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# The Frontline States: Looking Beyond Namibia

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An Intelligence Memorandum

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June 1982

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# **The Frontline States: Looking Beyond Namibia**

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## **An Intelligence Memorandum**

*Information available as of 14 May 1982  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

This memorandum was written by [redacted]  
Office of African and Latin American Analysis.  
Comments and queries are welcome and may be  
directed to the Chief, Southern Africa Division,  
OALA, [redacted]

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This memorandum was coordinated with the  
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The Frontline States:  
Looking Beyond Namibia [Redacted]

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Summary

Recent changes in the power relationship between the Frontline States and the South-West Africa People's Organization appear to signal a growing Frontline preoccupation with regional security issues in general and with the aggressive behavior of South Africa in particular. These changes are evident in SWAPO's successful insistence on rejecting Western electoral proposals on Namibia and in the growing Frontline pessimism about the entire settlement process.

This deepening pessimism among Frontline leaders probably stems from a belief that a settlement may not be attainable. Some Frontline leaders seem to believe that virtually any negotiated settlement would inevitably favor South Africa, and that even with such a settlement, Pretoria would not change its hostile, aggressive approach in dealing with its neighbors. Given these attitudes, it will be more difficult to engage the Frontline on Namibian matters, and the Frontline probably cannot be counted on to play a constructive role in Western efforts to promote peaceful solutions to the region's problems.

The Frontline States already appeared to be looking beyond Namibia at their summit meeting in Maputo in early March. Unlike most such meetings, the Maputo summit did not primarily address Western initiatives on Namibia, but instead concentrated on exploring regional security problems. It resulted in pledges to increase Frontline security cooperation and to expand support for the insurgencies of the African National Congress and SWAPO.

The Frontline States know they could not counteract Pretoria's superior military and economic power without a dramatic increase in external support. Although the Frontline States decided at Maputo not to accept Communist offers of increased military aid, the summit may have marked the beginning of a process by which the black governments will be moved along by a flow of events and incremental policy shifts toward a point where recourse to longstanding offers of expanded military support from the USSR and its allies becomes irresistible.

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**The Frontline States:  
Looking Beyond Namibia**

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**Introduction**

The Frontline States' inability over the past several months to budge the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) from its hardline rejection of the Western Contact Group's electoral proposals on Namibia may mark an important turning point in Frontline attitudes toward Western settlement efforts.<sup>1</sup> The general pattern of Frontline behavior in recent months suggests to us that the black governments' disillusionment with the glacial pace of the Namibian talks, coupled with their mounting concern over what they have called "South Africa's undeclared war against its neighbors," has led them to discount the value of Western efforts to promote regional stability. Indeed, they appear to be searching for new ways to cope with Pretoria and to persuade the West—particularly the United States—to restrain South Africa.

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This paper looks at the increasing circumstantial evidence that significant changes may be occurring in Frontline attitudes, changes which would have major implications for US policies in the region.

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**The Past Year of  
Namibian Negotiations**

The Frontline States initially were distrustful of US efforts to regain momentum in the Namibian negotiations. Many black African governments expressed a belief that the collapse of a Geneva conference on Namibia in January 1981 was due to Pretoria's perception that it could get a better deal from the new US administration. Frontline distrust was fed by reports leaked in March that the United States wanted a "comprehensive" settlement that linked Namibian independence to Angolan accommodation of the National Union for Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and to withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. The new US administration's early efforts to repeal the Clark Amendment were also disquieting to the Frontline States, leading some to complain to US officials that Washington wanted to subvert the Angolan regime. Frontline suspicion probably reached its high point when the United States vetoed the UN Security Council resolution condemning the major South African incursion into southern Angola in late August.

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<sup>1</sup> The Frontline States are Angola, Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Tanzania; Nigeria has periodically participated in Frontline deliberations. The Western Contact Group includes the United Kingdom, France, West Germany, Canada, and the United States—the sponsors of the Namibian settlement plan contained in UN Resolution 435

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***SWAPO Holds Fast***

*SWAPO's continued refusal to accept Contact Group proposals on electoral procedures for a Namibian constitutional assembly and its rejection of the phased approach to negotiations reflect:*

- *Its determination to resist settlement arrangements that do not ensure its dominance in an independent Namibia.*
- *The lack of any significant military or political pressure compelling it to compromise.*

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*SWAPO has maintained that the Contact Group's refusal to go back to the South Africans on the electoral issues confirms its suspicions that the West is colluding with Pretoria. SWAPO leaders fear that a proposed mixed electoral system would deny them the two-thirds majority needed to control a constitutional assembly.*

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*South African attacks on SWAPO bases in southern Angola and Pretoria's current occupation of a buffer zone north of the Namibian border have made SWAPO's military operations more difficult, but have not made it more flexible in negotiations. Although the insurgents have had to move farther north, SWAPO is still able to infiltrate terrorist groups into northern Namibia; its political support in the territory appears undiminished.*

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*The Soviets and Cubans have lobbied hard to derail the negotiations and have encouraged SWAPO to disengage from the Western-sponsored process. SWAPO leader Nujoma's decision to go to Havana rather than meet the Contact Group in Luanda in early April apparently was the result of Soviet efforts.*

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*SWAPO's tough line on negotiations also reflects a radicalization of its leadership. Since the organization moved from Zambian to Angolan bases in the late 1970s, an increasing number of SWAPO moderates have been isolated within the organization or driven from its top ranks.*

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Despite the initial skepticism of the Frontline States about the US-led Contact Group effort, a consensus on a negotiating approach emerged from the Contact Group and the South Africans appeared to be going along. Botswana, Zambia, and Tanzania enthusiastically supported the US negotiating initiative and expressed optimism about the prospects of success. 25X1

[Redacted]

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there was broad support for Tanzania's suggestion early in January 1982 that the Frontline, in the interest of maintaining negotiating momentum, give early approval to the Phase I package—proposals dealing with election procedures in Namibia. 25X1

SWAPO, however, continued to oppose elements of Phase I, particularly the "one-man, two-vote" electoral provision, and the negotiating momentum dissipated. A Frontline meeting was called for late January, presumably to press SWAPO to accept. After Nujoma toured Frontline capitals, however, the Frontline foreign ministers joined SWAPO in refusing to accept the electoral provisions of the Phase I proposals. 25X1

Despite pressure from the Contact Group, the Frontline states made little effort during February to overcome SWAPO's opposition. Instead, they asked the Contact Group to go back to the South Africans and persuade them to accept either a proportional representation or a single-member constituency scheme. 25X1 25X1

At the same time, Communist efforts to obstruct negotiations increased:

[Redacted]

[Redacted] it is clear that the Frontline leaders spent little time at their meeting in Maputo in early March discussing the impasse over Namibian electoral procedures. The Contact Group's demarche—which provided a detailed rationale for the "one-man, two-vote" proposal—was dismissed as adding nothing new and warranting no change in the Frontline position. 25X1

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[redacted] Frontline leaders endorsed SWAPO's statements of its intention to step up the fighting in Namibia.

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[redacted]

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SWAPO seemed emboldened after the Maputo meeting. It delivered on behalf of the Frontline States a stiff reply to the Contact Group's Maputo demarche, stepped up its guerrilla raids, threatened to pull out of negotiations if delays continued, and called for direct talks with the South Africans. Nujoma declined to meet with a Contact Group delegation that visited Luanda in early April for the express purpose of consulting with SWAPO, and Western diplomats in Luanda believe he did so with Soviet encouragement. Nujoma instead went to Havana for an extended visit.

[redacted]

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SWAPO's confidence in its ability to shrug off Frontline pressure was reflected in its unexpected announcement prior to the Frontline meeting at Dar es Salaam in early May that SWAPO not only rejected the Western Contact Group's proposals on the electoral system for Namibia but the phased approach to negotiations as well, calling instead for a UN-sponsored conference of all parties. Despite their anger at Nujoma over being presented a *fait accompli*, the Frontline States told US officials that they could not force Nujoma to reverse himself. The Frontline States attempted to soften SWAPO's position somewhat by implicitly inviting the West to go back to the South Africans on the electoral issue, but they supported SWAPO's hard line despite their preference to the contrary.

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[redacted]

**Present Stand on Namibian Talks**

Since the meeting in Dar es Salaam, there have been several indicators that Frontline unity on Namibia is eroding. Although Angola supported Zambian President Kaunda's initiative in meeting with South African Prime Minister Botha on 30 April to discuss Namibia and other issues, information from a variety of sources indicated that the other Frontline States opposed the meeting, believing that it would only give Pretoria a propaganda victory. Moreover, some Frontline States have told US officials they are not enthusiastic about the prospect of another all-parties conference, and we believe they are only supporting SWAPO's call for such a meeting to avoid blame for a breakdown in negotiations.

[redacted]

The factors underlying the Frontline's current paralysis are complex:

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- Although Luanda desperately wants a settlement in order to end South African incursions in the south, the weak and factionalized Angolan leadership appears incapable of controlling SWAPO. SWAPO is maintained in Angola by international aid, exists largely in a series of self-contained refugee camps in the south, and is trained and protected mostly

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by Cuban personnel. Inasmuch as the Soviet Union and Cuba also provide vital support to the Angolan regime, SWAPO leaders can defy President dos Santos because they are secure in the knowledge that Moscow—along with pro-Soviet hardliners in Luanda—will prevent him from acting against them.

- Despite strong Contact Group entreaties, Tanzania continues to play a low-key role. We believe that Nyerere may simply be waiting for a more propitious moment and is unwilling to expend much effort when the prospects for successful negotiations do not seem good.
- Zambia and Botswana also want a negotiated settlement but until recently have let Tanzania take the lead.
- Both Zimbabwe and Mozambique are preoccupied with their own problems. To the extent they have focused on Namibia, the Zimbabweans tend to be sympathetic to SWAPO, while Mozambique has been following Tanzania's low-key lead.

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The Frontline States, in our view, may now see the negotiating task as more formidable than they previously believed. The continuing impasse over seemingly minor electoral issues is likely to have made them skeptical about resolving the more difficult Phase II issues—those dealing with the modalities of international truce and election supervision. Moreover, the Frontline States have been briefed on the US-Angolan talks and are aware that a regional settlement centered on Namibia must realistically include movement on related Angolan issues, namely Cuban withdrawal and accommodation of UNITA. The Frontline States may believe not only that there is little prospect for a successful outcome but also that the likely terms of settlement would be too favorable to Pretoria. Such fundamental pessimism about the future of negotiations appears to be central to the reduced Frontline willingness to expend much effort over the current impasse.

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#### **Security Concerns Paramount**

The pessimism of the Frontline States about the prospects for a Namibian settlement has grown in direct relation to their concern and preoccupation with perceived South African “destabilization” policies. Specific events that have given rise to this concern include:

- South Africa's continued control of large portions of south-central Angola.
- Alleged South African involvement in coup plots in Zambia and the Seychelles.
- A significant expansion of South African-backed insurgent activity in Mozambique.
- Sabotage of Zimbabwe's transportation routes through Mozambique.

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**Events and Decisions at Maputo**

The Frontline's changing priorities were reflected at the Maputo summit, which concentrated mainly on exploring regional security problems and seeking ways to respond collectively. The relatively scant attention paid to the impasse in the Namibian negotiations suggests that Frontline leaders may no longer view the Namibian issue as central to their efforts to cope with South Africa. [redacted]

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The Frontline leaders maintained in their communique that Pretoria's growing aggressiveness was aimed at increasing Frontline dependence on Pretoria, delaying Namibian independence, and preventing the "liberation" of South Africa. The Frontline leaders also announced their intention to increase regional cooperation to counteract South Africa and to provide more support for SWAPO and the African National Congress (ANC) to enable them to intensify the armed struggle. [redacted]

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Few concrete security decisions, however, were taken at Maputo. The Frontline States agreed to send a military team to Angola to assess the security situation and make recommendations. [redacted]

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[redacted]

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**Actions Since Maputo**

*Cooperation and Aid*

The Frontline States have not moved dramatically toward greater regional cooperation. Tanzania has followed up an earlier decision to provide modest military training support to Mozambique, [redacted]

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[redacted]

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Frontline pledges to increase military cooperation are unlikely to amount to much. They have little money, and many face pressing economic and internal security problems that would prevent them from aiding their neighbors. [redacted]

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The inability of the Frontline States on their own to counter South African aggressiveness will lead them to seek additional external security assistance. All the Frontline States except Zimbabwe have accepted substantial arms assistance from the Soviets and some rely on large numbers of Cuban

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advisers. In varying degrees, however, these governments are dissatisfied with the quality and level of Soviet and Cuban assistance, and distrust Communist motives with the result that they have shown increasing interest in alternate sources of aid.<sup>2</sup> Mozambique, for example, recently signed a military cooperation pact with Portugal and even Angolan officials have discussed obtaining support from outside the Soviet Bloc. Such alternative sources of aid are unlikely to satisfy the Frontline States' needs, however, and they may become more receptive to longstanding Communist offers of increased assistance despite their distrust of the Soviets. [redacted]

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*Support for Insurgents*

Despite Frontline pledges to provide more support for SWAPO and the ANC, we do not believe there will be a major increase in insurgent activity. The Frontline governments are unlikely to follow through with much aid, although training support may increase [redacted]

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SWAPO has stepped up its military activities in Namibia in an attempt to make good on its promise at the Maputo summit to put more pressure on South Africa and bring a sense of urgency to the negotiations. Nonetheless, we believe SWAPO will not be able to resume the level of activity reached before last summer, when the South Africans began their major operations into Angola in an effort to drive SWAPO away from the Namibian border. SWAPO activity probably will decline again as conditions for counterinsurgency operations improve during the dry season this summer, regardless of any increase in Frontline aid. [redacted]

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[redacted] We believe, however, that fears of South African reprisals will deter most Frontline States from following through on their promise of direct support for the ANC or even from easing restrictions on ANC infiltration of South Africa from their territories. [redacted]

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<sup>2</sup> Tanzania in particular wants to reduce the role of the Soviet Union and its allies as the primary suppliers of military aid and is encouraging its neighbors to turn instead to other non-aligned countries. Moreover, the Frontline States in general are bound to be skeptical that more Communist support will deter Pretoria; Soviet arms and 20,000 to 25,000 Cubans did not stop South Africa and UNITA from retaining control over a third of Angola during the past year. [redacted]

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**Implications for  
the West**

Although the changing attitudes of the Frontline States are not irreversible and are not fully shared by all group members, a growing consensus on the futility of settlement and the inevitability of regional insecurity could be self-fulfilling. At the least, it could make the Frontline less likely to play a decisive role in Western efforts to promote peaceful solutions to the region's problems. [redacted]

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The Frontline States still want a negotiated Namibian settlement as much as ever—witness Kaunda's personal initiative to try to break the stalemate—but not just any settlement. Their disillusionment over a Namibian settlement, as well as doubts that it would encourage more restrained South African behavior elsewhere in the region, may cause them to lower their expectations about Western efforts to promote regional stability. They recognize, however, that only the West—in particular, the United States—has the power and influence to reduce significantly regional tensions. They are frustrated about having nowhere else to turn. [redacted]

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The Frontline States appear to be groping for ways to counter South Africa's increasingly aggressive regional policy. At Maputo they spoke of a more self-reliant approach, but they require external assistance in order to have even a remote chance of success. [redacted]

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Their pledges of defense cooperation may be aimed at demonstrating to the West their seriousness and determination to combat South Africa. Despite growing apprehension about the relationship between Pretoria and Washington, the Frontline States probably would prefer that the United States come to their aid by reining in the South Africans. The Maputo summit, however, may be a warning that, if help is not forthcoming and if Frontline security concerns are not eased, they will have little recourse but to increase their reliance on military support from the Soviet Union and its allies. They know that more Communist support is unlikely to help them much; still, by implying a new willingness to accept it, they may hope to provoke the United States into action. [redacted]

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