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# USA/USSR:

## The new partition of Africa

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It has become apparent, above all since the signature of the New York accords on **Namibia** and **Angola** on 22 December 1988, that there has been a new partition of Africa. This could turn out to be the most far-reaching great-power agreement on Africa since the Berlin conference of 1885, which divided the continent into colonial parcels.

The two parties to the new partition, the United States and the Soviet Union, are now cooperating to such an extent that it is hard to resist the conclusion that they have reached an informal agreement to redefine their spheres of interest in the world, including Africa. Circumstantial evidence suggests that a key occasion in the process of reaching such an agreement was the October 1986 Reykjavik summit between President **Ronald Reagan** and Secretary-General (as he then was) **Mikhail Gorbachev**.

The chief concern of the two super-powers at Reykjavik was an arms treaty. Subsequent events suggest that Africa was one element in the bargain struck, during the sequence following the Reykjavik meeting, to secure such a treaty. On the Soviet side, of prime importance was an assurance of US non-intervention in eastern Europe and an opportunity to manage the decline of its empire relatively secure from external pressure. It appears that part of the price paid by Moscow for such an assurance has been to renounce its aspirations to hegemony in Africa.

The Soviet renunciation does not mean abandoning its connections with Africa. Rather, the USSR now concentrates on political and diplomatic alliances rather than military ones. Soviet diplomacy now attaches correspondingly greater importance to international legality and the role of the United Nations. In Africa, the USSR appears to have effectively renounced attempts to influence events in those countries in which it does not have a long-standing interest. Where it does have such an interest, it is now unwilling to back its diplomacy with the threat of force. US diplomacy in Africa is now the only one backed by the threat of military action. There is now only one super-power left in Africa.

Evidence of the renunciation of Soviet power in Africa is now impressive. It includes:

- The New York accords. In effect, by securing a calendar for the removal of **Cuban** troops from Angola, the USA has

the opportunity to establish its own hegemony there. The Luanda government is now tilting towards Washington and away from the USSR. It will probably have become a member of the International Monetary Fund by the end of 1989, with diplomatic recognition by Washington to follow. An important by-product of this has been the closure of African National Congress (ANC) training-camps in Angola.

- Soviet agreement on United Nations' Security Council resolution 632 of 16 February 1989, including a reduction in the size of the United Nations' Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. This in effect gives Pretoria latitude to decolonise Namibia on terms of its own choosing, with the support of the USA and Soviet non-interference.

- The reduction of military assistance to **Ethiopia**, previously the only Soviet ally in the Horn of Africa. Colonel **Mengistu Haile Mariam** may not have much longer to run (AC Vol 30 No 4). This is good news for the Eritrean People's Liberation Front.

- The abandoning of **Benin's** President **Mathieu Kérékou**, previously the leading **Libyan** and Soviet ally in West Africa. Kérékou's government too is now highly unstable

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### Since 22 December 1988, it is clear that the super-powers have partitioned Africa

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(AC Vol 30 No 2). The USSR is doing nothing to counter US pressure on Kérékou, including a barrage of disinformation intended to topple him.

Together these developments amount to a Soviet renunciation of power-politics in Africa. They enable US strategists to 'roll back the frontiers of communism'. Nominally Marxist-Leninist governments may survive in Angola and **Mozambique**, for example, but as US allies.

The areas most affected by this change in super-power relations are southern Africa and the Horn, previously the cockpits of the most intense super-power rivalry. North African countries have sufficient strength, and good enough Middle Eastern and European links, to remain relatively unscathed. Moreover **Egypt** is now at the centre of a joint

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Soviet-US peace initiative in the Middle East. West and Central Africa are also comparatively unchanged by US-Soviet understanding since they are still dominated by **France**. Nevertheless there are signs, in **Chad**, **Senegal** and elsewhere, that Paris' grip on its former African empire is weakening. The USA is tending to fill the resulting diplomatic vacuum. Many observers think that French withdrawal can only become more marked as pressure builds up for a devaluation of the CFA franc and as Europe heads towards 1992 and economic integration.

The Soviet renunciation of its African ambitions has given a huge fillip to the government of **South Africa** which can now look forward to flexing its diplomatic and economic muscle throughout the southern part of the continent more easily than previously. Conversely, its military options will be circumscribed against states under US patronage. Strategists in Pretoria, facing the forthcoming loss of Namibia, take heart in the knowledge that if the South-West African People's Organisation comes to power, it will be without its Soviet god-parent.

Moreover the military threat to Pretoria from the ANC has now receded (AC Vol 30 No 2). On the other hand, the political weight of the ANC remains considerable, precisely because it is grounded not just in external support but in that of many South Africans. Much will depend on how effec-

tively the ANC responds to its new circumstances. And here the USSR still has a trump card. Moscow retains the right to maintain its political alliances in Africa, and its links with the ANC via the South African Communist Party remain close. The time may come when Pretoria will be asking Moscow to use its ANC connections in such a way as to deliver the movement to a negotiating position.

Strangely enough, another prominent African victim of US-Soviet agreement is **Jonas Savimbi** of the *União Nacional para Independência Total de Angola* (UNITA). As the USA gradually moves closer to the Luanda government, it is hard to see how he can avoid being sacrificed. And so the man reviled by many as the agent of Western imperialism *par excellence* may finish as a victim of that very force, while Washington finds the Marxist government in Luanda a more promising partner.

Cuba, equally paradoxically, emerges as a great victor. President **Fidel Castro** can withdraw from Angola on a high note, representing himself as the most principled foreign champion Africa ever had. Moreover he earns the substantial reward of improved relations with the USA, with benefits for his ramshackle economy, after 30 years of unrelenting hostility. So it is that the Reagan doctrine of struggle against communism worldwide has finished by sacrificing some friends and rehabilitating some enemies ●

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