

Soviets rethink policy on SA

Star 19/4/89 p.12

WASHINGTON — The recent covert visit to South Africa by Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Mr Anatolij Adamishin forms part of the superpower's restructuring of its overall global foreign policy.

Senior Soviet sources in Washington described the USSR's policy towards southern Africa as being in a state of flux. Much the same could be said for Soviet policy in general as Russia seeks to restructure its economy and other aspects of its society in Gorbachev's era of glasnost and perestroika.

In the new atmosphere of freer speech and questioning of previous Soviet policies, senior Russian experts are now stating that the Soviet Union has made mistakes in its policies towards South Africa.

"Soviet propaganda on South Africa in the last decade made some mistakes," one prominent Soviet expert on southern Africa told a private gathering here.

"The biggest mistake was the attitude towards the white population. Some Soviet journalists talked about whites as if they were colonists, with the idea that after the revolution Africans would kick the whites out of South Africa.

"This was a mistake made not only by the Soviet Union but also by East Germany and others in the Eastern bloc. Now that we are in the Gorbachev era, we hope not to repeat such mistakes," he said.

The major reason why this is perceived to be a mistake: it has allowed the South African Government to scare its white population — particularly Afrikaners — into believing the USSR is an enemy.

Said the expert: "The present Soviet foreign policy aims at trying to take this away from the South African Government, by eliminating the enemy imagery."

He was adamant the Soviet Union still stood consistently against apartheid and racism. The USSR still supported the liberation movements opposed to the South African regime. It had been noticed that South Africa had attempted to play a Soviet card in its relations with Western powers, and to cause tension between the Soviet Union and the African National Congress, he said.

On the other hand, a new realism has apparently permeated the Soviet approach to South Africa.

The Soviet Union, which until now has regarded the SA Government as an illegitimate regime, now accepts it is a genuine political force which must take its part in the process of resolving the conflict and problems of southern Africa.

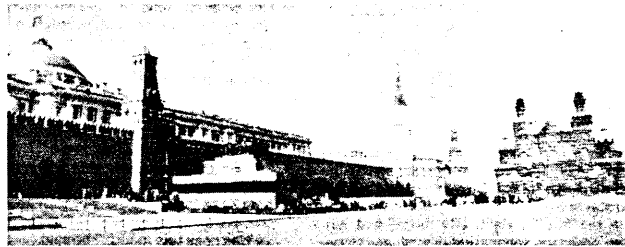
IN GENERAL

This is how two Soviet experts, one a prominent academic, the other an adviser to the Soviet government, saw their country's emerging role in southern Africa (they asked not to be quoted on the record and they stressed these were their personal assessments of the situation):

● In general, there was a completely new policy based on a new philosophy. The Soviet Union now took a different view of the world: whereas previously it saw everything in two colours, communism and capitalism, it now saw a multi-hued picture.

This reappraisal of its view of the world had led to the Soviet Union being criticised by parts of the Third World and liberation movements such as the ANC, on the basis that the USSR was apparently withdrawing its sup-

DAVID BRAUN of The Star's Bureau in Washington looks at the new realism that is permeating the Soviet Union's approach to Southern Africa and particularly South Africa, as expressed by senior Soviet experts in the United States.



Kremlin . . . seeks to change white perceptions that it is the enemy.

port from their struggle in the face of the continued onslaught of capitalist imperialism.

On the other hand, the competition of the Soviet and imperialist ideologies in southern Africa had not been beneficial to the peoples who lived in the region.

ON SOUTH AFRICA

● The situation had changed in South Africa dramatically. Four decades ago, when a study was made of the South African political situation, it was very simple. There were the National Party, the United Party and the ANC. Now, it was much more complex.

The Soviet Union was trying to understand this situation. It now not only had relations with the ANC and the SA Communist Party, but sought relations with other organisations opposing apartheid.

The Soviet Union was also trying to dispel its image as the enemy of the whites by building a relationship with the liberal anti-apartheid part of the white population. Representatives of such whites had been invited to visit the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union was now committed to finding political solutions to conflict, although it was firm in its support for the liberation movements and recognised their right to utilise any means to get their freedom, including the armed struggle.

The Soviet Union also continued to support international pressure on the South African Government and seek its isolation. The South African Government and the South African nation should be differentiated between in this regard, however, as the Government represented only three percent of its people.

It would be necessary for the Soviet Union to have diplomatic contacts with the South African Government, as it did in the recent Angola/Namibia peace process.

USSR contacts with South Africa should not be interpreted as recognition or readiness on the part of the Soviet Union to resume diplomatic contacts with South Africa.

The Soviet Union would not now abandon its stance on South Africa and its support for the liberation movements, which had won it much international prestige.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union must now fol-

low a more pragmatic approach.

"The Soviet Union has recognised the South African Government is not only part of the problem, but in certain aspects it is part of the solution. We have to recognise that.

"We have to accept the South African Government is part of the negotiating process. Once we do that we have to accept it has its own interests. We may not like this, but as a government and as a political force it has its own interests.

"We still regard it as an illegal regime that has to go. At least the system it has created will have to go," said one of the experts.

Another expert was of the firm opinion that apartheid had entered its final phase in South Africa. The internal contradictions in South Africa were so profound and acute, the fall of apartheid was inevitable, he said.

Reforms being carried out by the National Party, combined with escalation of repressions, did not provide a way out of the present deadlock, as they did not envisage complete elimination of racial discrimination and the white rule.

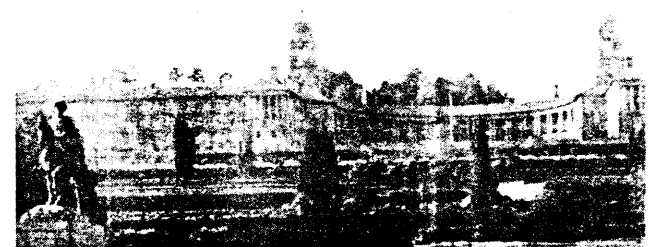
The SA Government could but prolong the system's crisis, and this was fraught with even more serious upheavals in future.

The only question now was how soon would apartheid be dismantled and by what means: either by a revolutionary upheaval of the oppressed masses, first of all the African majority deprived of full political rights, and by a bloody civil war — or through political negotiations between the parties at conflict, reasonable and mutually acceptable compromises made by the ruling circles and the opposition.

Apparently, one should proceed from the assumption that under present conditions the best, and, indeed, the only possible way was to start constructive talks.

It was not for the Soviet Union to decide upon the formula for these negotiations, their participants, or their outcome. This was entirely an internal affair of South Africa, and only its people could jointly find a mutually acceptable solution.

The Soviet Union would like to see future South Africa a



Union Buildings . . . Moscow accepts Pretoria as part of the solution.

united non-racial state, led by a democratically elected citizens of the country, both blacks and whites.

The settlement of the conflict in southern Africa would create a qualitatively new situation in the area. The Soviet Union would like to see the future southern Africa free of the armaments burden which resulted from unceasing confrontation, from interference by developed countries and their struggle for their own interests.

Bilateral and multilateral co-operation in the name of development and progress must become the basis of Soviet policies in the region.

ON ANGOLA

● There was no military solution to the internal problem in Angola. The MPLA and Unita could not destroy each another. The only solution was negotiation between the two sides.

The differences between the two sides were historic, traditional, ethnic and personal, and the involvement of the big powers did not help matters.

The United States should stop its military assistance to Unita and the Soviet Union should reduce its military aid to the MPLA.

ON MOZAMBIQUE

● There was no real ethnic or social basis to the conflict in Mozambique. The South African-supported MNR was only part of the problem, and probably not the biggest part.

What there was in Mozambique was social disintegration and a general mutiny because the economy had been destroyed and not been replaced with a new economy.

Apart from the MNR there were many other forces dissatisfied with the Frelimo government, who had taken to arms to make a living. Even the government forces used their weapons on the civilians in order to rob them.

This problem could be resolved only by restoring the economy, drawing the population into the process of producing commodities and by restoring the economic balance between villages and cities. To achieve this goal, the country needed international assistance.