

Spotlight on SA skulduggery

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SLOWLY but surely historians are lifting the veil on Pretoria's destabilisation of the Southern African region in the 1970s and 1980s.

The latest contribution comes from Paul Moorcraft, former senior instructor at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, former lecturer at various Southern African universities, author, journalist on American, British and South African publications (he wrote a political column for *The Star*), and film-maker. His 500-page *"African Nemesis. War and Revolution in Southern Africa 1945-2010"*, which has just been published, is a model of exhaustive research.

But even Moorcraft's research, thorough though it is, leaves questions unanswered. How much support, for example, did South Africa give Renamo in Mozambique after the signing of the 1984 Nkomati Accord? What were the tensions between the Foreign and Defence ministries in Pretoria over the merits of destabilisation? And what exactly were the calculations over southern Angola in 1988 that caused South Africa to sue for peace so abruptly?

Discussing the battles in South-

ern Angola in 1988, Moorcraft admits they are "still shrouded in the mists of disinformation". He rejects as exaggerations Castro's description of the battle of Cuito Cuanavale as "the turning point of African history" and Angola's naming of the town as "the Stalingrad of the South African army". But he concedes the battle changed the nature of the war.

Moorcraft's judgment is that the SADF had not been defeated, but could no longer afford the costs of trying to win. Most important, "it had lost the game of technological leapfrog with the Russians, as it was bound to do if Moscow persisted in resupplying the MPLA".

Discussing Mozambique, Moorcraft traces in detail the creation of Renamo by Rhodesian intelligence and, in 1980, its transfer to SADF military intelligence. On the eve of Zimbabwe's independence, he writes: "Members of the Rhodesian SAS simply drove Renamo's South African-supplied vehicles in a convoy through ... Beitbridge," and 80 percent of the SAS joined a new regiment of the SA Reconnaissance Commandos.

Moorcraft notes incidentally



Author Paul Moorcraft
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that "the ascendancy of military intelligence, under P W Botha, disturbed the spy network throughout Southern Africa". Many of the former highly successful BOSS (now NIS) agents were "demoralised".

Mozambique, says Moorcraft, did not realise until late in 1981 "the extent of Pretoria's connivance and that the SADF-Renamo axis posed a serious threat to the Marxist regime". The SADF's successes left the Soviet Union in an awkward position as the guard-

ians of Frelimo's revolution.

"Pretoria's destabilisation posed a serious test for Soviet prestige and resolve. It was a test they had manifestly failed, despite the grandiose fraternal rhetoric."

Turning to the Nkomati Accord, Moorcraft says the ANC leadership was "shattered at the abrupt, almost brutal way, its comrades had been booted out" (of Mozambique). For President Samora Machel everything "depended on whether the Afrikaners would keep their word. Some did and some did not".

Moorcraft claims it is clear the SADF continued to supply Renamo after the Nkomati Accord. "The Gorongosa (Renamo) documents indicate that at a very high level, despite political opposition and/or knowledge, the SADF secretly kept the supply lifeline open long after the 1984 pact".

But, he asks, on whose orders? Captured documents (at Renamo's Gorongosa headquarters) indicated a serious rift within the South African security establishment. "Obviously the Foreign Ministry was totally at odds with hardliners in military intelligence. Where did P W Botha stand? When the documents were made

public, the president's responses were highly ambiguous."

He concludes: "The war seems unwinable in the foreseeable future. Even if Renamo's infrastructure were to be smashed, local warlordism could become endemic. Even if Renamo won, and Frelimo crawled back to the bush to fight on, Pretoria would be unlikely to be transformed from a backseat fairy godmother to sitting in the driving seat with (Renamo leader) Dhlakama on its lap."

"That could be Vietnam revisited. Or at least Algiers. Pretoria had managed to extricate itself from that quagmire. Once was enough."

"African Nemesis", because it is a history, will not suffice the fate of so many books in southern Africa of being out of stock on publication day. It is an absorbing book. In the final chapter the author turns to the situation in South Africa after Nelson Mandela's release and draws a parallel with Zimbabwe's independence.

At the Lancaster House conference in 1979, he says, the British made it clear that if the Patriotic Front did not settle, London would recognise Abel Muzorewa's internal settlement. In South Africa,

"Buthelezi would be the replica perhaps. If the ANC stalled, the great powers could arbitrate over the heads of the movement, as they did with Swapo in the Namibian settlement, provided that the transfer of power was an implicit part of the understanding".

This, perhaps, if far-fetched, but what is likely is that the internal community will become increasingly impatient if the talks-about-talks drag on for too long, and not everyone will blame Pretoria.

Moorcraft offers another thought for the reader to ponder: "There may well be a nationalist-communist clash in the leadership if the ANC gets into power. And Mandela may well play a Keresky to a new Lenin waiting in the wings (Chris Hani perhaps)."

In "African Nemesis", Moorcraft goes as far as the available evidence allows him to go. What we need now is for Pik Botha and the army generals to start writing their memoirs — to fill in the gaps.

● *African Nemesis. War and Revolution in Southern Africa 1945-2010. By Paul L Moorcraft, published by Brassey's (UK). □*