

# South African deal will benefit Moscow

by Jeffrey Steinberg

The Anglo-Soviet Trust is alive and well in southern Africa, and the diplomatic maneuverings among London, Moscow, and Pretoria may soon result in the entire region falling into the hands of the Russians.

Early in March, a series of conferences occurred in London, drawing together Soviet, British, and South African policy-shapers. Simultaneously, senior Soviet Foreign Ministry officials responsible for African affairs made themselves available for interviews with Western reporters, to proclaim the new era of Soviet-South African cooperation. Amnesty International, always a bellwether of Trust initiatives, launched an assault on UNITA leader Dr. Jonas Savimbi of Angola, charging him with human rights violations, including a 1983 incident in which he allegedly ordered a witch to be burned at the stake.

Within the Republic of South Africa, the ruling Nationalist Party moved to oust President P.W. Botha and replace him with party chairman and Education Minister Frederik W. de Klerk. The anti-Botha move occurred within 24 hours of the President's nationally televised announcement that he would finish out his term despite a recent stroke, and drew the enthusiastic support of Foreign Minister Pik Botha, pro-Soviet industrialist Harry Oppenheimer, and Lonrho chairman Tiny Rowland. From this evidence, it is safe to assume for now that the power shift is aimed at installing a new governing combination that will go along with the evolving strategic condominium with Moscow.

In fact, no sooner had the anti-Botha move been launched, than British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher summoned Foreign Minister Pik Botha to London for consultations with herself and British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe. The meeting, the first in over five years, centered around a joint Anglo-Soviet "peace" process in which Thatcher would deliver Pretoria and Gorbachov would deliver the African National Congress (ANC) to a direct negotiating session.

During the weekend of March 11-12, London meetings drew together an impressive collection of officials from Pretoria and Moscow. At Wilton Park, a British intelligence psychological warfare center, the Foreign Office hosted a gathering of Soviet and South African officials, reportedly including Andrei Gromyko and Soviet Foreign Ministry Africa chief Yuri Yukalov. Chester Crocker, the outgoing U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and a close

ally of Britain's Tiny Rowland, was reportedly an observer. Yukalov confirmed the basic tenor of the discussions in an interview with the London *Independent* on March 16, in which he said, "South Africa should not be destroyed." He later told Reuters that he favored a negotiated solution to the apartheid problem, a break with Moscow's 30-year commitment to a military overthrow of the Pretoria regime by the ANC.

Simultaneous with this and the unannounced trip of Pik Botha to London, a second conference of Soviet African specialists was hosted by former British Ambassador to the Soviet Union Sir John Killick.

## The Soviet gameplan

According to one senior South African diplomat interviewed by *EIR*, Pretoria is fully committed to direct negotiations with the Soviet Union "in pursuit of our own interests." He said flatly that the South Africans have "written off" groups that it has supported until now, like Jonas Savimbi's UNITA rebel group in Angola and the RENAMO group in Mozambique, in the interest of pursuing the deal with Moscow. He said that this deal would extend far beyond regional matters and would certainly include talks leading toward new arrangements for strategic minerals, gold, diamonds, etc.

For their part, the Soviets are sending similar signals of disengagement from the irregular warfare that has characterized Russian involvement in the region for decades. Moscow has reportedly cut off further arms supplies to the SWAPO rebels in Namibia. And Soviet Foreign Ministry officials have talked frankly about cutting off the arms pipeline to the ANC.

In an exclusive interview with the *New York Times* on March 16, Soviet Foreign Ministry Africa specialist Boris A. Asoyan said candidly, "In our opinion, we doubt that revolution in South Africa is possible. If you're talking of revolutionaries storming Pretoria. We support the ANC and we regard it as the main force in contemporary political life in South Africa. But we also believe that there is really no alternative to a peaceful solution."

Simultaneous to these statements, exiled ANC leader Oliver Tambo made a trip to Moscow, in which he was snubbed by senior government and party officials. This was read by Moscow-watchers as a sure sign that the Gorbachov regime has placed a premium on the now extensive back-channel talks with the Pretoria government.

As these machinations were occurring in rapid succession, back in Washington, the Bush administration appeared to be signaling passive support for the overall package, with the expected announcement that Herman Cohen, a Crocker protégé and former Reagan National Security Council Africa desk chief, would replace Crocker as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. A knowledgeable Washington African scholar described Cohen as "a nicer guy, but basically a clone of Crocker."