

USSR/SA thaw does not mean bear hugs yet

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CAPE TOWN — South Africa is not about to jump into bed with the Reds and neither do the Soviets have any intention of being seduced by South Africa.

Relations between the two countries, virtually non-existent 12 months ago, have thawed only to the extent that the two are now talking to each other.

But diplomatic relations in the near future are not on as Soviet ambassador-at-large, Mr Vyacheslav Ustinov, made clear when he arrived in Cape Town last week.

He emphasised he had not even come to talk about the issue.

South Africa and the Soviet Union are sizing each other up at the moment and discovering that their propaganda about each other of the past was hogwash in many instances.

But senior South African sources said they did not particularly like what they were discovering about the Soviets.

One of the complicating factors in dealing with the Russians was that they had a bit of an identity crisis.

"They don't know if they are pre-glasnost or post-glasnost," was one of the more derogatory remarks.

Both South Africa and Russia are seeking to find where they can take advantage of any relationship.

This was emphatically stated by Defence Minister, General Magnus Malan in Parliament when he said South Africa's interests were the paramount consideration.

South Africa reads hopeful signs into the Soviet indications that it would prefer negotiated political solutions and that it is open to sanctions.

But Mr Ustinov has made it clear that the Soviets are still a long way from forcing

The recent easing of relations between the Soviet Union and South Africa does not mean diplomatic ties are about to be re-established. **BRUCE CAMERON** reports that the thaw should not be seen as anything more than the fact that the two sides are talking to each other.

ing the ANC to drop the armed struggle.

"We believe political solutions are very important but as you know the United Nations has recognised the right of nations to reach freedom by all means possible."

The Soviets insist that before they are prepared to renew formal diplomatic relations apartheid would have to be scrapped, but in the meantime they are prepared to engage in some type of constructive engagement.

They are clearly looking for international respectability and prestige in helping to resolve the volatile situation in South Africa.

The Soviets are being careful not to offend the African states and appear to be attempting to gain a quick march on the United States. At present the Soviets are doing most of the shouting about alleged over-reaction from security forces fighting the Swapo infiltration clearly to curry favour.

They are also doing most of the pushing for concessions for Swapo. All this has not done much to encourage South Africa to give the Soviets much of a toe-in during the Joint Commission talks.

At the moment the Soviets are sulking because South Africa has been keeping them at bay in the current negotiations to the extent they had to ask the Americans at the emergency talks at Mount Etjo to



Mr Vyacheslav Ustinov

approach South Africa to let them have some say in the final agreement.

South Africa relented and the Soviets altered a word or two.

South Africa has been trying to impress on the Soviets that South Africa is not a two-bit country that can or will allow itself to be pushed around by a super power.

This was one of the main reasons why Foreign Minister, Mr Pik Botha, encouraged Soviet Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Anatoliy Adamishin to visit South Africa after he met him for wide ranging talks in the Soviet Embassy in Mozambique last month.

He wanted the Russians to know that South Africa was a powerhouse unlike any other African country.

Mr Adamishin admitted in the Russian newspaper *Izvestia* last month that he did in fact visit South Africa, where he was given a

heli-copter tour of the Witwatersrand, but denied holding talks on South African soil.

In the interview with *Izvestia* Mr Adamishin made it clear that the Soviet Union retained firm relations with the African National Congress although he did concede that there was greater "realism than previously".

It is the loosening of this bond with the ANC, and particularly its support for ANC's armed struggle, that South Africa hopes most to gain from dealing with the Soviets.

South Africa takes Soviet demands for recognition of human rights and the scrapping of apartheid with a large pinch of salt given the Soviet Union's own rather worse history on the issue of human rights.

South Africa would also not be adverse to opening solid trade links with the Soviet Union as sanctions close doors in Western countries.

This is not a new idea and was suggested many years ago by the late Dr Connie Mulder although the Conservative Party with its opportunistic negative reaction to the Soviet contacts would like to forget it.

South Africa is definitely not seeking any alignment with the West. This was best summed up by a message which was understood to have been passed to the Russians last year that South Africa did not necessarily side with the West.

Although Mr Adamishin and Mr Botha may be prepared to down a few Vodkas together there is little chance that the two countries will soon be exchanging bear hugs. Instead they will continue to spar, looking for advantage, or at best, mutual advantage.