly, Ovamboland was excluded from the elections of "second-tier" legislatures held in November 1980 in the homelands of seven tribes and in the white areas. SWAPO had called for a boycott of the elections, and the South African authorities apparently expected that fear of guerrilla reprisals would have resulted in an embarrassingly low voter turnout.

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In early 1981 small guerrilla bands for the first time began operating for extended periods in Kaokoland and Kavango, leading the South Africans to augment their counterinsurgency forces in the two homelands.

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Guerrilla activity in these sparsely populated areas is unlikely to approach the level in Ovamboland. One of the most notable SWAPO operations—large-scale mortar attack on the South African base at Katimo Mulilo—occurred in Caprivi in 1978, but little guerrilla activity has occurred in this homeland since then. This apparently reflects the tightened control Jonas Savimbi's South African-backed National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) has exerted over adjacent areas of Angola as well as restrictions the Zambian Government may have placed on SWAPO use of Zambian territory. [ ]

Small guerrilla teams have occasionally penetrated white areas of Namibia since 1978, but their actions have not yet appreciably affected the modern sector of the economy despite occasional instances of railway sabotage. The only apparent results of SWAPO's efforts to intimidate whites during the election in December 1978 were three bomb explosions in Windhoek and one in Swakopmund which did not cause serious injuries. In May 1979 several guerrilla bands infiltrated the white farming area south of Tsumeb and killed five white civilians. Local security measures were stepped up and subsequent guerrilla penetrations of white farming areas have been repulsed with only a few civilian deaths. [ ]

SWAPO efforts at political action outside northern Namibia have been equally unimpressive. In late 1978 SWAPO's internal branch held several public meetings in the nonwhite suburb of Windhoek that drew hundreds of spectators, but the speakers merely called for a nonviolent boycott of the election. Relatively few of the SWAPO sympathizers in the urban or mining areas heeded the exiled leaders' call for a general work stoppage. [ ]

#### Principal Counterinsurgency Measures

The number of South African troops regularly stationed in Namibia increased from some 8,500 in mid-1978 to between 12,000 and 15,000 by early 1981, and the total strength has risen to 20,000 at the time of major operations. This excludes the 1,500 South African troops stationed in Walvis Bay, which is administered as part of South Africa. About half of the South African force is stationed within the Border

Operational Area, which is coterminous with the four northern homelands. The South-West Africa Territorial Command has its headquarters south of the Border Operational Area at Grootfontein, which is also the logistics center for South African forces in Namibia. [ ] 25X1

Within the Border Operational Area, Oshakati is the headquarters and logistics center of Sector 10, Ovamboland. Most SWAPO operations as well as South African internal counterinsurgency operations occur in Ovamboland. The Ondangua Air Base, 35 kilometers southeast of Oshakati, has been a major staging area for airstrikes into Angola. [ ] 25X1

Rundu is the headquarters of Sector 20, Kavango and western Caprivi, and the site of a major South African airbase. It served as the command post for the South African operation into Angola in 1975. Katima Mulilo is the headquarters of Sector 30, eastern Caprivi. Kaokoveld comprises Sector 70 (see map, page 4). [ ] 25X1

Only a small portion of the South African force in Namibia is directly engaged in the counterinsurgency effort inside the territory. The augmentation that has occurred since 1978 is a direct reflection of more frequent and more extensive cross-border operations against the guerrilla forces and their staging facilities in southern Angola. Although most South African military incursions have been limited in scope and duration, ample reserves have been poised to respond should Angolan or Cuban troops attempt to intervene on behalf of the guerrillas. [ ] 25X1

#### An Indigenous Counterinsurgency Force

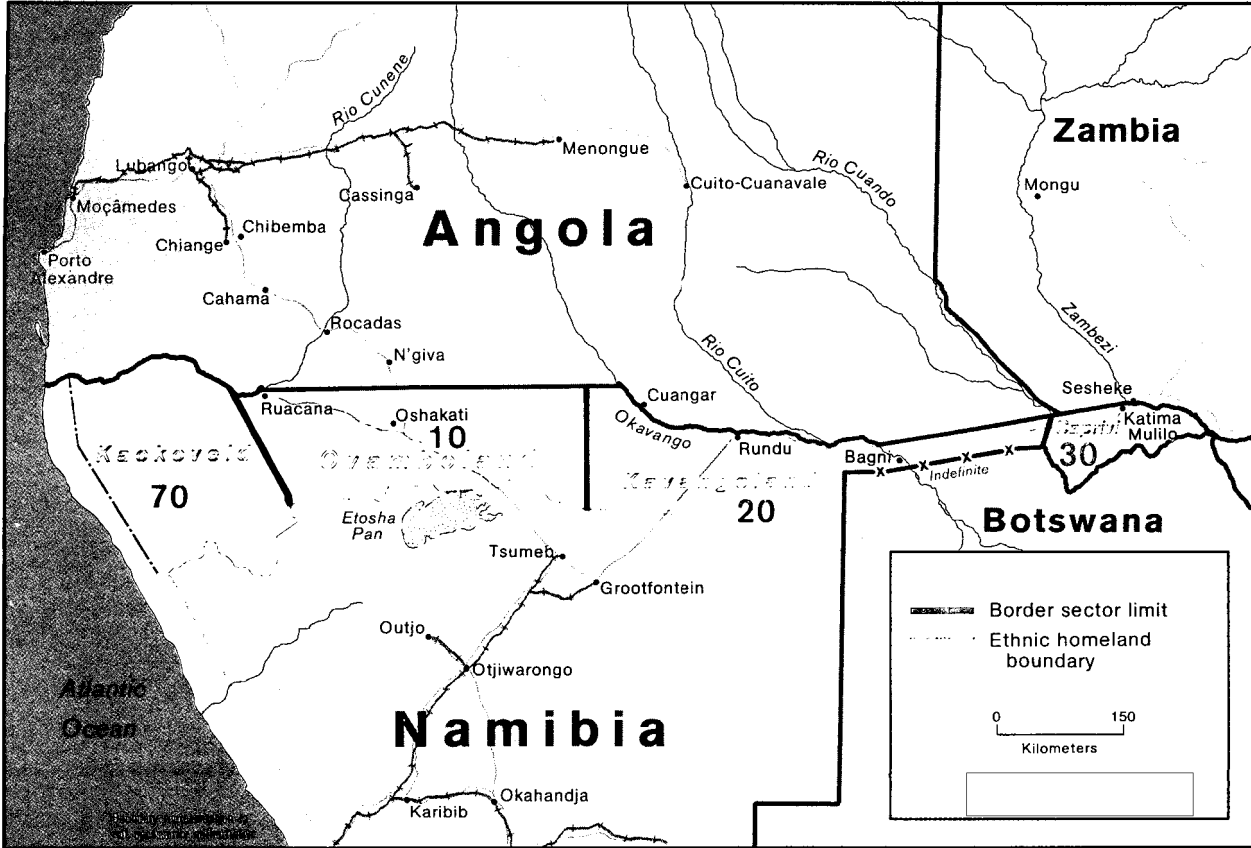
To supplement the South African force in Namibia, the SADF has formed seven Namibian infantry battalions since 1974. Six are "ethnic units"—each recruited exclusively from a particular tribal group. A seventh, composite battalion includes some whites. In August 1980, the seven battalions, which then had an aggregate strength of some 2,000 men, were nominally integrated with embryonic Namibian support and reserve units to form the South-West Africa Territorial Force (SWATF). The Namibian

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**Figure 2  
Northern Namibia Border Area**



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National Assembly and the Council of Ministers were granted titular authority over the SWATF, subject to a veto of the South African Administrator General. In September, the National Assembly adopted a plan, submitted by the Administrator General, eventually to extend military conscription to all Namibian youths; hitherto only white residents had been required to serve two years in the SADF. [redacted]

Pretoria has portrayed the formation of the SWATF as part of its effort to prepare Namibia for eventual independence. In reality, however, the Namibian battalions have remained under the operational control of the commander of the South African troops in Namibia. Most of their officers have been seconded from the SADF, and SWATF units are entirely

dependent on the SADF for logistic support. South African military spokesmen claim that Namibian troops have performed effectively in some of the raids on SWAPO bases in Angola. At the same time, however, troops in the ethnic battalions apparently have often mistreated civilians in Ovamboland and elsewhere. [redacted]

Military conscription has had a significant impact on Namibian ethnic groups not previously directly affected by the guerrilla conflict. Kaokolanders, Ovambos, Kavangos, Caprivians, and Bushmen were exempted from the first round of inductions in January 1981, ostensibly because sufficient volunteers had enlisted to fill out the battalions allotted to these ethnic groups. One underlying motive for exempting

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**Operation Protea**

*"Operation Protea," the South African incursion into southern Angola in August and September 1981, was exceptional in several respects. Although its duration—two weeks—was typical of many earlier preemptive strikes, it involved some 5,000 troops and was the largest incursion by the South African Defense Force (SADF) into Angola since Pretoria's involvement in the Angolan civil war in 1975 and 1976. The airstrikes against Cuban-manned radar installations at Cahama and Chibemba as well as the attacks by South African ground forces against Angolan military units also were new departures. Until this operation, the South Africans had usually avoided encounters with Angolan troops while attacking SWAPO bases.*

*A mix of calculations underlay the South African decision to launch "Operation Protea." Militarily, Pretoria hoped not only to preempt a threatened guerrilla offensive but, more importantly, to prevent the southward expansion of the Cuban-manned air defense system in Angola and otherwise to deter Angolan or Cuban support for the guerrillas in the frontier area.*

*Politically, the Botha government plainly was setting the stage for another round of hard bargaining over the UN transition plan. Botha, in particular, probably hoped to induce the black African parties to the Western-sponsored settlement talks to accept revisions of the existing UN plan that might prevent*

*SWAPO from gaining control of an independent Namibia. Whatever his hopes, Botha almost certainly considered the risk that serious clashes between South African and Angolan or Cuban forces would bring additional Cuban troops and Soviet arms to Angola to help curtail further military incursions by the SADF.*

*Neither Botha's hopes nor fears about the military impact of and international reactions to "Operation Protea" have been realized:*

- Pretoria announced that at least 1,000 Namibian guerrillas and Angolan troops were killed in the operation, but South African officers have acknowledged privately that SWAPO's casualties were not that high.*
- The South Africans displayed some 2,400 tons of captured arms and equipment, but much of it plainly was taken from the Angolan armed forces rather than SWAPO. In any case, the Soviets can readily replace whatever arms SWAPO needs to maintain guerrilla activity in Ovamboland.*
- Indications are that the Cuban force in Angola has been augmented, but the Cuban-manned air defense system is not yet capable of curtailing SADF incursions.*

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*inhabitants of the northern frontier sector evidently was to avert an exodus of draft dodgers to Angola or Zambia, where they very likely would have been recruited by SWAPO. Indeed, the flow of Ovambo youths to Angola apparently increased after the conscription plan was announced, and there has been a marked increase in the hitherto negligible flow of young refugees from central Namibia to Botswana.*

*Shortly before the first inductions, the Administrator General announced that the initial quota of some 2,000 inductees would be met from youths who completed their schooling in January. The quota was not met, however, and recruiting officers reportedly have haphazardly picked up unemployed youths around Windhoek. Because of its press gang tactics and the alleged mistreatment of inductees, the*

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scription of nonwhites has become a political liability for the Pretoria-backed Democratic Turnhalle Alliance, the white-led coalition party that nominally controls the territorial administration. [redacted]

#### Obstacles to an Early Military Breakthrough

"Operation Protea," the large-scale South African incursion into southern Angola in the fall of 1981, showed that the SADF's counterinsurgency effort has been extended to include attacks not only on Angolan Army units near SWAPO bases in southern Angola but also on the Cuban-manned air defense system in the area. Nevertheless, the South Africans are likely to be highly selective in conducting any deliberate encounters with Angolan troops or air sorties within range of any effective air defenses. The SADF does not have the logistics or replacement resources to support a prolonged intervention against a Soviet-equipped conventional force. Moreover, because of the UN arms embargo and the limitations of the South African defense industry, Pretoria must be especially careful to conserve its aircraft. [redacted]

As a result, the Cuban military presence in Angola—particularly the air defense installations along the rail line from Mocamedes to Menongue—will probably continue to limit the geographic scope of the SADF'S attacks on SWAPO's staging facilities. The SADF will continue to hit regularly the staging facilities and guerrilla units within 100 kilometers of the Angola-Namibia border in order to deter any significant guerrilla incursions into Namibia. Frequent airstrikes, however, could prompt the Soviets and Cubans to strengthen the existing air defenses in southern Angola. This would compel a cutback in SADF preemptive operations in southern Angola, which could enable the guerrillas to step up their infiltrations into Namibia. [redacted]

Even a marked increase in guerrilla incursions into the frontier zone, however, would not be likely to result in a significant guerrilla offensive inside Namibia. The South African troops already deployed in the border zone—with all the advantages of far superior equipment and logistics—very likely would succeed in intercepting a major portion of the infiltrating guerrillas without incurring heavy losses or requiring reinforcements. [redacted]

#### Pretoria's Long-Term Strategy

South Africa's wariness of a UN-supervised independence process for Namibia reflects its basic assumption that the SADF, with some help from Namibian combat units, can contain the insurgency for many years at an acceptable cost. The South Africans acknowledge, however, that their troops can never eradicate the guerrillas, and that blocking the UN plan may provoke some increase in foreign support for SWAPO. [redacted]

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Any appreciable increase in guerrilla activity in the northern tier of tribal homelands—particularly in Ovamboland—would further erode the influence of the South African administration with the local inhabitants, especially if the South Africans reacted with such steps as forced relocations of villages, curfews, dragnets, and other standard counterinsurgency techniques. Such a setback would deepen Pretoria's wariness of any genuinely open preindependence election. The South Africans would still believe that they could afford to put off a negotiated settlement as long as they could prevent serious terrorism or economic sabotage in the white areas. They appear convinced that such a strategy will be tenable unless the SADF contingents on the frontier are confronted by a conventional force capable of intervening inside Namibia. [redacted]

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The SADF command almost certainly has contingency plans for coping with the remote possibility that the feasible maximum level of preemptive air and ground strikes into Angola may not deter a major increase of guerrilla infiltrations into Namibia. We do not know, however, how many additional South African troops Pretoria is prepared to send to Namibia. Some temporary reinforcements to meet particular contingencies probably would be tolerable. The SADF troops now on active duty in Namibia—12,000 to 15,000—represent only a portion of the total SADF active strength of approximately 80,000. Moreover, the military command perceives combat experience against SWAPO guerrillas as the best training for an eventual struggle with South African insurgents. [redacted]

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As long as the SADF maintains even its present force level in Namibia, however, it would be hard pressed to mount a multibrigade deployment elsewhere. The eventual maximum of SADF units that could be committed to Namibia thus will be determined largely by Pretoria's perception of military pressures elsewhere along South Africa's periphery. Some further SADF buildup in Namibia may be tolerable as long as the terrorist activity inside South Africa does not reach levels that lead Pretoria to contemplate major preemptive strikes into black states that harbor black South African nationalist groups. [redacted]

By the same token, South Africa's white community is likely to tolerate the present level of military casualties in Namibia, and possibly some increase, as long as the SADF does not incur comparable casualties elsewhere. The Afrikaners, who comprise some 60 percent of the exclusively white electorate in South Africa, perceive no alternative to whatever sacrifices are required to maintain white rule in the nation. There is no indication that any influential element in the ruling National Party doubts Prime Minister Botha's belief that repulsing SWAPO is a vital part of the broader struggle against foreign-based black insurgency. Many Afrikaners would hold it against Botha if he agreed to any transitional arrangement that gave SWAPO even an outside chance of gaining power. [redacted]

In the absence of an international settlement, Pretoria probably will proceed to enlarge the SWATF by training additional Namibian troops. [redacted]

[redacted] Pretoria will provide long-term logistic support for the territorial force, if its combat units prove capable of replacing South African units. This might eventually make possible a gradual phasing out of some SADF units, if the SWAPO insurgency is contained at its present level. The inevitably slow process of developing a qualified Namibian officer corps would provide a valid case for prolonging the presence of South African officers and thereby maintaining actual control of the SWATF. If the guerrilla conflict escalates, however, the South

Africans might attempt to speed up the expansion of SWATF in order to minimize the need for additional South African troops and the risks of higher South African casualties. [redacted] 25X1

#### SWAPO's Likely Response

Although SWAPO spokesmen have implied since the collapse of the Geneva Conference in January 1981 that the PLAN was about to launch a major offensive, no significant increase in guerrilla activity has occurred inside Namibia. South African military spokesmen claim that the latest series of preemptive strikes has sharply reduced the PLAN's offensive capabilities. The recent history of the guerrilla conflict suggests, however, that even the most extensive preemptive operations cannot long deter resumptions of guerrilla infiltrations on a troublesome scale. Nevertheless, the major incursions in the fall of 1981 have shown more dramatically than ever that the SADF is fully capable of nipping in the bud any major guerrilla offensive. [redacted] 25X1

Unless the Angolans and the Cubans soon go further toward confronting the SADF than they have done, SWAPO must indefinitely postpone its goals of inflicting intolerable losses on the security forces and harassing white areas and interests in Namibia. The long-exiled SWAPO leaders, however, are unlikely to renounce armed struggle unless all foreign aid is stopped or they perceive a good prospect of gaining power by means of a transitional program under UN auspices. [redacted] 25X1

#### Soviet and Cuban Options

The Soviet and Cuban response to "Operation Protea" and to smaller South Africa operations in late 1981 was fairly restrained, revealing Moscow's and Havana's unwillingness to become more deeply involved in defending the extensive portion of Angolan territory where SWAPO staging bases have been situated: [redacted] 25X1

- In September 1981, three Soviet naval vessels spent several weeks at Mocamedes—the first time that any Soviet naval craft visited the southern Angolan port. Moscow, however, did not publicize the visit.

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- A TASS report on 19 September, which belatedly acknowledged that four Soviet advisers had been killed in fighting between Angolan and South African troops, stated that Moscow "will continue to give political, diplomatic, and material support to both Angola and the national liberation movement in South Africa."

[Redacted]

If Moscow perceives any future South African invasion of Angola as a serious challenge to the government in Luanda, the Soviets probably would provide whatever additional military aid was needed to prevent a collapse of the pro-Soviet regime. In the absence of such a threat, it now appears unlikely that Moscow would deliberately incur the heightened tensions with the West that would result from giving SWAPO—and the Angolans—sufficient assistance to sustain a major expansion of guerrilla activity inside Namibia.

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- Thirteen MIG-21 fighters—probably Cuban-piloted—were dispatched to Lubango shortly after "Operation Protea" began, and one was subsequently downed by a South African Mirage over southern Angola. Following the incursion, Havana also sent at least 2,000 and possibly as many as 6,000 additional Cuban military personnel to Angola while redeploying other Cuban forces already in the country to the southern rail line—roughly 275 kilometers from the Namibian border.

[Redacted]

Castro probably would agree to send more troops to Angola if the security situation along the southern border deteriorates further. But if Castro believed that the threat of US military action against Cuba was growing, he might withdraw several thousand military personnel, which would increase Angola's vulnerability to South African attack. Ultimately, however, the Cubans will follow the Soviet lead in Angola.

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Moscow's anxiety over the progress in the Namibian talks has prompted it to make a variety of moves since late 1981 aimed at fueling suspicion between the Africans and the Contact Group—particularly the United States—and reinforcing Moscow's position in southern Africa. These moves include stepped up propaganda, strengthening bilateral ties in the region, and lobbying key parties to back out of the negotiations.

This suggests that the Soviets perceive a simmering SWAPO insurgency as being their best bet. It would deepen SWAPO's and Angola's dependence on Moscow and Havana for military backing, while prolonging security concerns of the other Frontline States—thus making them receptive to Communist military aid. As long as the United States and other Western powers seek to mediate an intractable conflict, the Soviets can depict the West as condoning Pretoria's occupation of Namibia and military incursions into neighboring states.

Promoting a simmering guerrilla conflict exposes Moscow to some political risks, such as some loss of prestige with SWAPO, with the Angolans, and with other clients whenever incursions into Angola show up the limitations of Soviet military aid. Moreover, it runs counter to the desire of Angola and the other Frontline States to see the conflict terminated. The Soviets have another option, of course, and can dampen guerrilla activity by reducing arms deliveries to SWAPO.

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**Implications for the United States**

The United States is cast in a middleman role in the Namibian equation, and US credibility in Pretoria as an honest broker on Namibia depends on the success of its constructive engagement policies. This enhances the opportunities for SWAPO's Frontline backers to call US impartiality into question—through either real or disingenuous misunderstanding of US intentions. These misunderstandings are readily exploited by the Soviets and their allies, whose interests and policies in the region are not clouded by such apparent ambiguities.

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With the current military standoff in Namibia unlikely to change much over the near term, US involvement in the problem will remain exposed to double jeopardy. SWAPO is highly unlikely soon to exert the kind of military pressure it would take to break the spirit of whites as occurred in advance of the Zimbabwe settlement. Nor are the South Africans likely to defeat SWAPO so decisively as to force it to accept a settlement on Pretoria's terms. The costs of maintaining the stalemate for both the South Africans and SWAPO's Communist backers are not high enough for either side to feel compelled to seek an early, dramatic change on the battlefield. The Frontline States, particularly Angola, pay the highest costs for maintaining the status quo, but there are

strong limitations on Luanda's ability to act as a completely free agent because of Angola's deep dependence on the Soviets and their surrogates.

Moreover, all sides clearly recognize the dangerous implications of a complete break in the settlement negotiations. The high costs now paid by Angola would become unbearable with the level of military escalation that would be likely to follow a breakdown of the talks. For South Africa, current costs are acceptable, but a substantial increase in the military effort that would follow collapse is not an attractive alternative to the minimal effort it takes to keep the talks going.

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