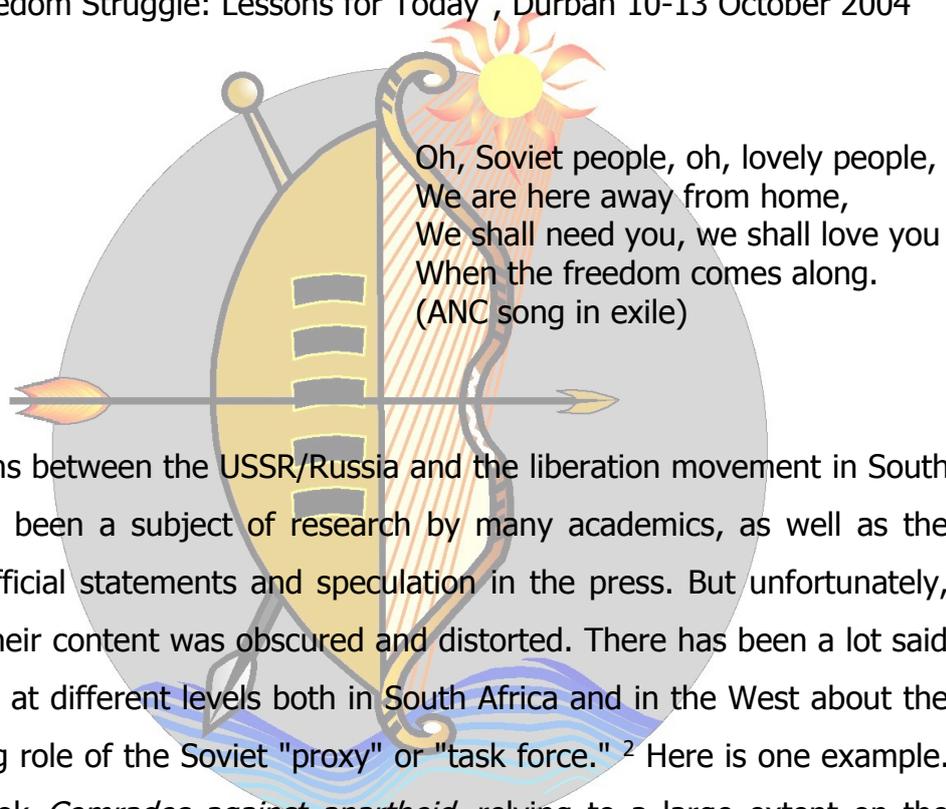


# Moscow and ANC: three decades of co-operation and beyond. <sup>1</sup>

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The relations between the USSR/Russia and the liberation movement in South Africa have been a subject of research by many academics, as well as the issue for official statements and speculation in the press. But unfortunately, too often their content was obscured and distorted. There has been a lot said and written at different levels both in South Africa and in the West about the ANC playing role of the Soviet "proxy" or "task force." <sup>2</sup> Here is one example. In their book *Comrades against apartheid*, relying to a large extent on the information supplied by spies and traitors, Stephen Ellis and co-author, the so called "Tsepo Sechaba" drew themselves (as well as poorly informed readers) into trouble, claiming that "the Freedom Charter was sent to the Moscow

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<sup>1</sup> My presentation has been scheduled by the organisers of the conference under "State/Official solidarity". However, I am not sure that this term adequately reflects the theme – for me it is difficult to imagine that solidarity can be just "official", it has always a human dimension even if officials are involved.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, K. Campbell. *The ANC: Soviet Task Force?* London, Institute of Strategic Studies, 1988.

Africa Institute for approval." <sup>3</sup> As a staff member of that Institute I should be proud of its association with such an important historical document, nevertheless I have to confess that the Institute had nothing to do with it: it was established in June 1959, exactly four years after the Freedom Charter had been adopted!

An objective analysis is overdue and this paper is an attempt to assess the USSR/Russia's attitude to the ANC of South Africa and its allies during the three decades when the organisation was banned and especially during the period of profound changes in the two countries.

A lot has been said and written about negative effects of the links between the Soviet Union and the South African liberation movement. I was astonished, for instance, when at the recent conference in London an activist of the Treatment Action Campaign linked the present government's policy on HIV with Joseph Stalin and so called "Stalinism"...

True, such features of Soviet society as a cult of personality, dogmatism, and a lack of broad discussions before taking crucial decisions, were not the best to emulate. But even if some "borrowing" of these manners did take place, their influence was insignificant. No doubt, they were "overweighed" by the positive effect of the co-operation with the Soviet Union.

The re-establishment of direct contacts between the USSR and the South African Communist Party took place in the early 1960s. Yusuf Dadoo, Moses Kotane and other representatives of the SACP came to Moscow and their discussions with the leaders and officials of the ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union resulted in the political and practical support of the liberation struggle on the terms suggested by the South Africans themselves. Parallel to the above, although lagging behind a bit, was the process of Moscow

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<sup>3</sup> S. Ellis and T. Sechaba, *Comrades against Apartheid. The ANC and South African Communist Party in Exile*. James Curry, London, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1992, p.27.

establishing (or, rather, re-establishing, since the ANC President Josiah Gumede visited the USSR in 1927!) relations with the ANC. After a visit of Oliver Tambo, then Deputy President General, to Moscow in April 1963, a versatile system of mutual contacts and co-operation was developed.

Unfortunately too often this co-operation is reduced by outside observers to the military sphere. Indeed, the assistance to Umkhonto we Sizwe (and to the underground activities of the ANC and the SACP for that matter) constituted an important, but just one of, the fields of interrelations between the USSR and the liberation movement in South Africa.

Let us try to categorise these interrelations. No doubt, we have to begin with the political and diplomatic support by the USSR to the antiracist struggle in South Africa. It would not be an exaggeration to say that politically Moscow supported the struggle against colonialism and racism from the first days of the 1917 revolution. According to the USSR Constitution "supporting the struggle of peoples for national liberation and social progress" was regarded as one of the aims of the Soviet foreign policy.<sup>4</sup>

Moscow's consistent diplomatic support to the anti-apartheid struggle began from the moment this issue was raised in the United Nations. Professor Vassily Solodovnikov, who was awarded this year with the Order of Companions of O R Tambo recalled in his recent interview that when he came as the Soviet Ambassador to Lusaka in 1976, his colleagues, the Western ambassadors used to say: "Why are you dealing with the ANC? No struggle against the white regime in South Africa is possible. The ANC does not have any support inside the country". In his opinion "the Western countries maintained their unfriendly attitude towards the ANC almost till the end of the

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<sup>4</sup> Constitution (Fundamental Law) of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics Adopted at the Seventh (Special) Session of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Ninth Convocation on October 7, 1977. Article 28.

1980s, and only when they saw that the ANC was rapidly advancing to the victory they hurried up to make 'friends' with it." <sup>5</sup>

A peculiar feature of the material assistance to the liberation struggle was that, although it was funded largely from the state budget, all requests used to come to and be handled by the International Department of the CPSU Central Committee.

This assistance can be divided into several categories. The most secretive were matters of financial assistance. It began in the second half of 1960 when the SACP was allocated \$ 30 000 from the so called "International Trade Union Fund for assistance to left workers organisations", then attached to the Romanian Council of Trade Unions". <sup>6</sup> Later the Soviet support for the armed struggle and underground activities may have been the cause of an increase of financial assistance to the SACP- to \$ 50 000 in 1961 <sup>7</sup> and then to \$ 112 445 in 1962 <sup>8</sup>.

Direct financial assistance to the ANC began in 1963 and was to continue for many years. The first allocation to the ANC was 300 000 dollars, a really huge sum in those days. The beginning of such direct support apparently brought about the reduction of allocations to the SACP which received that year only \$ 56 000. <sup>9</sup>

However, a limited financial help had, in fact, been given to the ANC even earlier. In the archives there is a transcript of the Central Committee

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<sup>5</sup> Sovetskaya Rossiya, Moscow, 23 September 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Russian State Archive of Modern History (Hereafter – RSAMH), collection 89, inventory 38, file 3, p.6. Head of the CPSU CC International Department B.N. Ponomarev's report on application of the International Trade Union Fund for Assistance to Left Workers's Organisations attached to the Romanian Council of Trade Unions, 2 November 1960. It should be mentioned however that at the stage Moscow's contributions to the Fund constituted about a half of the total sum.

<sup>7</sup> RSAMH, collection 89, inventory 38, file 4, p. 3-5, Head of the CPSU CC International Department B.N. Ponomarev's report... 1 November 1961.

<sup>8</sup> RSAMH, collection 89, inventory 38, file 5, p. 5-6, Head of the CPSU CC International Department B.N. Ponomarev's report... 3 January 1963.

<sup>9</sup> RSAMH, collection 89, inventory 38, file 6, p.11-12. Head of the CPSU CC International Department B.N. Ponomarev's report... 28 December 1963.

Secretariat's decision of March 1962 "on rendering assistance to the representatives of the African National Congress" who visited Cairo. It approved the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee <sup>10</sup> proposal to provide them with 100 Roubles in foreign currency (equivalent to \$111).<sup>11</sup> Those representatives were nobody else but Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela and Robert Resha.

The scale of funding fluctuated during the three decades, in the late 1980s an equal amount – \$ 100 000 – was provided annually to the ANC and SACP. Such a sum looked rather modest, but, contrarily to the support from most of other sources, it was provided on discretion of these organisations' leadership and therefore could be used for armed and other "sensitive" activities.

At that period much more substantial was the Soviet support in kind. Humanitarian assistance to the ANC, which began in 1963, included supplies, both through the Soviet government channels and through the NGOs, of food, clothes, cars, trucks, stationary, sportswear, building materials and other goods. All in all, according to the Russian government sources, the total value of humanitarian assistance to the ANC in kind from 1963 to 1990 was 16 million Roubles. <sup>12</sup> But this figure does not reflect the true picture. This sum is counted in roubles and their simple conversion into dollars at any given rate of exchange can only further distort the picture: many goods were exceptionally cheap in the USSR.

Moreover, this figure is not all embracing, because it does not include the material assistance provided by the Soviet non-governmental organisations, such as the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee at the expense of the Soviet Peace Fund. For example, in 1969 it sent to Dar es Salaam for the ANC sportswear and equipment, musical instruments, film projectors; in 1970 food

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<sup>10</sup> Like other NGOs the Solidarity Committee acted under a tight control of the ruling party.

<sup>11</sup> RSAMH, Catalogue of the, Decisions of the Secretariat, from Minutes N 17, item 37g, 10 March 1962.

<sup>12</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Moscow, 8 August 1992.

and clothes; in 1971 spare parts for trucks and cars; in 1972 four jeeps and two cars; in 1973 clothes, food, and another two cars; in 1974 25 tons of food, three cars, and radio receivers.<sup>13</sup>

A peculiar field of assistance, which is not included in any statistics, was provision of air tickets and transit facilities for numerous ANC delegations and representatives which enabled them to attend international conferences and visit different countries of the world, and contributions into budgets of those conferences.

Apart from the annual quota detailed by the CPSU (ten places, later twenty), the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee and other NGOs received South Africans for rest and medical treatment in the USSR. Then, on the initiative of the SAASC, wounded and sick ANC activists were admitted to the Soviet military hospitals as well. In some cases the treatment was fairly long: Moses Kotane, having suffered a stroke, spent over 10 years in the Central Clinical Hospital in Moscow; several months in the hospitals and several operations were required for Timothy Makoena (General Godfrey Ngwenya) to recuperate after an attack by the UNITA on the ANC convoy in Angola.

Besides, doctors and nurses were trained in the USSR, among them the incumbent Minister of Health Manto Tshabalala-Msimang and late Lieutenant General

Themba Masuku, (known in Moscow as Haggard McBerry), medicines and equipment were supplied, and in the 1980s, Soviet doctors were sent to the ANC camps in Angola.

From 1962 South African students began coming to the USSR for academic and political training. All in all about two hundred ANC members completed training in Soviet tertiary institutions, mostly with Masters and some with PhD

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<sup>13</sup> Archive of the Soviet Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee stored at the Institute for African Studies, Moscow.

degrees (the official government figure is smaller, 145, but it does not include those South Africans who were registered as citizens of Lesotho, Zambia or other Southern African countries). On top of this about two hundred ANC and SACP members studied at the Institute of Social Sciences (it was also known as the International Lenin School), on the Leningradsky Avenue in Moscow and at its campus outside the capital and dozens in trade union and youth schools.

Last but not the least is Soviet assistance for "Umkhonto we Sizwe". The Russian press reported that from 1963 to 1991, 1 501 ANC activists underwent military training in Soviet institutions <sup>14</sup>. However this figure is not all-inclusive as far as MK training is concerned, in fact their number was well over two thousand, including the RSA President, Deputy President and several ministers. One telling detail: of the first group of the ANC commanders incorporated into the new SANDF in 1994 everybody underwent military training in the USSR except one who was trained by the Soviets in Angola.

Training of the MK personnel in the USSR continued for almost three decades becoming increasingly sophisticated. Let us hear about it again "from the horse's mouth" - "Comrade Gebuza" (General Sphiwe Nyanda, incumbent Head of the SANDF). He came to the USSR in 1985, immediately after the Kabwe Conference of the ANC with the group of MK commanders, which, by the way, included Charles Nqakula who is now Minister of Safety and Security (and the SACP Chairperson) and Nosizwe Maphisa Nqakula, Minister of Home Affairs (and the ANC Women's League President):

"In the USSR, we were staying in an apartment on Gorki Street, Moscow [now renamed back into Tverskaya, it is the main street in the capital], where the lectures were conducted. For the practical exercises, we went to a place outside Moscow... We studied MCW (Military and Combat Work) as part of an abridged Brigade Commanders' course.

The course covered the following subjects, among others,

- (1) Communications
- (2) Underground work
  - Surveillance
  - Secret writing
  - Secret meetings
  - Photography
- (3) Military work
  - Ambush
  - Attack
  - Artillery effectiveness
  - Small arms

All were useful”<sup>15</sup>

So, to judge purely by the figures, about three thousand South Africans stayed in the USSR for relatively long periods. Yet, often the same people would, for example, complete a university degree and then also undergo military training. So, a realistic figure for South Africans who lived in the USSR under the auspices of the ANC and its allies is appreciably smaller, say, one thousand persons. There were, of course, many hundreds of South Africans who visited the Soviet Union as members of delegations or in transit. I believe that their overall impression of the Soviet Union was expressed well by Archibald Sibeko (Zola Zembe) who underwent training in the USSR in one of the first MK groups: “Perhaps they [the Soviets] were weak on some aspects of democracy, but they certainly did more for our struggle for a democratic South Africa than any of their "democratic" critics.”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, more than two hundred Soviet specialists and interpreters

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<sup>14</sup>□ *Segodnya*, no 3, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Sipiwe Nyanda to Vladimir Shubin, 10 December 2002.

<sup>16</sup> *Freedom in our Lifetime* by Archie Sibeko (Zola Zembe) with Joyce Leeson, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/congress/sactu/zz1.htm>

were stationed with the MK in Angola in the period 1979-91 <sup>17</sup>. In October 1978 an ANC delegation, headed by Oliver Tambo, requested from the USSR practical assistance in the organisation of the training Umkhonto cadres in Angola. From 1979, for more than a decade, Soviet military personnel were involved in it. The first group included specialists on tactics, mines and explosives and was headed by the person who became widely known in the ANC as "Comrade Ivan" – Vyacheslav Fyodorovich Shiryayev. Others followed, replacing each other in two- or three-year shifts. Their number gradually increased from the three that were initially requested by the ANC leadership to several dozen. Soon the group included specialists on "military-combat work", that is creation of the armed underground, hand-to-hand fighting, communications and communications equipment repair, as well as medical doctor, interpreters, etc. Later "Comrade Ivan" as its chief was succeeded by "Comrade George (late German Pimenov), "Comrade Michael" (Mikhail Konovalenko), "Comrade Victor" (Victor Belysh),

The Soviet specialists in Angola carried out what used to be called "international duty" in the remote camps, which had to be often moved, in unhealthy climate and under persistent threat from the Pretoria-led UNITA bands. Initially they stayed in Angola alone and only later the families were allowed to join. The ANC leadership involved the Soviets in training MK personnel both in regular and guerrilla warfare. There can be no doubt that the direct involvement of Soviet officers helped to raise the level of combat readiness of ANC armed units and, especially, of the organisers of the armed underground.

If earlier supplies for MK were coming to Tanzania and partly to Mozambique, the creation of a reliable rear base for the ANC in independent Angola provided an opportunity to accumulate weapons and ammunition there. By mid-1982 the ANC formations were well equipped and in position to operate

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<sup>17</sup> *Segodnya*, Moscow, no 5, 1993.

both as regular and guerrilla units for a protracted period of time.<sup>18</sup>

The total value of "special equipment", that is military supplies to the ANC from 1963 to 1990 was about 36 ml Roubles. However as it was mentioned before, the price of many items was exceptionally very low in the Soviet Union, and this was especially true with regards to arms. The list of the equipment received by the ANC will give a clearer picture: several thousand AK-47s of various modifications, over three thousand SKS carbines, over six thousand pistols, 275 grenade-launchers, 90 Grad-P missile launchers, over 40 Strela 2M anti-aircraft missile launchers, 20 Malyutka anti-tank rocket launchers, over 60 mortars, etc.<sup>19</sup>

The successes of Umkhonto actions in the early 1980s worried the South African ruling circles, and just as twenty years earlier the blame was put again on the "arm of Moscow", P.W. Botha in November 1983 called the ANC "a small clique of blacks and whites, controlled by the Kremlin"<sup>20</sup>.

General Constant Viljoen, the then Head of the SADF, claimed that the Kremlin formed a Co-ordination Committee on Southern Africa to undermine the region, and named the USSR Ambassador in Botswana Mikhail Petrov as the co-ordinator of the revolutionary onslaught against South Africa<sup>21</sup>. The irony was that in Gaborone, as distinct from Dar es Salaam, Lusaka, and later Luanda and Maputo, the Soviet Union had not designated even a single person to be specifically in contact with the ANC.

The South African authorities did their best to convince the leading Western countries of the "Marxist total onslaught" on the country. The height of this long campaign was a hearing on "the role of the Soviet Union, Cuba and East Germany in fomenting terrorism in Southern Africa," organised in the sub-

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<sup>18</sup> Discussion with V. F. Shiryaev, Moscow, 2 April 2003.

<sup>19</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 8 August 1992.

<sup>20</sup> *Star*, Johannesburg, 3 November 1983.

<sup>21</sup> *Washington Post*, 1 January 1984.

committee on terrorism of the US Senate in 1982. The South African Ambassador to Washington, D.B. Sole, admitted in his memoirs: "We had engineered the establishment of the Committee" <sup>22</sup>. In spite of several months of preparation the staged performance was rather poor and did not have a significant international effect, although the misinformation, supplied by the South African security services had now been "laundered" through the US Senate machinery.

1985 was a special year for both South Africa and the USSR. Trying to suppress mass protests, which had started after the introduction of the new Constitution in the previous year, the South African government declared a State of Emergency. In the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, the new CPSU General Secretary promised to get rid of the so-called "stagnation" of the previous period.

The Soviet attitude to the ANC and its allies during "Gorbachev's rule" which became known as "perestroika", a hardly translatable and therefore often confusing term which equivalent in English is somewhat like "reconstruction" or "rebuilding", deserves a special study. Too often it is described as a period of USSR's "alienation" from the ANC and its "rapprochement" with Pretoria. The truth however is much more complicated.

In fact the first years of "perestroika" witnessed much more active foreign policy of the USSR in all directions, including South Africa. At the dinner in honour of the Angolan President Jose Eduardo dos Santos in May 1986 Gorbachev said: "There exists a reasonable and realistic alternative to bloodshed, tension and confrontation in Southern Africa. It presupposes an end to aggression against Angola and other liberated states, the speedy granting to Namibia of independence – but of genuine independence, not

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<sup>22</sup> D. Sole. *This above all. Reminiscences of a South African diplomat*, (D. S. Sole), p. 481.

fictitious independence, as the USA and the RSA would like – and finally, the liquidation of the inhuman apartheid system.<sup>23</sup>

These "three whales" or pillars for regional settlement in Southern Africa remained for the rest of the 1980s the cornerstone of the Soviet policy in the region. In fact this was the very way the conflict was finally later resolved.

At the meeting with Oliver Tambo in the Kremlin on 4 November 1986 Gorbachev specifically assured the ANC President that the USSR was not in a hurry to respond to the attempts of P.W. Botha to start talks with the USSR and that any step in this direction in the future could be taken only after the ANC leadership agreed to it. (Unfortunately, he has not kept his word.)

Closed-door multilateral consultations with the participation of three parties, the ANC, Cuba and the Soviet Union, took place in Moscow in September 1987 and proved again the common views on all major issues. The ANC delegation at the meeting, headed by Oliver Tambo, included all the major leaders of the organisation. A major subject for discussion was the approach towards a political settlement.

At this time relations in the military field were strengthened as well. From 1986 there was an increase in the number of ANC members undergoing all kinds of training. In 1986 the first group of ANC members arrived for a full course for motorised infantry officers, and starting from 1987, full courses of four or five year-training programmes were organised for the ANC in several other fields: helicopter and later jet pilots as well as aircraft engineers, naval, communications, etc. After April 1994 most of them were integrated into the SANDF as officers.

Perhaps the most striking example of co-operation and mutual trust in a very sensitive field was the Soviet involvement in the Operation Vula, aimed at the

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<sup>23</sup> *Pravda*, Moscow, 9 May 1986.

creation of the armed underground network inside South Africa, which began in 1988 and went into post February-1990 period.<sup>24</sup> In particular, it included the assistance in sending to South Africa future ministers Mac Maharaj and Ronnie Kasrils and future Head of the SANDF Sipiwe Nyanda. The latter commented: "The Moscow visit of 1988 was the final leg of my preparation to infiltrate the RSA. It afforded me the opportunity to brush up on my disguises and gain more confidence on these. More identities were added to existing ones, enabling me to shed some of them as I advanced from Moscow to Schipol (Holland) to Nairobi (Kenya) and to Matsapa (Swaziland), thus breaking the trail and preparing for a safe infiltration into the RSA... From an operational point of view, the Moscow leg was probably the most important for my cover story.

Without exception, those who were not privy to the information believed I was in the Soviet Union for [military] studies. The enemy therefore never expected me to be right on his doorstep!"<sup>25</sup>

Thus the first three or four years of the "perestroika" period had a definite positive influence on the Soviet relationship with the ANC. The ties were becoming more regular and versatile, the assistance in all fields grew and the ANC office was opened in Moscow with a diplomatic status. A common approach to the prospects of a political settlement in Southern Africa was worked out and sustained. Furthermore, the democratisation of the political system in the USSR and of the methods of work of the ruling party positively affected the South African liberation movement.

All this helped to create a climate conducive to political settlement in South Africa no less, than the general relaxation of the international tension and the

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<sup>24</sup> This operation is described in *Armed and Dangerous: from undercover struggle to freedom* by Ronnie Kasrils (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), Jonathan Ball, 2004 and *Talking to Vula. The Story of the Secret Underground Communications Network of Operation Vula*, [www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/vula.html](http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/vula.html) by Timothy Jenkin; for the Soviet involvement see *ANC: A View from Moscow*, p. 332-338, 360, 381.

<sup>25</sup> Sipiwe Nyanda to Vladimir Shubin, 10 December 2002.

demythologising of the "total onslaught" bogey. But the changes in South Africa, the emergence of a chance for political settlement were the result, first and foremost, of the internal dynamics and not of the so called "collapse of communism". Perhaps the outgoing rulers of the country and especially the military and security hierarchy found in these theories a kind of consolation for themselves: unable to admit their defeat they tried to explain their retreat by relating it to the "global change". It is more surprising when some academics follow them. I was astonished, for example, to find in one supposedly serious South African magazine a calendar of the political settlement, which started with the collapse of the Berlin Wall!

Have those politicians and academics forgotten that the Pretoria regime (or at least some of its representatives) started to seek (very preliminary and very informal) contacts with the ANC as early as 1984, when the name "Gorbachev" was hardly familiar to anybody outside the USSR? That South African business "tycoons" met the ANC leadership in 1985? That the Eminent Persons Group of Commonwealth had real hopes for starting the process of settlement in 1986? That the ANC National Executive Committee had a profound discussion on the matter in 1987?

The positive influence of the USSR on South African developments started to subside with the general change in the policy of Gorbachev from the "perfection of socialism" to the restoration of capitalism, and from democratisation to the establishment of a more authoritarian rule. In this light, 1989 can be considered a watershed.

At the meeting between Gorbachev's Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze and Nelson Mandela with a group of the ANC leaders on 20 March 1990 in Lusaka Thabo Mbeki made the ANC's position clear, warning against negative changes in the Soviet policy: "We want the USSR to be a leader of anti-apartheid forces. That position should not be compromised... The USSR should continue to be seen as not beginning to establish links with a system

on its way out... We wouldn't want a negative perception of the USSR among our people. <sup>26</sup>"

But in spite of Shevardnadze's assurances, during the very period when the several decades of the anti-apartheid struggle brought the first fruits, the Soviet relations with the ANC and its allies started to "cool down" and later to deteriorate. By that time Gorbachev was playing a double game. Contrary to his promises, given to Tambo earlier, he established direct contacts with the South African government, behind the back of the ANC and of the CPSU that he (at least on paper) was still heading.

The situation deteriorated further when Boris Yeltsin replaced Gorbachev in the Kremlin. In his paper "From Gorbachev to Yeltsin: Moscow-Pretoria Relations at a Time of Change" Nicholas Anderton of the University of Stellenbosch claimed that "after the accession to undisputed power in the Kremlin of President Boris Yeltsin in December 1991, a clearly defined policy towards South Africa, based exclusively on Russia's national interest emerged..." <sup>27</sup> The reality, however, was rather the opposite: after that date the policy was largely determined by personalities or groups that either acted in their narrow interests, or under the blinkers of "reideologisation", rather than in "Russia's national interests".

On many major issues of foreign policy Yeltsin's Government followed the steps of the West, but as far as South Africa is concerned it went even further. While major Western powers were doing their best to build or to broaden the bridges to the ANC, Yeltsin's government was in a hurry to develop ties with Pretoria at the expense of the ANC. Such steps involved the establishment of diplomatic relations with Pretoria in February 1992 on the one hand, and the dropping of the financial support to the ANC office in Moscow and sending away most of the ANC cadres on the other.

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<sup>26</sup> ANC Lusaka Collection. Mayibuye Centre Historical Papers, University of the Western Cape.

So, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Moscow's cessation of both political and practical assistance to the ANC in late 1991 undoubtedly had a negative effect on the talks. It is hardly accidental that the government of the day adopted an intransigent position in 1992 after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Moscow and the assurances given to De Klerk by Yeltsin in the Russian capital. Moreover, the collapse of the "second world" harmed prospects of deep social and economic transformation in the interests of the majority in South Africa.

However the twist in USSR/Russian policy towards South Africa did not remain unchallenged. When Yeltsin was welcoming De Klerk in May 1992 in the Kremlin, Themba Thabethe, the Head of the ANC Mission, was invited to the House of Soviets - the premises of the Russian Parliament where he discussed with the Co-ordination Council of the Opposition "the present stage and the prospects of political, economic and cultural relations between Russia and South Africa". A message to Nelson Mandela, signed by a group of the opposition leaders, was forwarded to the ANC envoy<sup>28</sup>.

Nevertheless lacking a broad anti-apartheid movement in Russia, the actions of the opposition, though they irritated Yeltsin's government and forced it to think twice before taking further steps towards Pretoria, could not have a decisive impact on its policy. It was the developments in South Africa itself, the ANC's victory in the 1994 election, that caused later some positive changes in Moscow's policy towards South Africa. The prospects for the development of the South Africa's relations with Russia have been strengthened after the defeat of the overtly pro-Western political forces in the recent Russian election.

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<sup>27</sup> M. Anderton. *From Gorbachev to Yeltsin. Moscow-Pretoria Relations at a Time of Change*, University of Stellenbosch, 1994, p.1

<sup>28</sup> Press Release. The meeting between a leading member of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and the ANC Chief Representative in Moscow, 4 June 1992.

Let us try to sum up. Not only was the volume of Moscow's assistance to the ANC and its allies very significant, but what is more important, the USSR was capable and willing to render assistance at the time and in the fields when and where other countries were not ready and not able to do it. This happened in 1963-1965 when mass training of the MK cadres was organised in the Soviet Union, in 1969 when the core of the MK had to be "evacuated" from Tanzania to Simferopol and other places in the USSR, and even much later, in 1988 when Moscow was still the safest place for Oliver Tambo's meeting with the head of the ANC underground machinery Mac Maharaj.

Yet the author strongly believes that Moscow's most important contribution to the elimination of apartheid in South Africa was not material assistance, training facilities or other steps, as described above, but the encouragement of non-racism in the ANC ranks.

