

The 'life-and-death' battle for Africa

W. Argus
23/9/95

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SOUTH Africa was of "pivotal" importance in the "life-and-death" battle for Africa between Russia and America.

This was confirmed by former KGB Chief of Foreign Counter Intelligence General Oleg Kalugin who was in South Africa last week as a guest of Spectrum, the investigative unit of Independent Newspapers.

He said that if the Russians had succeeded in conquering this country, all other "ripe-for-change" African regimes would have fallen too. "If Russia subverted South Africa, they would not have needed Europe. But Europe could have been ours without a war if we had beaten the Americans and Western allies in South Africa and taken over the country."

Had South Africa's nuclear capability, developed political and economic infrastructures and strategic shipping lines fallen into the hands of the local communists, it would have made South America "more vulnerable" to the Russians.

Kalugin said the United States was so anxious to protect Africa from communist advances that it had stationed 300 Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officers and an "untold" number of other agents at strategic points on the continent.

It was even "technically very probable" that there were CIA people in South Africa's new government.

Kalugin said Boss was very close to the CIA and they would have taught them "how to conduct themselves . . . how to operate. It was their job. If it didn't happen, they would simply have wasted taxpayers' money."

At the same time, said Kalugin, the Russians were channeling hundreds of thousands of rands into the SACP. "It would have eventually amounted to millions," he added.

A MAJOR disadvantage for the KGB during its war with the CIA was that it had no normal diplomatic relations

with South Africa. "We had no people under legal cover," said Kalugin, adding that if the Russians had had an embassy in South Africa, Boss wouldn't have escaped Soviet infiltration.

Nevertheless, the Russians were able to rely on "excellent sources" in other countries to keep themselves informed of strategic developments in South Africa.

As an example, Kalugin said, the Russians "heard at the time" that South Africa had bought tritium from another country for its atom bomb. "To my knowledge, it was Israel", he added.

"It did bother us to a degree. But it also bothered America. They didn't wish to have proliferation. Any unauthorised acquisition of nuclear material was of concern."

Kalugin said that by the late 1970s the communist threat to South Africa was at its "strongest". This was boosted by the collapse of Portuguese regimes and the emergence of big African States. "The north was pink. Not red. It was a most dangerous time for South Africa."

BECAUSE South Africa was an "isolated spot on the map" at the time, the Russians would, for instance, have instigated its communist-minded neighbours to "devour" it by guerrilla warfare.

"This would have been blamed on the locals. South Africa would morally have had their hands tied behind their backs. The West wouldn't have come to their defence," he added.

Kalugin said if South Africa had not reformed its system, or if it had "simply surrendered", it would have been "destroyed".

Today, however, the SACP "does not matter", the general said. "They present no danger. I'm sure that in South Africa, more than anywhere else, they have become social democrats."

South Africa, he said, now had a "great chance" to become one of the leading powers in the world. "South Africa must be proud. It has the potential to do a lot better domestically. But it can become a beacon to other Third World countries."