

Letters to the Editor

Defining our role

IT was hoped that the demise of the Cold War would bring about lasting peace worldwide and to southern Africa in particular.

At the start of 1991 Angola seemed set to travel the last mile to implementing a political settlement that was to be fulfilled by the holding of multi-party elections.

By the same token, the signing of a ceasefire by Frelimo and Renamo in Rome in the same year gave rise to hope for a peaceful settlement in Mozambique.

In South Africa the process of negotiations toward change begun to take a path which some political pundits referred to as 'irreversible'. However, the current political events that are unfolding in the region are beginning to cast doubts as to whether the end of the Cold War was the guarantor of lasting peace to our war-torn region.

Savimbi's refusal to accept the outcome of the multi-party elections should be put into proper political perspective. The Unita leader bears the character of a politician who is unwilling to serve under anyone. During his 16-year bush war for the 'true' independence of Angola, it was unlikely that Savimbi contemplated losing elections to the extent that the electoral outcome was a personal humiliation. At last the Angolans chose peace through the ballot box rather than peace from the barrel of a gun.

Shortly after Savimbi repudiated the outcome of the elections, the world witnessed a marathon peace-saving mission initiated by the South African Foreign Affairs Minister whose own country is struggling to find a solution to its apartheid policies. We can understand why Botha saw it as his diplomatic business to 'save' Angola from civil war when we consider several factors.

First, if Angola and Mozambique attained political settlement, the world community was likely to refocus its attention on South Africa. It was and still is in the best interest of Pretoria to forestall political settlement in Angola and Mozambique in order to deflect the attention of the world community from South Africa.

Secondly, P. W. Botha might have encouraged Savimbi not to accept the results of the elections so that South Africa might use Angola as the playing ground from which to exercise its dubious political policies. If Savimbi was to realise that it is humanly costly and militarily suicidal to stage a 'successful' coup d'etat, then South Africa would encourage federalism and perhaps even partition. The attempts of Unita soldiers to capture major diamond and

oil centres in Angola might be because they want the most rich areas. Thus, the next move by Unita would be to declare all areas they are presently controlling as self-independent states.

Thirdly, South Africa's alleged violation of the airspace of Botswana, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe might be a deliberate action by SA and Unita to draw the region back into military conflict. It may be in the interests of Unita and some political and military leaders in SA who are reluctant to relinquish power to revive the dark age of military destabilisation. The revival might be sparked by the gunning down of an SA aircraft violating airspace. If this occurred, the SA military may respond in kind. However such action would hurt its own image and efforts of its reforms.

Finally, Unita's military strategists might think that if they push aimlessly towards Luanda and occupy as many provinces as possible, by the time they get to the negotiating table they will force the ruling party to concede to terms it might not otherwise do if its important provinces were not occupied by Unita. This strategy might not work if Unita is nailing itself to the wall in defying the call of the international community for the resumption of peace talks. But will Unita come to its senses and act peacefully before it is too late?

As was argued above, the demise of the cold war did not exactly bring about lasting peace in southern Africa. One of the reasons is that the collapse of the former Soviet Union left a vacuum and gave rise to a uni-polar world dominant power, the USA. The concern is that the US would continue to prop up its old allies (Renamo, SA, Unita) in the region. While the Clinton administration may do the opposite, it might not extend diplomatic recognition to the MPLA before the rerun of the presidential elections. However, this delay would mean the continuation of human, physical, infrastructural destruction.

Another concern is that the US may use military threats where it finds it impossible to get what it wants diplomatically. But this might not be a viable option because the more the US uses military coercion the more it is likely to push the world into grooming a second superpower. Thus, it seems the only viable option for the US and the world to forge mutual co-operation among nations. This diplomacy would mean give-and-take diplomacy among powerful as well as weaker nations.

Unita's move to resort to military action in Angola might have been an attempt to take the country by force before the inauguration of Clinton as US

President. Implicit in such a military action is that the Clinton administration may discontinue military or diplomatic support of Unita. Moreover it might extend diplomatic recognition to whatever government is in power in Angola, thus further isolating Savimbi or preparing him to join the government of Angola to reconstruct their war-torn nation. However, a closer reading of the current foreign policy position of Clinton shows continuity of the US 'hands-off' policy towards Angola.

Namibia in its turn should look at the regional issues very carefully as they are likely to have long-term and short-term spillover effects. These issues are vital to Namibia. The influx of refugees from our neighbours may tamper with domestic economic development. Regional civil wars will also hinder Namibia's business community from exploring potential markets.

If Savimbi attacks Luanda, one military option to the Angolan Government is to attack the heartland of Unita, Jamba. If this action is carried out, Namibians who live close to the border, especially in Caprivi, may become victims of flying rockets and bullets intended for Jamba.

The only military action against Jamba which minimises human casualties on the side of Namibia is launching from the southern side of Jamba.

The other reason why Namibia must seriously analyse the situation unfolding in the region is that if Unita and South Africa succeed in drawing Angola, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe into a military confrontation, the economic policies of SADC would be affected.

Let us take a closer look at the issue of federalism and partition of Angola. Pretoria desperately wants to implement a federal system in SA and it would appear that if another southern African country successfully institutes federalism, especially Angola, Pretoria would have a strong bargaining chip to negotiate a federal system in post-apartheid SA.

Federalism is neither alien to Africa per se nor will it be a panacea to all of South Africa's problems. Nigeria has embraced a federal system which is not working well. The problem with federalism in SA is that the debunked homeland system is akin to federalism. Up to now Pretoria has not offered its opponents a concrete federal system that is different in form and substance from that of bantustans.

Thus, serious political players in SA would find it unacceptable to adopt a federal system for SA as it clearly resembles the almost defunct policies of apartheid. The partition of Angola is also likely to be unacceptable. The reason is that by an international

constitutional standard Angola is a member of the OAU and according to its constitution, one party cannot secede and partition a country. The OAU constitution also calls for respect of sovereignty. Against this background it would be difficult, if not impossible, for Unita to opt for partitioning.

Given the fact that southern Africa has just emerged from wars, it would appear Namibia's role should be to give a shining example to its neighbours that Namibia and its administration have maintained peace since independence in a trying era because of the country's policy of national reconciliation. There will, however, continue to be human catastrophe in the region. Namibia could help its neighbours to realise that the end of the cold war should give impetus to our leaders to solve their political differences by means of concrete compromise, which required political maturity from all involved.

One way in which Namibia can define its role is to act as an advisory peacemaker in the region. Angola can learn tremendously from what Namibia achieved politically in the aftermath of UN peacekeeping in Namibia. It does not help for UN peacekeepers or electoral monitors to be present in any country, including Angola, if all leaders are not prepared to make lasting peace among themselves by reconciling.

Namibia can use its diplomacy as a way of reaching Savimbi. One way to do this is by using 'silent' diplomatic persuasion to pressure the US Administration and UN to bring Savimbi to his senses. Namibia should also talk seriously to African leaders, such as in Zaire, Ivory Coast and Morocco, who have historic links with the Unita leader, to make him see the suffering of Angolans.

In terms of Botswana the two countries must not allow outside detractors to exploit the current strained relations. Namibia must do its best to ensure a peaceful solution is found to this dispute.

Namibia must ensure that whatever role it decides to take our leaders must include the population in the decision-making process.

For Namibia to engage in foreign affairs, its foreign policies must reflect its domestic policies of economic development, peaceful settlement and reconciliation, for them to succeed. Thus, Namibian society should have an understanding of itself in order for it to have a clear role in foreign-related issues.

In the final analysis, if we look at all possible political-economic indicators the last thing southern Africa wants is war, and the region and its people continue to cry out for democracy, peace and development. While Namibia has maintained experimental democracy, peace, justice and stability, and continues to make strides towards achieving vigor-

ous economic development, it must define its role by explaining to warring neighbours that peace, stability, justice and reconstruction are all preconditional to peaceful settlement and reconciliation.

However, Namibia and the world at large must know that, so long as the region continues to suffer because of a few neighbouring dictators and despots who do not want to concede to democratic ex-

crises of the majority, Namibia's peace and 'beacon' of democracy might not be lasting ones as regards reconstruction.

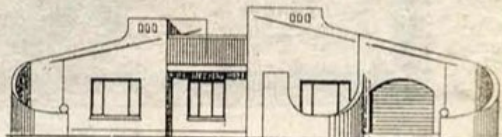
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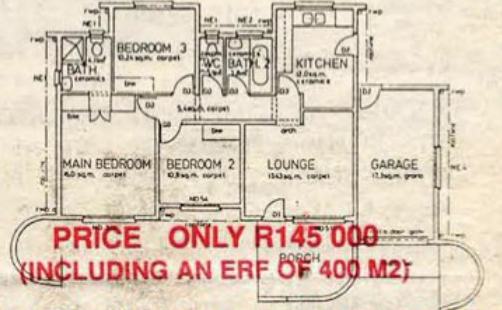
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