

Namibia

South Africa has illegally controlled Namibia (formerly South West Africa) since 1918, initially in breach of a League of Nations mandate and since 1946 in growing defiance of United Nations resolutions. In 1948 Pretoria began imposing the newly-codified apartheid statutes on the black majority in Namibia and since 1968 has been waging an escalating war against the broad-based liberation movement SWAPO (South West African Peoples Organisation).

In 1977 a call by most member states of the United Nations for mandatory sanctions against Pretoria for its military occupation of Namibia was headed off through the Security Council veto power of Britain and America, and as a compromise a five-nation 'contact group' was formed, consisting of Britain, America, France, West Germany and Canada, with the stated aim of persuading South Africa to withdraw from Namibia and permit free elections and full independence there.

Since then South Africa's propaganda strategy on Namibia has been to encourage successive representatives of the 'contact group' to believe in imminent breakthrough on the diplomatic front, while repeatedly renegeing on implied undertakings to progress towards real independence for Namibians.

By 1980 South Africa had broken a number of such undertakings, and pressure for sanctions had been building up again in the United Nations when the Reagan administration came to power in America and took the pressure off South Africa, allowing Pretoria to link the question of Namibian independence to the unrelated issue of Cuban troops in Angola.

Throughout the period of such 'linkage', a device facilitated by the Reagan policy of 'constructive engagement' with South Africa, Pretoria made use of American compliance to step up its war against SWAPO, to increase its military personnel in Namibia more than threefold, to launch repeated invasions and incursions into Angola and other states of the region including Lesotho, Mozambique and Botswana, and to arm and sustain the UNITA forces fighting against the government of Angola.

At one time nervous about the Namibian issue provoking economic sanctions from the international community, Pretoria has since the advent of the Reagan administration in America and the Conservative administration in Britain functioned without constraint in its consolidation of military occupation of Namibia

and its campaign against SWAPO, and has recently defied even American and British objections to the setting up of an internal regime of its choice in the territory.

Meanwhile Pretoria's propaganda line on Namibia is to try to project an image of reform internally and success militarily against SWAPO, featuring frequent claims of successful engagements against guerrillas of SWAPO, inflated claims about SWAPO casualties and consistent understatement of South African casualties. In Washington, moreover, strong efforts are made to depict SWAPO as surrogates of Moscow, and as 'communist terrorists hostile to the West'.

International supporters of SWAPO in the West, such as the Namibia Support Committee in London, try to counter these tactics but have limited resources to pit against Pretoria's hugely funded lobbies. The Namibia Support Committee names three related organisations in London which disseminate propaganda for Pretoria: Namibia Information Service, Lloyd-Hughes Associates Ltd and Venture Communications.